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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, April 10, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 10, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

•(1005)

[English]

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Charlottetown.

PRIVILEGE

RCMP DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BARBARA GEORGE

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 12 of this year, I, on behalf of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts, tabled in the House the third report of that committee. In the report, the committee was of the unanimous opinion that then RCMP Deputy Commissioner Barbara George provided false and misleading testimony to the committee on February 21, 2007, and the committee further recommended that the House find her in contempt and that no further action be taken.

Marleau and Montpetit, on page 862, state:

—the refusal to answer questions or failure to reply truthfully may give rise to a charge of contempt of the House, whether the witness has been sworn in or not.

I rise today on a question of privilege. Based upon the unanimous report of the committee, I would ask that you find that a prima facie case of contempt has been established. Should you so rule, Mr. Speaker, I would then be prepared to make the appropriate motion.

The Speaker: I have heard the hon. member for Charlottetown and his submissions. I understand that the report he has tabled on this matter from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts was a unanimous report of the committee and accordingly I am prepared to find there is a prima facie case of privilege and will allow him to move a motion.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Edmonton—St. Albert:

That the House of Commons find Barbara George in contempt of Parliament for providing false and misleading testimony to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts on February 21, 2007; and that the House of Commons take no further action as this finding of contempt is, in and of itself, a very serious sanction.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table a report of an official visit for the 15th Canada-Mexico Inter-Parliamentary Meeting held at Mazatlan, Mexico, from February 17 to 19, 2008.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

SCRUTINY OF REGULATIONS

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Minister of Justice to table, in both official languages, the government's response to the report of the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on International Trade on the Canada-EFTA free trade agreement. Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the committee has studied the free trade agreement between Canada and the states of the European Free Trade Association: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

This is the first agreement to be tabled in the House of Commons under the federal government's new policy of allowing members of Parliament the opportunity to review and debate international treaties in the House of Commons for 21 days.

* * *

•(1010)

PETITIONS

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to again present an income trust broken promise petition on behalf of a very large number of Canadians, all from the province of Alberta, who remember the Prime Minister boasting about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said that the greatest fraud is a promise not kept.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts, but he broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out over \$25 billion of the hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

The petitioners therefore call upon the government to admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions, as shown in the finance committee; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and finally, to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

INDUSTRIAL HEMP

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a very interesting petition to present on behalf of many Victoria residents. They are asking the government to recognize that industrial hemp is a valuable fibre and a large biomass source that could be used to replace many commonly used problematic materials. Right now I am wearing a shirt made of that material.

Industrial hemp could help farmers diversify their farm operations, so the petitioners are asking the government to invest in the construction of industrial hemp processing facilities to utilize the pulping of Canadian industrial hemp when making paper and other products and to utilize industrial hemp biomass in the making of biofuels, instead of food for fuel. I am very pleased to present this petition on behalf of my constituents.

TRANSPORT

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present three petitions from my people in my community.

The first petition calls on the Government of Canada to stop the deregulation of the transportation sector that has put Canadian lives at risk. Deregulation, they say, has resulted in more accidents across all transport sectors, including rail accidents in British Columbia that have involved hazardous waste. There has been a real increase in rail accidents. They support strong regulation, not voluntary regulation, and they are very concerned that the government's preference for self-regulation is putting Canadian lives at risk.

AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition deals with the war in Afghanistan. I have presented many of these petitions in the past. The people who have signed them call on Canada to rebalance the mission and begin the safe withdrawal of Canadian Forces from the counter-insurgency part of the mission in southern Afghanistan.

IMMIGRATION

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my third petition deals with the issue of unification of families under the immigration system in Canada.

The petitioners say that unification, particularly of seniors with their families in Canada through immigration, is a core aspect of forming strong, healthy, vibrant families and communities in Canada. They believe that the current system calling for a 10 year residency requirement under Canada's income security program is

wrong. They ask Parliament to amend the Old Age Security Act to eliminate the 10 year residency requirement and to work with provincial governments to waive the enforcement of sponsorship obligations in situations of genuine immigration sponsorship breakdown involving a senior.

I am pleased to present these petitions on behalf of my constituents.

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here from thousands of Canadians from right across the country who point out that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known. In fact, more people die from asbestos poisoning than all other industrial reasons combined, yet Canada remains one of the world's largest producers and exporters of asbestos, dumping 220,000 tonnes per year into third world countries.

The petitioners call on Canada to ban asbestos in all its forms and institute a just transition program for the asbestos workers and communities. They also call upon Canada to end all government subsidies of asbestos in Canada and abroad and also call upon the government to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam convention.

* * *

●(1015)

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 208 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 208—**Mr. Paul Dewar:**

With respect to the procurement of temporary personnel services by the government over the last five years: (a) what are the total government expenditures for such services, on an annual basis as well as over the five year period; (b) on an annual basis, what amount is spent by department; (c) how much was spent annually, on a departmental or agency basis, in the National Capital Region alone; (d) what is the breakdown by province for such services; (e) which companies received contracts to provide temporary personnel services; (f) what is the annual combined total of all contracts awarded to each company; (g) on an annual basis as well as over the five year period, how many people were hired by temporary employment agencies to work for the federal government, nationally as well as in the National Capital Region; and (h) on an annual basis and by department or agency, how many employees were hired on a temporary basis, nationally as well as in the National Capital Region?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

[Translation]

The Speaker: Agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: It seems the hon. member for Joliette wishes to raise a point of order.

* * *

POINT OF ORDER

BILL C-505 — CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM ACT

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak about the point of order raised yesterday by the member for Scarborough—Rouge River concerning the constitutionality of Bill C-505.

First, I would like to show that the constitutionality of a bill is not a procedural issue that comes within the purview of the Speaker of the House. Second, I would like to show that my colleague's arguments about the unconstitutionality of Bill C-505 are not supported by constitutional law.

In the point of order he raised, my colleague mentioned that, unlike government bills, private members' bills do not receive the scrutiny or check of the Department of Justice. This is true. But he neglected to say that private members' bills are assessed for constitutionality by the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business, which declares that bills are non-votable if they do not comply with constitutional law.

However, the subcommittee declared that Bill C-505 is votable. In fact, the member for Scarborough—Rouge River is asking you, Mr. Speaker, to take the subcommittee's place and, given that you cannot declare that this bill is non-votable, to ensure that it is not debated. Mr. Speaker, with all due respect—and you know I have the utmost respect for you—the role of the Speaker of the House is to rule on issues of parliamentary procedure, not legal issues.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote from a ruling you gave on May 3, 2007:

The other issues raised in the point of order of the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River, while interesting and cogently argued, are related to the substance of the bill and to legal issues arising therefrom and not to procedural considerations. While they may well be of interest to members as they consider this legislative proposal, they are beyond the purview of the Chair.

We think that this is exactly the same situation.

Second, the member for Scarborough—Rouge River is alleging that Bill C-505 is unconstitutional under section 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I will now read section 27 of the charter:

This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.

Section 27 is very clear. It guides the interpretation of other sections of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In their

Point of Order

treatise entitled *Droit constitutionnel*, “Constitutional law”, Henri Brun and Guy Tremblay explained this section as follows:

Section 27 states that interpretation of the Charter must be consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.

The Supreme Court of Canada, in Keegstra, 1990, the ruling my colleague quoted from, takes the same view:

Section 27 has therefore been used in a number of judgments of this Court, both as an aid in interpreting the definition of Charter rights and freedoms...and as an element in the s. 1 analysis.

Contrary to what my colleague stated, I would like to clarify that in the Keegstra case, the hate crimes provision in the Criminal Code was upheld because the limitation on freedom of expression that it sets out is justifiable under section 1 of the charter, a section that has been interpreted in light of section 27, which I cited earlier. However, it is false to suggest that the provision was upheld under section 27 itself. As I said, this section guides the interpretation of other sections in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. On its own, therefore, it is not enough.

In conclusion, section 27 is an interpretive provision of the charter, and if not considered together with another section of the charter, it does not in itself create law. Consequently, Bill C-505 cannot be unconstitutional under section 27 of the charter.

On a different note, my colleague claims that the Canadian Multiculturalism Act and section 27 of the charter are flip sides of the same constitutional coin and that my real intention in presenting Bill C-505 is to amend the Constitution. I do not intend to expand on this matter since the argument is so weak. If we accept his reasoning, then what about section 3 of the charter, which guarantees the right to vote. Can we claim that the Canada Elections Act is so entwined with the exercise of that right that it is inextricably linked to the Constitution and cannot be amended without amending the Constitution? As we know, a number of bills on this matter are currently being studied by Parliament.

Section 16 of the charter states that English and French are the official languages of Canada. Does the Official Languages Act therefore have a quasi constitutional status?

• (1020)

I could go on, but I think I have made my point.

Bill C-505 proposes to amend a single piece of legislation, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, not the Constitution Act, 1982, with the aim of exempting Quebec from the application of the multiculturalism policy.

Over a year ago, this House recognized the Quebec nation. The Bloc Québécois now finds that the House must put its words into action and give concrete meaning to that recognition. In fact, Bill C-505 is the second opportunity the Bloc is giving this House to solidify that recognition. It is also the second time we have had to defend the constitutionality of the measures we are proposing.

Government Orders

We can only conclude that although this House has recognized the Quebec nation, a number of parliamentarians sitting here have no problem using the procedural tools available to them to try to prevent votes on the concrete measures that we are proposing in that regard. They want, at all cost, to avoid showing that when it comes to implementing concrete measures, the recognition of the Quebec nation no longer means anything to them.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, when the member for Scarborough—Rouge River laid out his case with regard to Bill C-505, I think he made all the appropriate references. I think the facts, as I heard them and read them again today, appear to provide a compelling argument.

The other point, as the member for Scarborough—Rouge River pointed out, is that a government bill, prior to going to cabinet, would need to have the imprimatur of the justice department with regard to constitutionality.

With regard to private members' bills, we have a subcommittee on procedure and House affairs and it is, as I understand it, part of its responsibility to opine on votability on a number of criteria, one being constitutionality.

I find it very hard to believe that a subcommittee of procedure and House affairs would have at its beck and call the proper advice and guidance in regard to complex questions about constitutionality. It is a matter where I believe we have put the committee in a situation where it has a responsibility which it has no resources to effectively discharge. There are some complex arguments here with regard to this matter.

If that subcommittee were to take a decision that a particular item was not votable, the mover of that bill would have the opportunity under the Standing Orders to appeal, whether it be through procedure and House affairs or, in fact, directly to the House.

Should another member or the House itself decide that there is some problem with regard to votability or constitutionality and no appeal had been made by the mover, there is no opportunity, other than coming to the House now and suggesting that this issue of constitutionality is an important issue. Every private member's bill has an opportunity to bring forward matters which have the same full force and effect of any other bill that becomes law from a government or in any other fashion that it would come before the House.

My submission to you, Mr. Speaker, would be that the question of constitutionality may, and I would suggest that may is the appropriate word, not have been appropriately assessed at the subcommittee. The matter is so important that other considerations should be taken to ensure that this matter is resolved with the same kind of scrutiny that a government bill would receive prior to being presented to this place.

• (1025)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, there is a procedure already in place, a means of studying the constitutional aspect of bills. The matter has been debated. Furthermore, the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River, who, to my knowledge, attended the

debate, could have put forward his arguments. The majority of members of the subcommittee decided that the motion was votable, and therefore that a substantive debate should be held. In my opinion, all members, including you, Mr. Speaker, should respect the subcommittee's decision and proceed this evening with the consideration of the substantive question.

The Speaker: The Chair has heard the arguments advanced by the hon. members for Joliette, Scarborough—Rouge River and Mississauga South on the admissibility of Bill C-505, An Act to amend the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (non-application in Quebec).

As I indicated yesterday, it does not fall to the Speaker to settle constitutional issues. However, given that it is also a question of the nature of the initiative, I intend, for now, to allow the debate to continue this evening and I will get back to the House as soon as possible with a more complete decision.

In the meantime, I would like to remind hon. members that it is important to raise points of order as soon as possible in such situations, and not at the last minute.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2008

The House resumed from April 9 consideration of the motion that Bill C-50, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 26, 2008 and to enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak today to Bill C-50, the budget implementation act, and outline some of the reasons that New Democrats will be opposing the legislation.

On any number of fronts, the bill fails to provide for working and middle class families, but I want to address specifically first nations, Métis, and Inuit. On these fronts, it fails to provide adequate housing, safe drinking water systems, education and, unfortunately, the list does go on.

I want to put this into some context. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, in its alternative federal budget document, did a very good job analyzing some of the challenges facing first nations, Métis and Inuit. In its document, it talks about the fact that government figures confirm that first nations received approximately \$6 billion from the federal government in 2006-07. This funding was for all services, services that other Canadians receive from all three levels of government, which would include the federal and the municipal governments.

It goes on to say that the 2% annual increase in first nations' budgets is less than one-third of the average 6.6% increase that most Canadians will enjoy through Canada health and social transfers in each of the next five years. When adjusted for inflation and population growth, the total budget for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada decreased by 3.5% between 1999 and 2004. As a result of the 2% cap, it is estimated that the accumulated shortfall through 2007-08 is \$774 million. This has an impact on all aspects of first nations, Métis and Inuit, whether it is their ability to join the labour force, to live in clean housing or to access clean drinking water.

There are on reserve and off reserve Inuit in the north. When we talk about off reserve, I want to touch briefly on the plight of Indian friendship centres. The friendship centres have been chronically underfunded for any number of years and yet we know they deliver a vital and important service in urban communities where there are large numbers of first nations, Métis and Inuit.

In my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan, we have two very good friendship centres, Hiiye'yu Lelum and Tillicum Haus. Both of those friendship centres have been forced into the kind of fundraising that we would not expect of any other organization delivering services. I would agree that it is important to look for partners but these organizations have such limited core funding that they are always lurching from funding crisis to funding crisis, despite the very good services they deliver in their communities.

I want to talk briefly about the funding and the fact that the budget implementation act does include funding for child protection services. However, in the alternative federal budget it states that the current funding formula drastically underfunds services that support families and allow them to care for their children safely in their homes and communities. As a result, for first nations the removal of children from their homes and communities is often the only option considered, not the last option.

I have spoken to this House before about least disruptive measures and how we actually pay for foster care off reserve at prices that, if we were to put that money into the on reserve community for least disruptive measures, we would actually close the gap around education, housing and the poverty that is a daily living condition in many first nations communities.

The alternative federal budget estimates that rather than the \$43 million over two years that this bill would put in place, \$388 million should be allocated over three years. The sad reality is that the Assembly of First Nations and other partners have had to take this complaint about the chronic underfunding for child protection services in this country to the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

In December, this House stood and supported unanimously my private member's motion on Jordan's Principle. I do not want to repeat all of the stories but Jordan was a little boy from Norway House Cree Nation who died in the hospital. He had spent four years in a hospital and two of those years were because of a jurisdictional dispute between the federal and provincial governments.

In a recently released report called "Reaching for the Top: A Report by the Advisor on Healthy Children and Youth", a recommendation was made that when there is a jurisdictional dispute between the federal and provincial governments that the

Government Orders

federal government step forward and demonstrate some leadership and pay first. It has mechanisms to recover those payments once those jurisdictional disputes are completed.

• (1030)

We simply should approach this from a child-centred approach and say that children come first in this country and we will put the resources where they are needed.

The Norway House Cree Nation, where Jordan lived and where his parents gave him up to foster care in order to get him care, there are 37 children right now with complex medical needs. The parents of these children may also need to surrender their children to the provincial foster care system in order to get their children's needs met. This is happening because of a funding problem from the federal government perspective.

I will now touch briefly on the issue of violence against women. British Columbia has a highway called the Highway of Tears that runs between Prince George and Prince Rupert. From 1989 to 2006, nine young women either disappeared or were murdered on that highway and all but one of them were first nations women.

Working with community partners, the provincial government has stepped forward and funded some forums and a number of key recommendations came out of them.

However, once again the federal government has failed to demonstrate leadership when it comes to aboriginal women and violence. There have been many pleas for the federal government to step forward and help with the funding of some coordinator positions in Prince Rupert and Prince George. People are calling for a highway transportation feasibility study that would look at community safety. They are also asking for funding for some of the important recommendations that came out of the community forums.

We have wide documentation on violence against aboriginals and the federal government could step forward and support some of the initiatives that communities have put forward.

I now want to turn to education. Article 15 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information.

Sadly, the federal government has failed to support a number of articles in the UN declaration and, in fact, actively lobbied not to support the declaration. It is playing out right now in first nations education across Canada.

Many people in this House will be familiar with the Attawapiskat situation where the community is resorting to tools like YouTube to get its message out across this country. Attawapiskat is not the only school in this country that is suffering. The parliamentary library did some research for us and found that 39 schools were currently on the list for construction or renovation projects, and those were only the ones that we could identify. The parliamentary library estimated that it would cost \$350,833,000 to construct or renovate these 39 schools.

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We have seen surplus after surplus and yet we continue to have schools to which not one of us would send our children. Reports have shown many safety hazards with respect to these schools, such as doors not closing properly, mould, and roofs in danger of collapsing from heavy snow, and yet we still cannot get the kind of movement that is required from the federal government. A school in northern Saskatchewan burned down in 2004 and still has not been replaced.

This is not just a problem in Attawapiskat. Unfortunately, because of the lack of transparency within the government, we have not been able to get a complete list of all the schools on the list so we could let Canadians from coast to coast to coast know how many first nations and Inuit children are unable to access the kind of education that we say is a fundamental human right in this country.

We often try to present ourselves as champions of human rights and yet we have citizens in this country who do not have access to the things that we think are fundamental human rights.

I would encourage members of the House to oppose this bill unless it can be amended to include some of these important measures that would ensure the quality of life for first nations, Inuit and Métis is equal to that of other Canadians.

• (1035)

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member started her speech by talking about the north. We are doing many great things in the north and we are determined to keep doing that. We have a very aggressive northern agenda.

The newspaper in Yellowknife has urged the NDP to get off its high horse and support this budget because it is good for the north. I wonder if the member would comment on the fact that many northerners say that this is a good budget for the north.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, like anything else there are always elements in any piece of legislation that have a positive effect. However, what we have to do is look at the piece of legislation as a whole. We have to look at the complete context.

We had a housing report not long ago for north of 60 which talked about the failure of the federal government and previous federal governments to address the housing crisis in the north. We have women in the north who are in violent situations, who are at risk, and they simply have nowhere to go.

I would argue that we need to take a comprehensive look at the north, work with the people in the north to make sure that we are covering that range of services, which includes education. Justice Berger's report still has not been responded to by the government. On the north of 60 report, where is the comprehensive response to that? There are many other issues being faced by the north that simply are not addressed in this budget.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. She mentioned that she did not think our

government was doing anything to protect first nations women from violence.

I think that first nations women in particular when they are in a matrimonial breakdown find themselves very vulnerable. Our government, and of course the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, has brought forward legislation that will bring about matrimonial real property protections to first nations citizens, including women. Does the member think that is a good idea and would she support it?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I did not say that the government was doing nothing. I was actually calling on it to address a very specific situation on the "Highway of Tears" where the federal government simply has not stepped up to the plate.

With regard to matrimonial real property, article 18 of the UN declaration talks about indigenous people having the right to participate in decision making, in matters which would affect the rights to representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures and so on.

When it comes to matrimonial real property, we have had the Native Women's Association of Canada quite clearly say that it did not have a hand in the final drafting of this legislation and that it has some very serious concerns.

Therefore, I would encourage the government to bring the MRP bill back to the House for debate. We could then send it to committee to call witnesses and make appropriate amendments that would actually reflect the needs of first nations women and children in this country.

• (1040)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to support the member in more funding for friendship centres.

I was the president and treasurer of our local friendship centre and I have mentioned this many times. Hopefully there will be more money for the headstart program, which is a very successful program.

Also, we have had a review of land claims in Yukon and I am hoping that in the budget or in the supplementaries there will be sufficient funds to deal with that.

I am hoping that the government will work quickly to settle more land claims. There is much to be done and I hope the government will come up with the money either in the budget or in supplementaries for that and hopefully Tsawwassen will come to the House soon.

Finally, the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council had a great conference. I think the member is aware of that. It came up with all sorts of recommendations and I hope the government will look at those recommendations and implement some of them.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, there was a lot in the member's question. I will just talk about the Yukon self-government agreement and land claims.

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What we have seen is delay and stall tactics on the part of the government. The Council of Yukon First Nations and the nations that have been involved in these agreements have done a tremendous amount of work in pushing forward its agenda on justice as well as many other matters.

Yet, the government is very slow to respond and come to the table with the resources that are required for full implementation of these very important agreements.

Again, the budget fails to address some of the important implementation issues that have been raised consistently over the last five to nine years.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to see that the NDP and the Liberals have finally seen the light. They have seen the great initiatives this Conservative government is taking in relation to aboriginal Canadians and all Canadians.

As a result of that, I move:

That this question be now put.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I think this motion is out of order. We are in the middle of a debate. Members in the House are ready to speak to Bill C-50. I do not know where this motion comes from, but debate on this bill is continuing. A number of members are here ready to debate this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Just on that point, the motion does not prevent the debate from continuing. All it does is prevent any further amendments from being moved, so that the members in the House who are lined up to speak on the matter will be able to do so.

Of course, the parliamentary secretary concluded his speech as he rose by moving the motion. We will now move to questions and comments, on what I am not sure. Nevertheless, we are in a question and comment period with respect to the brief appearance of the parliamentary secretary.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from that very short speech, I want to be really clear that I was not in wholehearted support of this particular budget implementation act. I think the budget is sadly lacking with regard to issues facing first nations, Métis and Inuit.

I would like to ask the member if he could tell me how this budget addresses the serious education gaps, gaps around housing, and violence against women, just to name a couple?

Mr. Brian Jean: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. It did not take us two years, it did not take us one year. The very first budget this government ever implemented addressed the issue of northern housing. It provided \$300 million for northern housing on reserve and \$300 million for off reserve housing. We have already addressed that issue and we continue to address the issue.

We continue to support vulnerable Canadians. We have provided \$110 million to the Mental Health Commission of Canada to increase our knowledge of those who are homeless and suffering from mental illnesses. We have provided \$282 million over this and the next two years to expand the veterans independence program.

This government stands up for vulnerable Canadians. We get the job done for all Canadians.

• (1045)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member gave a one sentence speech, which basically said that the speeches made by the Liberal and NDP members showed that they supported the government's work on aboriginal people. That, of course, had absolutely no relation to reality. I even saw the Speaker raise his eyebrows.

I want the member, if he wants to maintain his integrity, to defend the statement that the previous two speeches said even one thing in support of the government's support of aboriginal people.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, that gives me an opportunity to talk a bit more about what we are doing for aboriginal Canadians in this particular budget.

There will be \$70 million over two years for measures to foster aboriginal economic development. Those are real steps to move forward for aboriginal Canadians. There will be \$70 million over two years to improve first nations education outcomes. There will be \$147 million over two years to improve first nations and Inuit health outcomes. We have listened to aboriginal Canadians. We have moved forward with safe drinking water and housing.

We have moved forward because this Conservative government wants to get the job done for aboriginal Canadians and all Canadians, and we are doing that. We are glad that the Liberal Party is standing up or I should say sitting down because it is allowing us to move forward our agenda for Canadians. We want to thank the Liberal Party because we are getting the job done for Canadians.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too am puzzled by the comments made by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: But remember the quote that I read about you.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Yes, and I am also puzzled by the comments that the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development made.

I guess he did not see the poll that was conducted in the *Yellowknifer* as well, which unanimously supported my position to stand up to the Conservative Party that only provided an increase of 10% in the northern residents tax deduction.

I say this to the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport. The New Democratic Party does not stand and say that the government has taken our money that it should be allotted to housing in Bill C-48. It applied it and that is great, but that money is going to be sunsetted.

The minister of housing in the Northwest Territories is distressed by the fact that we are going to be running out of money for housing that can assist aboriginal and non-aboriginal people across the territory in getting affordable housing. This is the case. There is nothing new for housing in this budget. It is a disgrace.

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Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if there was a question there, but I know the NDP takes a position to the left, to the right, out of this world, and somewhere on the moon. It does not matter what position those members take, they are never going to form government. They are never going to be able to take any positive steps anywhere to help Canadians.

I have talked to the people in northern Alberta because actually I am right next to him as far as our constituencies go. I respect the member. However, let us be clear. The increase of 10% in the northern living allowance was welcomed by all northerners. It had not been touched in 20 years before this government took positive steps. We recognize the needs in the north.

However, let us talk about something else that is going to directly affect this member.

The Deputy Speaker: We will just have to talk about it at another time because the time has expired.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Newton—North Delta.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak about an issue that has caused my constituents great concern and fear.

In fact, in the time that I have served as the member of Parliament for Newton—North Delta, my office has never received this kind of reaction from the people in my riding. The issue that I am referring to are the changes the government is proposing to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

Over the past few weeks, Canadians have been told that these amendments would make the system more efficient and improve the way that immigrants are welcomed into this country.

The facts do not support these claims and the government is misleading Canadians. Since this government took power, the application backlog has grown by over 100,000.

The simple fact of the matter is that Canada's immigration system is severely understaffed. We need more immigration officers, more consulate officials, and more branch offices across the globe. These are the simple adjustments that must be made if we have any hope of overcoming this backlog. I will tell members something else we need more of, and that is immigrants.

Two-thirds of Canada's population growth between 2001 and 2006 was fuelled by immigrants. According to the 2006 census, Canada is on track to becoming 100% dependent on immigration for growth. By 2012 immigration is expected to account for all the net labour force growth. The Conference Board of Canada estimates a shortfall of three million skilled workers by the year 2020.

These statistics are the reality of our country's future. Canada's growth, both in population and in the economy, will collapse without a steady flow of immigrants.

The new powers that are being proposed for the minister would have the potential to allow great abuses of the system. The minister would have the ability to pick and choose which immigrants she decides are acceptable. The minister would also be able to cap the number of applicants by category. Family reunification and permanent resident applications could be slashed.

The scariest proposal is to allow the minister to reject applicants who have already been approved by immigration officers. This minister is bringing politics into the immigration system. No one person should have the power to choose who gets into Canada and who does not.

How can Canadians be sure that the government will not favour one class of immigrants over another? With these new ministerial powers, there are no guarantees that people and businesses would be treated objectively.

Every day I speak to residents in my riding who are very fearful that if this bill passes their family members are going to be ignored and their business are going to suffer.

There are thousands of my constituents who were once immigrants themselves and who have built a life that contributes to the betterment of Canadian society. These Canadian citizens are desperate to be reunited with their families, and they have gone through all the proper channels to make this happen. However, with these changes, the rules would not matter any more.

At times, I wonder if this government understands what immigration really means, beyond a raw economic cost-benefit analysis. Does the government even understand the religious and cultural heritage that immigrants bring to our country?

This Sunday is Vaisakhi, the celebration of the birth of Khalsa. It is one of the most important days in the Sikh nation heritage. I congratulate the Sikh nation on this most important day. Hundreds of thousands of Sikhs and their fellow Canadians will celebrate peacefully and inclusively for the well-being of everyone in the world.

• (1050)

I am proud to say that the largest celebration of Vaisakhi, the birth of Khalsa, in North America takes place in my riding of Newton—North Delta. I encourage my colleagues to take part in these ceremonies in their communities and celebrate Sikh heritage.

I am an immigrant to this country. My family members have joined me in Canada since I arrived over two decades ago. There is one thing in which I always had faith. I never had a doubt about the fairness of our country and its immigration system.

Canada represented new opportunity, a better life for my family and, most important, equality, meaning that everyone was assessed in the same way. If these amendments pass, that expectation of opportunity for all will disappear, so too will Canada's reputation as a welcoming country for immigrants.

I want to conclude by asking a simple question. If the government feels these amendments will improve the system, why is it hiding them in a budget bill? The budget should be voted on by itself. These proposed amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act are too important to be hidden. If these changes will make a positive impact, then the House should be able to consider them on their own.

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I encourage the government to remove the proposals from the budget bill and allow all members to voice their opinions without the threat of an election. This is what I mean when I say that politics is being put ahead of good policy. This is a matter that should not be rushed through in isolation. If the government believes in transparency and accountability, it will allow an open and honest debate. We all know the record of the government on transparency and accountability. Conservatives talk the talk, but they do not walk the walk.

Once again, I want to repeat the desire of my constituents to allow the House to consider the immigration act on its own. Governing is about making choices. In an age where we have billions of dollars in surplus, there is no reason why immigrants should be turned away. We have the resources to speed up the immigration process. We have the ability to increase the numbers of immigrants we let into our country. We have an obligation to ensure that fairness continues to be a guiding principle in our decisions.

Now is the time that we, as representatives of the people, must stand up for Canada's best interests. I will stand up to vote against Bill C-50. I am grateful for this time to speak and I am ready for any questions my colleagues might have for me.

• (1055)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague across the floor go on and on at great length about his opinions on the bill. I heard him say that he would stand in this place and vote against the bill.

Will the hon. member opposite bring any of his colleagues in to vote against it, or will they stand in the House, make their speeches opposing the bill and then do what they have done in the past, which is sit on their hands? Is this another case in which the hon. member is making his leader look weak?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, in fact, when I look at the track record of my leader, whether it is on environment, or immigration or on social justice issues, there is no one who comes close to him. I am very proud of my leader and I am in full support of him.

I appreciate the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety asking the question, but this is exactly what I mean. When it comes to the government, it is playing politics with immigrants. It has put this as part of the budget bill. I can say—

Mr. Mark Warawa: How are you going to vote?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: If the member for Langley is in the House, he will find that out.

However, every group in our country is avoiding the drastic changes the government is bringing to the immigration system because businesses and families in Canada will suffer.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my hon. colleague from Newton—North Delta regarding immigration. I know it is an important issue for the hon. member, being an immigrant himself.

In the budget, surprisingly, the Conservative government indicated that it intends to give more discretionary power to the

Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. We all know about the hidden agenda. It seems a little paradoxical to say everyone knows about the hidden agenda, but we could say that everyone suspects that the Conservative government, which is reactionary, might have a hidden agenda.

I would like to ask the hon. member for Newton—North Delta how the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration will use her new discretionary power, that is, the power that will allow her to make decisions that go against all existing rules. Why does he think this government is granting itself this discretionary power? For what purpose and how will it be used?

• (1100)

[*English*]

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, first, I thank the hon. member for her work on the very important files.

When it comes to the transparency and accountability of the government, the member is well aware of the bad practices of the government, whether it be the Brian Mulroney-Schreiber affair or the Afghanistan issue. These are issues of which the member is aware.

It worries me that the minister can pick and choose which immigrants she wants to bring into our country. When I look at the system, perhaps she will want to bring in skilled workers, depending on the demand, but the provinces already have that program in place. It is the PNP program. Under that program, provinces can bring in those immigrants.

This is exactly what the government is all about. It is playing politics with every single issue.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased and honoured to have spoken last week about Bill C-50, Budget Implementation Act, 2008. I spoke about various aspects of this bill. Let me begin by putting things in context. This may seem like a good budget and it may work for some, but there is nothing in it for Quebec. Quebec's Conservative members were not able to meet a single condition that the Bloc Québécois set down on January 23 on behalf of the majority of Quebec ridings. At that time, the Bloc Québécois presented Quebec's immediate and urgent needs. I will list them for you, but first, I would like to remind you that these needs were identified by Bloc members during our prebudget consultations, not only in Bloc ridings, but in other ridings as well. You will note that one very important, very urgent need was not included in the budget, and that is direct and immediate assistance for the manufacturing and forestry industries.

Nor did it include any assistance for workers in the manufacturing and forestry industries. Yet Quebec and Canada have lost hundreds of thousands of jobs because of this manufacturing crisis. As you know, Quebec and Ontario have been particularly hard hit. The Bloc Québécois members are here to defend the interests of Quebecers, and we condemn the fact that the budget contains no measures to resolve the current crisis in Quebec's manufacturing and forestry industries.

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The dozen or so Conservative members elected in Quebec two years ago now have not followed through on their promises. These members were elected based on big promises: they asked to be put in power in return for millions. And I am not talking about the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, who even had the courage to say something. Courage is not the right word, but I would not dare use the word that comes to my mind right now. It is certainly not courage, perhaps it would be gall, to use a slightly nicer word than the one I am thinking of. So, he had the gall to promise a Marshall plan, with billions of dollars and called it the “Blackburn plan”. I apologize for using his name, but he said it himself two days ago in the House of Commons. He then spoke about another plan called “his name II”.

First of all, when I heard this, I had little hope that his second plan would be any better than the first, since his first plan was a bust. He spoke about the “his last name II” plan, which made me think about *Star Wars*—we started with the fourth episode, before seeing the first three. Second, we realized that it was not the [his name] II plan, but the “Blackout II plan”. In short, there was absolutely nothing in his first plan or in the second one.

The Conservative government gives absolutely nothing to Quebec in this budget implementation bill. The Conservative MPs from Quebec were absolutely incapable of obtaining anything. I imagine that they have no power in caucus. Nothing has changed for Quebec and that is why the Bloc exists. Federalists have been elected and sent to Ottawa. Since 1993, that has happened less and less. A minority of Conservative or Liberal members are sent to Ottawa because Quebecers understand what goes on. Conservative members who have promised to defend Quebec's interests and wield power get elected. Some will become ministers and will sit with the other Canadian ministers in cabinet or in their caucus. And there they do nothing, absolutely nothing. They very seldom are able to obtain anything for Quebec. The Conservative ministers scurry on all fours to collect the crumbs thrown by the cabinet.

• (1105)

The same thing happens with the caucus: it throws some crumbs to the starving Conservative members who keep quiet and ask for nothing in public. They do not speak up publicly because they are told to keep quiet in the name of party discipline, in the name of Alberta, which does not need money but receives it nevertheless, because that is where the stronghold of the Conservative Party is. These Conservative members are incapable of doing anything for Quebec. This budget before us is ample proof of that once again.

I promised to list the Bloc Québécois's demands made public on January 23. We asked for direct and immediate assistance for the troubled manufacturing and forestry sectors, as I explained a little earlier. There was no help in this budget for the workers and communities affected by this crisis. We have been calling for an older worker assistance program for a long, long time. Again, there is absolutely nothing in the budget for that. And yet it is precisely that kind of program that could help the workers get through the crisis in the manufacturing and forestry sectors.

I want to take a few moments to explain POWA. It is a program that gives working people generally over 55 years of age an income

roughly equivalent to employment insurance. It actually does fall under the employment insurance umbrella. This income helps them bridge the period between becoming unemployed, for example at 57 or 58 years old, and the moment they qualify for a government pension at 60 years of age. It covers a year or maybe two, or sometimes just a couple of months. In most cases, it helps these people avoid having to resort to welfare. POWA provides very parsimonious benefits to people who cannot easily change jobs and find themselves in what I would call desperate straits.

Some of us were lucky enough, of course, to be born with the gift to learn things quickly and easily all our lives. Others find it more difficult. They get close to retirement and for them to learn about computers at that age is just too big a mountain to climb. We need a program like POWA for people who find themselves in a difficult situation and cannot easily learn new skills. That was one of the Bloc's demands.

We also wanted compensation for the seniors who were swindled out of the guaranteed income supplement. This program was a scandal under the Liberal government and the scandal continues under the Conservatives. I remind the House that it was the Bloc Québécois that exposed the GIS problem. Hundreds of thousands of seniors were entitled to benefit from it and receive annual payments of as much as \$6,000 to add to the meagre government pensions they were already getting. It afforded them an almost decent income and raised them over the poverty line.

For years, though, the Liberal government of the day did all it could to ensure that seniors did not find out they were entitled to this supplement. The Liberals did all they could. The call centres were real labyrinths where people could never actually reach anyone. We know how difficult it is for the average person to deal with an answering machine and can only imagine what it must be like for someone who is older. In addition, the people who qualify for the guaranteed income supplement are usually among the poorest and have the least education. Often they have difficulty speaking one of the two official languages, or even both, and are also ill and isolated.

The guaranteed income supplement was one of the Bloc Québécois's demands. A few improvements were made to it, thanks to the Bloc. When we in the Bloc say we are helpful, there is no need for any more proof. Assistance for older people, thanks to the guaranteed income supplement program, is another specific accomplishment of the Bloc Québécois.

My time is running out, unfortunately, because I still have a lot to say. The Bloc Québécois will vote against the budget implementation bill, therefore, because it fails to meet our minimum demands. I did not have enough time to mention the environment, culture or a single securities commission, but these issues were also included in the Bloc's minimum demands, which the Conservative government failed to meet.

• (1110)

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in addressing Bill C-50, it is important to see the context in which this budget bill has come forward and the economic policies of the government that underwrite it. In that regard, it is important for us to look at the policies the government has implemented since it has been in power, and in particular the Conservatives' absolute obsession with their ideology around the importance of tax cuts to move economic development forward in this country.

We saw the process kick into high gear in the fall of 2007, when we saw the governing Conservative Party and in fact the Liberal Party bidding each other up as to how much in corporate tax breaks and corporate tax cuts should be given to the large corporate sector in this country. Those cuts went ahead fully supported by the Liberal Party to the tune of billions and billions of dollars.

The cuts were to be concentrated in the oil and gas sector and the finance sector. In the finance sector the banks alone were earning an annual profit in the \$20 billion range. Those corporate tax cuts gave that sector an additional \$2 billion. The oil and gas sector received similar types of benefits from the government.

We see the consequences in the budget. The budget is very close to being balanced. Depending on revenue this year, it is not beyond the pale that we would fall into deficit. It is very clear that at the very least a number of programs that are sorely in need of assistance from the government will not be funded because of those decisions.

By hollowing out the ability of government to pursue valid social policy programming by this type of tax cut, we ensure that on an ongoing basis governments are not going to be able to protect their citizenry and develop all of their potential as individuals in our society. That is what is going on here. That is the context in which we see Bill C-50, the current budget bill.

I want to address the consequences to the auto sector. I come from a community where the auto sector is the dominant industry. It is rather interesting to watch the conflicts that go on between the finance minister and the industry minister, but the finance minister and the Prime Minister say that they cannot pick winners or losers.

That is not accurate. The government is quite prepared to intervene in the market. I am going to quote some statistics from a group that is not particularly friendly to the NDP, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. These statistics were printed in this morning's newspaper.

During their first fiscal year in office, the Tories paid out \$25 billion in grants, contributions and subsidies. Here is where we are into this inaccuracy on the part of the finance minister when he says they are not prepared to pick winners or losers. That included \$350 million to Quebec based Pratt and Whitney Canada and \$47.5

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million to the Mont Tremblant ski resort, again in Quebec. In the spring of 2007, the government announced a \$900 million fund for the aerospace sector.

Where is the auto sector? The auto sector creates at the present time 140,000 jobs in this country. The aerospace sector creates 75,000 jobs currently. The number in the auto sector is dropping dramatically. The aerospace industry is stable at this point.

• (1115)

It is interesting that the industry minister at that time, now the foreign affairs minister, said we needed that \$900 million fund "for the defence of the aerospace industry". The auto industry is in much worse shape and in much greater need of defence than the aerospace sector is.

My party repeatedly speaks about the need for assistance to the auto sector, and we heard the same this week from the Liberals, but what do we get? We get the platitude from the finance minister and to a lesser degree from the industry minister that they do not support winners or losers. That is simply not true.

The government has made a very clear decision in its economic policies and it is reflected again in the budget, in Bill C-50. It has made very clear decisions that it is going to support certain sectors of the economy and give them preference and priority over other sectors. Oil and gas, finance and aerospace are all getting preferential treatment. There is direct assistance and subsidies in the form of tax cuts or direct dollars going to those sectors and nothing to the auto sector.

In the auto sector in my community alone, in direct and indirect jobs over the last three to three and half years, 17,000 jobs have been lost. That is in a total population of less than 400,000. It has the second highest unemployment rate in the country and this budget does nothing, I repeat, absolutely nothing to assist the auto sector.

I want to make a point and perhaps it will be of particular concern to the finance minister since he comes from a riding that is immediately adjacent to Oshawa, a major auto sector dependent community. Windsor is at the very forefront of these losses and devastation in the auto sector, but his community is not far behind, nor is Oakville, St. Catharines or London. They will be facing the same kinds of problems that Windsor is facing.

The problem is that, either because of its obsession with tax cuts based on that very warped ideology that has been proven not to work around the globe or because of its desire to support specific sectors like oil and gas, aerospace and finance, the government is unwilling to help the auto sector. This is reflected by the absolute absence of any assistance in this budget to the auto sector.

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There are a great number of programs and policies that could be put into place within the auto sector and then funded to some degree by the government. The NDP has been working on a green auto policy, for instance, for well over five years now, with very specific, detailed proposals as to how we would put that into place. We need to understand that this budget totally ignores any of that. This is not just the NDP speaking. It is the auto sector, the major corporations that produce and sell cars in this country and, of course, the labour unions that work in those plants.

It is a cohesive policy. It is one that has very little disagreement within that sector of what needs to be done, the roles that all of the participants in the sector need to play and the need for a partnership from the federal government in order to be sure that policy can be put into place and the results of that work deployed into the economy generally so we create many more jobs while saving a great number of jobs as well.

• (1120)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague very intently. He touched on a number of issues.

I would like to ask him why he voted against the environment when he voted against providing funding of \$1.5 million to help the provinces improve their environmental positions by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Why did he vote against providing \$30 million to the Great Bear Rainforest? Why has he voted against carbon capture and sequestration? It is a technology in which Canada is a world leader but he voted against that.

On one hand, the NDP speaks as though it supports the environment, but when it actually comes down to voting for funding for the environment, the NDP votes against it. Why is that? Why do we see that inconsistency in the NDP?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I regularly get up and point out the hypocrisy of questions. That question has got to be near the epitome of it when we see what is going on in the environment committee right now. For the first time in Canadian history, a government is filibustering a committee.

What is that about? It is about the environment. It is about dealing with global warming and climate change. It is a bill that the three opposition parties all support. It is a bill that all of the major environmental groups in this country support. However, what is going on? The government, for how many hours, how many days and how many weeks, has tied up that committee. It is just absolutely hypocritical that I would get that kind of question from the government.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member would expand on his last comment about committees. He is on the justice committee, where the chair has walked out four times in a row, leaving witnesses from across Canada stranded, witnesses for whose attendance Canadians have paid.

I was glad the Conservative member mentioned the carbon sequestration project, which we started.

However, my question is for another area of the hon. member's expertise, that of the justice agenda. He is a very thoughtful participant in that area. I think we can agree that the government had

a large number of misguided bills in that area, many of which failed, and thank goodness for Canadians, considering the damage they would have done to Canada.

Nevertheless, bills did get through and that agenda had financial consequences. I would like to ask the member if he thinks the government's budgets, estimates or anything even analysed and then reflected the financial costs of the agenda that was presented in legislation.

• (1125)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Yukon raises a very valid point. The government, and I will say this both about the justice ministers and the public safety minister, has consistently moved forward with programs and law that impose additional burdens on the provinces.

For instance, when it comes to our police forces, we are still waiting for those 2,500 police officers the government was supposed to fund. There is money in the budget. I question whether that money is in fact going to flow, because up to this point in the previous two budgets it did not. We did not get any of those police officers whatsoever. We had been assured that we were going to get 1,500 more RCMP officers. We got hardly any of those.

There is no question that the prosecution and judicial wings of our courts now are significantly overburdened. Again, first, the government has not done the assessment of how much it will cost the provinces and, second, has certainly given no indication of willingness to assist the provinces in those added costs. On those costs, by the way, both the prosecutors and our judges were already substantially overwhelmed before that new legislation came forward.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity today to speak to Bill C-50, the 2008 budget implementation bill, which contains many of the measures set out in the government's budget.

After over two years of lavish spending, the government decided, wisely, to be a little more fiscally prudent with this budget. We have heard many times before in the debates that this is indeed the first Conservative government to have a balanced budget since Robert Borden's government in 1912.

The only reason why the government has not plummeted into deficit is the sound fiscal inheritance of the previous Liberal government. When the Liberal government left office there were billions of dollars in surpluses. Also, the Liberals managed with eight consecutive balanced budgets. Canada had the best fiscal record in all of the G-7 economies.

This year the title of the budget was "Responsible Leadership". It is rather ironic, I would think. We have heard from many that we are indeed on the cusp of a deficit.

The government went on a foolish spending spree when times were good. It made irresponsible tax cuts, taking \$12 billion out of the fiscal framework with the two cuts to the GST, and now that the economy is beginning to slow, our financial situation becomes more precarious. Responsible leadership and sound economic management, I would say, are certainly questionable.

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When the government delivered its budget speech, it appeared like a straightforward document, only for the government to deceive Canadians with the bill before us, which contains what I would call a zinger clause. With the budget implementation bill, the government has imposed upon Canadians immigration measures that would give the minister unprecedented power: unprecedented power to pick and choose, unprecedented power to determine who gets in and who stays out, and unprecedented power to play favourites.

What the government is saying yet again is “trust us, we know best, we will make the rules and you will be better off”, a pattern we have seen with the Wheat Board and the government's manipulation of processes and numbers. We have seen it with the censorship activities of Bill C-10 and with the lack of consultation on the repeal of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act, and the list goes on.

In this case, the government wants to be trusted, trusted to decide behind closed doors if one's mother, father or children can come to Canada, again with no consultation, with no input from those most affected on any of the impending changes, whether they are families, settlement groups, employers or provincial governments.

Just this morning in committee, the Auditor General was before the committee and spoke to the importance of consultation in the development of any policies of government. The government wants us to believe that it will meet its goal, as articulated, of reducing the backlog with an increase in the budget of approximately 1%, and it is asking for trust.

Immigration needs to be taken out of the bill and properly studied in committee. A few years ago, I was part of the committee that revamped the immigration bill. The consultations were widespread. The chorus was not unanimous by a long shot, but everybody had an opportunity to put forward his or her position and the consequences of decisions taken and decisions not made, and I would say that we have to do that again this time.

The government plays mind games with Canadians. It talks about being tough on crime, yet it stalls its own justice bills in the House and uses them to play petty partisan games when they get to the Senate.

When I look at this budget, I have somewhat the same reaction that I did to last year's budget. A little money was spent, with a sprinkle here, a dash there, a pinch for this and a pittance for that. Once again the government tried to appeal to everyone, but has spread its funds too thinly. One of my constituents calls the Conservatives' style of government and budget making “fast-food government”.

• (1130)

We know that our cities and communities are in vital need of investment. We have all heard about the billions of dollars of deficit Canadian municipalities face with respect to their infrastructure. We have also heard from the finance minister that potholes are certainly not his responsibility.

My own city of Winnipeg, like other cities in members' ridings, has significant financing challenges and yet there has been no recognition by the government of these challenges faced by cities. What the Conservatives did finally incorporate was the step the

Liberals promised, and that was to make the gas tax permanent, and I commend them for that.

Budget 2008 provided \$500 million for public transit out of the 2007-08 surplus. However, within days of that, we learned that \$108 million of it was going to restore a train service to run through the minister's riding. Nobody had asked for that and no advice had been given on it.

The government has refused to answer questions about Manitoba's infrastructure program. We know that the floodway for Manitoba is non-negotiable. We know how important it is.

It was over a year ago when funding for the floodway was announced under the Canada strategic infrastructure program. A month later, it was decided to allocate the funding under the building Canada fund, which, I might add, is full of moneys committed by the previous Liberal government. This would shortchange the province of Manitoba by \$170 million in infrastructure funds that could well go to a host of other issues.

I also want to talk about Lake Winnipeg. We heard grant announcements on what we in Manitoba call “our beloved Lake Winnipeg”. We heard that an additional \$11 million would be headed toward the cleanup of Lake Winnipeg, bringing the total, with moneys committed previously, to \$18 million.

Examination of several websites, coupled with conversations with many researchers and scientific experts on the restoration of the health of the lake, show that few funds indeed have been forthcoming to date. Again we have heard empty words and hollow commitments.

The Conservative government continues to treat the women and children of Manitoba and this country as an afterthought. Many of the issues of importance to women have largely been bypassed. The programs that most women talk about as important and transformative, such as housing, child care, education, health care, unemployment insurance, and legal aid, are of limited interest to the government.

We hear members opposite espouse family values and talk about children as the future. We also hear members opposite talk about skill shortages and the need for skilled workers. However, social programs go hand in hand with economic programs.

I have spoken many times here in this House about the need for quality child care. What about it? Nothing is forthcoming except that cheque through the mail. Where are the promised spaces? In my riding, there are huge waiting lists. Parents are forced to leave their employment. Parents, and particularly single mothers, do not have the necessary supports.

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In the last few months, the waiting list at one day care in my riding has grown from 300 to 400 children. It receives five to ten inquiries a day about spaces. The government has not made the connection on the availability of child care spaces to economic growth.

Although I do not have time to read for members an email on this, I will take another opportunity to do so. I received an email that listed all the parents with respect to that child care facility, the jobs they do, and the contributions they make to the economic growth of the city of Winnipeg. Coupled with that is the desperate need for space in their day care.

I wanted to talk about the government's shortcomings with respect to aboriginal people, whether it is in education or in how the government is ignoring them in the consultation process on the repeal of section 67. We heard in committee this morning from a group of aboriginal women who have very grave concerns about the matrimonial real property legislation, which I look forward to reviewing.

However, we know that the government has not addressed the needs of aboriginal peoples except in this piecemeal, cherry-picking, fast-food manner of a little bit here or a little bit there. We will see what we can do.

• (1135)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, inasmuch as I would like to ask the member for Winnipeg South Centre a number of questions on a file we both share, I will leave that to the time I have in committee.

The question I have for her is in relation to the statements she made with regard to the changes to the immigration policy as proposed in the budget.

In a democracy I feel individuals who are elected to the House of Commons have the opportunity to put forward ideas and changes in policy and represent, in the House, the reasons why we feel they are right for the country. The member opposite also can stand in her place to advocate for a different position.

Is she philosophically opposed to the position we have put forward to the point that she would vote against our government and force an election?

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, the member is taking lessons from members opposite in not answering questions.

It is incumbent upon us, as duly elected legislators, to have the opportunity to hear from those who are most affected by the legislation. It is important that the legislation go to a separate committee, that it be dealt with in a comprehensive manner, that we hear from those who are involved in the immigration world, those who are most affected by the legislation, and then decisions will be made as to whether to support or not support the legislation.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I especially noted the member's comments about the lack of early learning and child care facilities and services in her city. We face the same issue in Victoria. I heard last night that there was a large meeting in Nelson held by the mayor, wherein it was expressed that the lack of child

care really prevented economic development because people could not go to their city.

The question I have for the hon. member is this. I introduced a bill that would enshrine principles of accessibility, universality and affordability into home care to create a program across Canada. I know the member supported the bill. Would she continue to support this, to have a law in Canada, instead of simply the kinds of agreements that her government negotiated, which, as she knows, were cancelled at the stroke of a pen.

• (1140)

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, the House has heard me many times speak about the importance of child care. I would do whatever is required to ensure that a national child care and early learning system was built across the country, whether it is legislation, or negotiation with provinces and territories one on one, whatever it takes to enshrine and create a national program.

I think it is a definition of who we are as a country. Some of the members may have heard me tell this story in the House before, but it always bears repeating. The first child care agreement was signed with the province of Manitoba. For the hundreds of people who were there that day, it was a very exciting. It was made into a remarkable moment when a group of people stood, as the two ministers signed the agreement, and sang O Canada. I want to be a part of that kind of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this week I spoke about Bill C-50. Due to the amount of time that each of us is given, we cannot always delve into all the details of a bill, but we can be certain that Bill C-50 deals with the implementation of the budget.

This week I spoke about the type of society we would like to live in, and I highlighted the very conservative philosophy that underlies this budget. I spoke about oil companies and banks that seem to be receiving numerous tax credits, while in the manufacturing and forestry industries companies cannot benefit from these tax cuts because they are not making any profit and are systematically closing down.

Today I would like to focus on an aspect of the bill that falls under my responsibilities. I took a long look at the military contracts that are inherent in this budget. Since the Conservative government came to power, we have seen a clear trend towards militarization and an American-style military philosophy. Some American and Canadian companies are really hitting the jackpot because of the Conservative government's major shift in direction.

Defence contracts will be worth roughly \$20 billion over the next few years. What is even worse is that there has been almost no discussion of this spending. It would practically take experts to investigate the ins and outs of all these contracts and how they came about. Normally, the government should follow a specific procedure when it purchases equipment worth more than \$20 billion.

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First, it is very important to have a foreign policy that describes Canada's place within the international community and clearly establishes the responsibilities Canada intends to take. This forms the basis for a defence policy and possibly an international development policy under CIDA, as well as a number of other things. Certainly, nothing has been done since 2005, when the Liberals updated a policy or policy statement.

As a result, today we are faced with announcements and the signing of contracts worth more than \$20 billion, but we have no word on the foreign or defence policy. Normally, in such a case, discussions are then held to determine what military equipment we will purchase to meet the requirements of our defence and foreign policies.

For the past year or two, the government has promised us a defence capabilities plan and a defence policy. Not only have these failed to materialize, but Canada is taking a piecemeal approach to military procurement, issuing more than \$20 billion in contracts. The risk is that, once all these contracts have been signed and the goods purchased, Canada will tailor its foreign and defence policies to what it has purchased. The government is unlikely to create a policy that says Canada does not need C-17s or strategic or tactical aircraft when it has just purchased \$20 billion worth of such aircraft. The government's approach is therefore somewhat dangerous. In my opinion, the government is going about things backwards, because it should have drawn up a plan, from which a policy and a defence capabilities plan would have followed. Then the government could have determined what equipment it would need.

• (1145)

What we are dealing with here is an inconsistency, and Canadian and Quebec taxpayers are the ones who are going to have to pay the price.

I have the figures here. Those C-17 strategic aircraft cost \$3.4 billion. The worst thing is that there are two parts to military contracts: the cost to acquire the equipment and the cost to maintain it over 20 years. That is the department's new approach.

Many Canadian companies are saying that at least Industry Canada is responsible for the purchase cost and that companies will benefit from the economic spinoffs of all of this. Unfortunately, that is not what happens with many of these contracts, like the contract for the C-17 strategic aircraft. The government will be giving Boeing \$3.4 billion, and there will be next to no economic spinoffs for Canada. All of the maintenance support for 20 years will be done in the United States. We can try telling Boeing to invest money in Canada and Quebec, but really, the company can do whatever it wants. We cannot be at all sure that there will be \$3.4 billion in spinoffs.

The same thing is happening with tactical aircraft. We just found out that the government signed a contract for a \$1.4 billion portion of a \$4.9 billion contract to buy tactical aircraft from Lockheed Martin. In this case, Canada will be getting only a portion of the \$1.4 billion acquisition cost back in economic spinoffs from Lockheed Martin. Lockheed Martin has decided to give back \$843 million in reinvestment in Canada and Quebec.

This is all very unfair to Quebec. Quebec accounts for 54% of the aerospace industry. In the Lockheed Martin contract, Quebec will have to be satisfied with only approximately 28% of the spinoffs. This is unfair, considering that the Atlantic provinces, which account for just 4.6% of the aerospace sector, will reap 28.7% of the economic spinoffs. The Atlantic provinces, with 4.6% of the industry, will get over 28% of the spinoffs, while Quebec, with 54% of the industry, will get 28.5% of the spinoffs. The Atlantic provinces will be getting more than Quebec in terms of spinoffs.

That is a gross injustice. I could go on at length about this. The Chinook helicopters from Boeing represent an investment of \$4.7 billion. That investment was just announced. The Canadian contract will take priority over others that were waiting to get Chinooks. An agreement was probably reached with the U.S. president in Bucharest. Once again, we do not know for sure if the maintenance will be done in Canada. Nor can we be sure of the potential spinoffs from this contract. Furthermore, the government renounced its prerogative as signatory of these contracts to tell them where to invest in order to ensure economic spinoffs for Canada. That is their *laissez-faire* policy and Quebec comes out the big loser.

Supply vessels are another example. We are talking about \$2.9 billion. Transport trucks represent \$1.2 billion. Search and rescue aircraft represent \$3 billion. As an aside, however, search and rescue aircraft are actually very useful to Quebeckers and Canadians. When there is a problem in isolated or mountainous areas, that is the kind of equipment used to help Quebeckers and Canadians. Yet it is at the very bottom of the list right now, as we speak. It is not a high priority. It is at the bottom. I met the air force commander this week and he said that things were going at a good pace. Yet we are far from where we should be in the contracts at this time because they have almost all been signed.

Thus, this is a gross injustice. At a time when people in the manufacturing and forestry sectors need help with employment insurance and seniors need help with the guaranteed income supplement, it is unfortunate that over \$20 billion is being invested in the military sector. This is completely unacceptable for the Bloc Québécois and one of the reasons why we will vote against the bill before us here today.

• (1150)

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed serving on the defence committee with the member. We get very good input from him. As he knows, I always talk about the north and encourage more military there.

Could he comment on the need for military in the north and the fact that we need it to be increased? I have been pushing for this. Also, could he comment on some of the failures related to sovereignty? The Prime Minister promised two icebreakers. We might finally get one, but it will not be new because it will not come until an old one has died.

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The government cut back the Aurora flights, which used to do the surveillance of the north. As I travel across the north, the Canadian rangers, whom the Conservatives said they would increase, have all kinds of technical problems in getting their pay. It is such a tiny expense. Why can they not at least make it good for those very important northern rangers?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for the excellent work he has done on the Standing Committee on National Defence and elsewhere. It is obvious that the member for Yukon regularly defends his region, and that is something I have always admired in him.

It is true that there are currently some major concerns in the far north. As the passages open up, there will be more maritime traffic. It is also clear that more and more countries are starting to occupy the far north. This is probably because of maritime passages, and also because the far north has unbelievable natural resources. We must move into this region, and the way to do so is with the Rangers. This should be encouraged.

Furthermore, the government should respect the commitments it has made concerning the far north. There needs to be a presence; airplanes need to fly over the area to ensure Canadian sovereignty. We also need ships. But the government is starting to back off a little. The only thing in the contracts I have here has to do with supply vessels. But I too heard the Prime Minister say that there would be three large, armed icebreakers for the far north.

We should also think about whether this is the right way to proceed. Would it be better to hold meetings with the four or five countries making territorial claims in the north and to sign agreements with them, instead of arming ourselves to the teeth? I do not think that the Canadian navy would last very long against the American navy in the far north.

Nevertheless, I congratulate the member for being so involved in his region, Yukon, and for being such a strong advocate for the far north.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's presentation and I appreciated his comments. I would like to ask him a question regarding the problem with sources of drinking water in Canada. We know there are problems throughout the country, not just in Ontario, but in Quebec and elsewhere. We recently learned that about 1,600 communities in Canada have serious problems and have had to issue boil water advisories, not to mention 93 other locations in Canada where aboriginal communities are experiencing these types of problems.

I wonder if the hon. member could comment on this issue as well as on the government's inadequate attempt at dealing with the matter. We know that the United Nations is doing everything it can to ensure that drinking water remains a right for all human beings.

• (1155)

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I would like to relate this to the speech I just gave. The armed forces is one of the biggest polluters nowadays. I can attest to this because I have been to the far north and all over with the armed forces. We often see that their work on the ground leads to major pollution of groundwater.

However, it is not just the Canadian armed forces that pollute, but also the oil companies. I am really quite concerned with what is happening with the Athabasca River in Fort McMurray. There is nowhere to put the water that is forming huge lakes. If they were to give way, we would have an incredible disaster in that part of Canada.

Potable water is very important. I am also worried about the fact that many companies are stealing drinking water. They bottle it, sell it and often do not pay the country for it.

We have to immediately put an end to this policy of paying the polluters, which is basically what the government is doing by lowering taxes for companies that are making a profit, because oil companies benefit the most from tax cuts. On the other hand, are they good corporate citizens in terms of drinking water? I do not think so. And that is where the government has a role to play. It must forget about its laissez-faire attitude and impose strict standards on these polluters so that we can keep our water. It is an important legacy for us to pass on to our children and our grandchildren.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-50, the budget implementation act. I would like to speak on two aspects of the bill. One is the significant changes to the immigration system that are included in this bill and the other is the priorities of the bill that we are debating today.

I represent Vancouver East, a riding that certainly reflects the multiculturalism of Canada. It is a community that is built on immigration. Vancouver East would not exist in terms of its economic vitality and the people who live there, if it were not for many waves of immigration beginning in Strathcona and moving throughout all of Vancouver East and indeed Vancouver as a whole. Immigration is a very important part of our community. Immigrants and new Canadians are people we welcome into our community.

It is very alarming to me to see that the budget bill we are debating these days in the House contains such dramatic and significant changes to our immigration system. It concerns me that those changes are in a budget bill. One would expect that changes to the immigration system would be contained in legislation pertaining to immigration and that the legislation would then go to the immigration committee.

The Conservative government has brought in very significant changes to the system through the back door. The Conservatives are trying to hide them under the cover of the budget bill and hope that no one notices. Luckily, there is a growing debate in my community and across the country about the impact that these immigration changes would have if the budget bill is approved.

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The immigration changes that are contemplated would give major new powers to the minister to control the types of applications she accepts. It would impose quotas. It would dispose of current immigration applications and would even allow queue jumping. There would be new limits put on the humanitarian and compassionate grounds category which often is used by many families for the purpose of family reunification. It would even give the minister the power to deny visas to those who meet all of the immigration criteria. This would confer enormous, and I would say very dangerous, powers on an individual, a powerful minister and it is being done through the back door.

The most significant change is that it is supporting what has already been a policy shift wherein our immigration system is increasingly being understood as a system that looks at immigrants as economic units. For example, these changes would allow applications to be disposed of and put aside, but it would allow a further dramatic increase in what is called the foreign worker program or the guest worker program, where people are treated as cheap labour from foreign countries. We have seen it in Alberta and in B.C. where there has been a massive influx of foreign workers who are often exploited and abused by employers. It is very hard to track what is going on and whether or not they are able to avail themselves of their rights as workers.

This is something that is incredibly alarming in this budget bill. We are seeing this dramatic policy shift in our immigration system that would displace families. It would do nothing further in terms of reunification and would place a greater and greater emphasis on foreign workers who come to this country on a temporary basis. They have no adequate rights. They are not treated as permanent residents. They do not have an opportunity to become citizens.

It is something that we have seen in Europe. We have seen the kind of instability, both politically and culturally that it fosters, where there are two tiers of people. There are citizens and workers who have no real status, who are never protected in the society to which they are major contributors. That is the kind of thing we absolutely should not be accepting in Canada. I am very afraid that is what would happen under these changes.

There are other very concerning things in the bill.

● (1200)

A couple of days ago the homelessness count in metro Vancouver was released. This count is done every few years. It was conducted by over 700 volunteers who literally go block by block, alley by alley, shelter by shelter and endeavour to get, and indeed do get, a very accurate count of people who are homeless, whether they are in shelters or on the street.

That count was done on March 11 and the results were released on April 8. It showed that overall there has been a 19% increase in the number of homeless individuals found in metro Vancouver. That is a 19% increase since 2005 when the last count was done. It is a 131% increase since the one previous to that was done, which was in 2002. This should cause enormous concern.

In my community of Vancouver East, particularly in places like the downtown eastside, the visibility of homelessness, the number of people on the street, those who are destitute and those living so far

below the poverty line with no resources or hope for the future, causes enormous distress. It causes illness and mental distress not only to the individuals who are in that predicament but also to the community at large.

The latest figures from the homeless count should be setting off alarm bells. One would think that over the years there would have been a concerted effort to address this as a grave human tragedy. In a country as wealthy as Canada, nobody should be sleeping on the street. Nobody should be without shelter. Everybody is entitled to a living wage and decent, safe, appropriate and affordable housing.

Yet, when we look at the budget, there was no new money for housing. A number of local advocacy groups in the downtown east side, including Pivot, United Native Nations, DERA, the Carnegie Community Action Project and Streams of Justice, recently released a report that showed there were 10 new low income housing facilities that have either closed or will be closing for a further loss of 448 units.

My community is facing a very grave situation where people are either already homeless or are on the verge of becoming homeless. Yet there was nothing in this budget to address those issues.

I read a quote from the minister allegedly responsible for housing, where he dismissed the idea that we needed a national housing program. I have heard the minister say that the government is spending more money on housing than any other government in the history of Canada. He is talking about mortgages. He is talking about existing projects, some of which were built 20 years ago. No new co-ops or social housing units have been built. Even the homelessness programs that exist are in jeopardy because it is not yet clear whether they will continue.

All of this creates incredible anxiety both for the organizations that seek to assist those who are homeless and certainly the people on the street and in shelters who wonder whether they will ever have a roof over their heads or have a place they can call home.

To me, this budget is about priorities. I find it shameful. When we look at the \$50 billion in corporate income tax cuts that are contained in this budget and the former economic and fiscal update that was presented last October, when we look at the corporate tax cuts that are laid out from 2007 all the way to 2013, we are talking about \$50 billion that has been lost from public revenue.

Let us think about what could have been done with that amount of money. It could have provided 1.14 million child care spaces. It could have provided 74,000 hybrid transit buses. It could have provided 12 million units of non-profit affordable housing. It could have assisted 11 million students with their undergraduate tuition, or another two million graduates with their student loans. It could have put a much greater emphasis on dealing with climate change. None of these priorities were addressed in the budget.

● (1205)

To add insult to injury, when people in my community read that VANOC, the Olympic committee, received another \$45 million yet housing receiving nothing, they knew that they were at the bottom of the list.

This is a very bad budget and it is the reason—

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Vancouver East for raising a number of the issues associated with the budget, with which I too find fault. Her riding of Vancouver East has many of the same social problems and challenges with which my riding of Winnipeg Centre deals, not the least of which is a complete dearth of affordable social housing.

This is not by accident, but by deliberate policy, first by the Mulroney Conservative government, which killed most of the social housing programs. I was the president of a housing co-op at the time. During that era, most of the access to federal funding disappeared. Then when the Liberals were elected, they killed off the last remaining streams of money for affordable social housing. In fact, we can trace this negligence toward affordable housing through three successive federal governments.

I visited her in the riding of Vancouver East and the downtown east side recently, and a study was published at the very time of my visit. It made the business case for affordable housing, in that it cost more per person in social services for a person on the street and without housing than it did to provide social housing. Could she expand some on that study?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure to have the member for Winnipeg Centre in Vancouver East. We visited a number of organizations and walked around the neighbourhood. We saw the devastation because of the loss of affordable housing units.

The member is correct. The report has clearly pointed out that the cost of dealing with homelessness in the required social, help and emergency interventions far outweigh the costs of providing secure, appropriate and supported housing where needed. It is simply dollars and cents. The economics of that are common sense. To me, it is not rocket science. This is about the basics of where we invest money.

When I walk around the downtown east side and I see vacant lots that are going to be condo developments, when I see people being evicted from their homes only because they are in low income housing sitting on land that is becoming very valuable on the east side of the downtown, it is a great tragedy. It is something that does not need to happen.

Again, it is very alarming that there is no money in the federal budget to provide for such a basic human need as affordable housing and shelter.

• (1210)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for talking about housing. Housing across the country and in northern regions is a subject of great concern. The minister of housing in the Northwest Territories indicated that the only programs available from the federal government have a sunset clause after next year. Then there will be no money for housing for people in the north. Is that a similar situation in the south?

Do we have this thing happening where the federal government, basically under the direction of the Conservative Party, is getting out of housing entirely?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately that is the case. When I was the housing critic for the NDP, I visited the north. I

found there were many common issues between the north and the south. Communities were feeling the impact of a depleting housing resource and a lack of support from the federal government.

We can see it in the daily lives of people. People are sleeping on sofas and doubling up. Kids have to stay at home many years later than they normally would. In some communities people have to go to the local jail to sleep overnight because they are homeless and it is the only place to go.

The federal government, under the Liberals and continued by the Conservatives, abandoned its responsibility. In fact, Canada is now the only western industrialized country that does not have a national housing strategy. Even the United States has far superior programs from the federal government that support state initiatives. We do not see that in Canada, and we see the consequences of this in our local communities.

Hon. Raymond Chan (Richmond, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to debate Bill C-50, the budget implementation bill, which also includes the amendment to the immigration act. I will focus my debate on the immigration act.

I represent the riding of Richmond, an island city just next to the city of Vancouver where the Vancouver International Airport is situated. The riding is composed mostly of immigrants. It has a very booming economy. We have the privilege of having a farming community. We have a dike that is very close to the city. At the same time, we have the convenience of the metropolitan facilities.

Richmond has a very low crime rate and a booming economy. The lifespan of our citizens is one of the longest in Canada. Therefore, we can demonstrate from our experience in Richmond that immigrants contribute a great deal to the lives of Canadians.

The Conservatives have said that the new immigration policy is aimed at reducing the backlog of immigration applicants. They have said they want to expedite selected classes of immigrants and focus their resources on desirable immigrants, but their methods will not work and they are wrong.

The amendment tabled would destroy a democratically based immigration system, which has been hailed as a model for other countries to follow, and replace it with dictatorial system, allowing the minister to cherry-pick who is allowed to come into our country.

The amendment to section 87.3(4) states:

If an application or request is not processed, it may be retained, returned or otherwise disposed of in accordance with the instructions of the Minister.

Giving the minister the discretionary power to dispose of applications is an illogical way to reduce the backlog of applicants. The government is implying that if we have a huge backlog, we should give the power to the minister to hand-pick a few and then outright reject everyone else. To me, this is not only unfair, but illogical.

The amendment allows the minister to unilaterally and arbitrarily dispose of applications without any recourse, so applicants would be unable to appeal their cases. This is very unfair. The proposed amendment to section 81.3(c) states, “The Minister may set the number of applications or requests by category or otherwise to be processed in any year”.

Along with the fact that unprocessed applications can be disposed of, this amendment would allow the minister to set a cap on applications.

Capping the number of applicants only superficially reduces the backlog by temporarily not allowing potential immigrants to make their application. How will forcing applicants to pay for re-applications year after year help reduce the backlog? These are situations which senior officials from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration agree would happen.

Reducing the backlog is not about prioritizing some and ignoring others. The Conservatives' rhetoric seems illogical. They have said that they can set priorities, but does that not mean there will be lower priorities? Even so, how does this reduce the backlog? Just because we focus on cleaning up the kitchen first, it does not mean the rest of the house gets any cleaner any sooner.

However, the worst and the most worrisome change that the Conservatives are pushing for is the change of a single word, from “shall” to “may”. As it stands right now, if an immigrant passes the bar, then it is clearly stated in section 11(1) that he or she “shall” be granted a visa. The amendment would change this so that someone who has already fulfilled the requirements only “may” be granted a visa.

•(1215)

Why is the Conservative government trying to subvert the immigration process? If a reason is found as to why a visa should not be granted, then make it a part of the evaluation. If immigration applicants cannot be certain, even after they have passed all requirements, why should the apply and how will this help reduce backlogs?

Time and effort would need to be spent in the processing of their applications. I see this as yet another opportunity for the minister to cherry-pick again, even after the applicants have escaped the first round of cherry-picking by the minister.

None of the proposed amendments are aimed at clearing up the backlog or reducing wait times for applicants. It is about letting the minister choose who is and who is not a desirable immigrant. Again, this is an unfair method.

The Conservatives' cherry-picking in the darkroom, dictatorial approach will destroy our well hailed rules based democratic and transparent immigration system. This will lead us down a very dangerous path.

A senior immigration official was quoted on Wednesday in the *London Free Press* saying, “There is no right in the law—and there never has been a right in the law—to come into Canada”.

This is wrong. It is because of this kind of attitude that led our forefathers to create a racist immigration act, better known as the

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Chinese Exclusion Act. After the Pacific Railway was built with Chinese labourers, they were no longer desirable. A head tax was exclusively applied to Chinese immigrants. When that did not stop Chinese immigrants from coming to Canada, they were totally excluded.

Yes, being allowed to immigrate to Canada is a privilege. However, we must apply that privilege fairly, respecting the core values of democracy, rule of law and equality. The bill eliminates the rights to equal opportunity for every application to be given fair review and consideration, regardless of background, country of origin or skill set.

Even after Paul Martin Sr. amended the Canadian Citizenship Act in 1947 to allow ethnic Chinese to become Canadian citizens, in general, we Chinese still cannot have the privilege to come to Canada. It was not until the Right Hon. Lester B. Pearson changed the Canadian immigration system into a race free, transparent, point based system in 1967 that most Chinese could come to Canada.

This continuing and worrisome trend by the Conservative government must be stopped. Canada's race free and transparent immigration point system is hailed as a model for other countries to follow. It should not be tossed aside so lightly.

The Liberal government committed \$700 million in 2005 to cleaning up the backlog, which the Conservatives cancelled after becoming the government in 2006. After ignoring the problem for more than two years, they now claim to have allocated \$100 million to fix the problem. It is far from enough.

We must not allow the Conservatives, under the excuse of solving the backlog problem in our immigration system, to lead us away from fundamental Canadian core values of democracy, the rule of law and equality. I will vote against it.

•(1220)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague from Richmond. I heard him talk about Richmond being a wonderful part of the world. I concur with him and I know he is very proud of it.

I also listened very closely to all his comments. I am pretty proud that this side of the House has righted some of the wrongs on the Chinese head tax, of which he spoke. We have cut in half the immigrant landing fees.

I thank the hon. member for being, in a way, a co-author of this new change. As we know, that side of the House, when in government, ran the waiting list from 50,000 to 800,000 immigrants. I cannot think the Liberal members are very proud of that. Now they are obviously going to help us in correcting that with this new legislation.

I heard the hon. member say that he would vote against it. Is the member going to bring his colleagues to the House and vote against it or is it another case of making his own leader look weak?

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Hon. Raymond Chan: Mr. Speaker, the biggest problem with this amendment is that it would change a transparent, open, rules-based, democratic system into a dictatorial, undemocratic decision making process under the control of the minister.

One of the biggest problems with our immigration system in the old days was that it was not transparent. It was not democratic. It was not fair and it was not equal for every ethnic group or even every area of the world. As a result, only a select few, primarily from the European countries, could come to Canada.

It was not until 1967, when the right hon. Lester B. Pearson saw the problem with the system and corrected it with a new points system. It became transparent and equal for everyone. The system began allowing people from other ethnic groups to come to Canada. For the Conservative Party to now propose a system that would go back to the dark ages is not right and we must stand against it.

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-50. I am not pleased to see Bill C-50, but I am pleased to be able to talk about it. In this Bill C-50, the government is establishing a crown corporation for employment insurance.

For years the NDP has been calling for an independent employment insurance fund that is separate from the government's consolidated revenue fund. In 1986, the Auditor General suggested putting funds from employment insurance into the consolidated revenue fund. After a number of years, as the surplus in the consolidated revenue fund increased because of employment insurance, it became apparent that the EI fund was the government's cash cow.

The government said that workers depended on the employment insurance fund. It soon became apparent that it was not workers who depended on the EI fund, but the government. The government started to run zero deficits and balanced budgets with the money it stole from the EI fund in the consolidated revenue fund. This was the biggest heist the country has ever seen. It was like an old movie where the protagonist robs a train full of money.

The previous government stole \$57 billion from the surplus in the EI fund. The fund generated some \$57 billion. This afternoon, that theft will be legalized in Bill C-50. It is not unlike stopping at a bank to steal money and instead of going to jail, seeing a bill passed to legalize bank robbery. That is what is happening this afternoon: money that workers have worked so hard for is being stolen.

The most surprising thing is that a crown corporation is being created and that is different than an independent fund. A clear explanation is needed. We asked for an independent fund. People might wonder what we are crying about today since we will get an independent fund. There is a difference between an independent fund and a crown corporation. An independent fund would be a fund separate from the government's consolidated revenue fund and would only be used to deposit employment insurance premiums into the employment insurance fund. A crown corporation is a separate, independent corporation, like Canada Post, Radio-Canada or the CBC.

When we stand up in the House of Commons to ask questions about the employment insurance fund, the government will say that it is a crown corporation and that we should go ask it. We will not be able to ask any more questions in the House of Commons about it. The same thing will happen when we rise in the House of Commons to ask questions about Radio-Canada or the CBC. The government says it is at arm's length, that it is a crown corporation and that we should go see the president. The government will wash its hands of the whole thing.

Moreover, the Auditor General has always said that there should always be a \$15 billion balance. In this crown corporation fund, it will be just \$2 billion. This afternoon at 3 p.m., during the vote in the House of Commons, \$55 billion will be stolen with the help of the Liberals. Either they will vote for Bill C-50 and make the theft legal, or they will not vote and just let the theft happen. That is exactly what will happen this afternoon.

What might we do instead to help workers? People often talk about POWA, for example. Manufacturing and forestry companies in Canada have closed their doors. I remember POWA and PWAP in New Brunswick. When the fish plants closed, people had PWAP, a retirement program for fish plant workers, for women, when the groundfish fishery collapsed. These programs helped working men and women at the time. Employment insurance was there to help people.

• (1230)

Today, employment insurance is there to help the government, not workers. Employment insurance is insurance that workers and employers pay for directly. I am concerned, because the only thing the Conservative government is worried about is reducing employment insurance premiums and making sure employers do not pay premiums. We do not often talk about the workers who pay premiums. According to the government, if employers did not have to pay premiums, they could create jobs.

Once again, I have never seen a company hire more people because it is turning a profit. Companies do not hire people because they are making a profit; they hire people because they need them to produce. I therefore do not believe that Canadian companies have gone bankrupt because they were paying employment insurance premiums. On the contrary, a good employer is not afraid of paying employment insurance premiums, because the employer hates to have to tell an employee not to come in on Monday morning because there is no more work for him.

Government Orders

Employment insurance existed so that these families would receive benefits to help them. In 1996, the Liberals decided to make a sweeping reform of employment insurance, following on the reform that began when Brian Mulroney was Prime Minister. The first signs of reform were seen in Inkerman, New Brunswick, in my riding. The reform continued until 1996. A \$57 billion surplus built up, and now the government is starting to want to wipe out that surplus. At 3 o'clock this afternoon, it will be wiped out, with the support of the Liberals who carried out the reform in 1996 and the Conservatives who are spearheading this reform in the House of Commons by introducing a bill to create an independent crown corporation to avoid any further questions about the surplus, because they get embarrassed when they are asked about it. They have even told us to stop asking questions in committee, because the money is not there anymore. They have asked us to stop pestering them with questions. Meanwhile, individuals and families are in need, and this government is completely ignoring them.

What could be done with this money? First of all, the government could do away with the two-week waiting period. It is not people's fault if they lose their jobs. I have said this time and again in the House of Commons, and I will keep on saying it.

Why do we penalize these people by imposing an unpaid two-week qualifying period when their employer announces that there will be no work for them next week? Who wants to lose two weeks' salary? Who ends up being penalized by this unpaid period? Why does the claimant lose two weeks' salary? This measure penalizes the family that needs to pay the electricity bill at the end of the month and to buy groceries for their children. It penalizes the family that needs to pay its mortgage. That is the end result. This afternoon, the government is preparing to carry out the largest theft in the history of Canada by legalizing the transfer of the \$57 billion surplus from the employment insurance fund. That is what will happen this afternoon in this House.

We could keep the 12 best weeks to give people a chance to receive a decent benefit. We should not forget that those on unemployment receive only 55% of their salary and that 55% of minimum wage is not very much. In fact, it is less than welfare. We could therefore make some changes to help these people and to ensure that benefits are based on their 12 best weeks. Furthermore, new claimants should be able to qualify after 360 hours rather than 910 hours. Next week, we will be tabling a bill in this House to make this change and we will debate it. Once again, the Liberals did not support this measure in committee but rather backed the Conservatives by agreeing to take money from workers who are losing their jobs.

The government is hitting people when they are down. It is a terrible experience to lose one's job as I have been told by people who have called my office. People call me to tell me that they have just lost their jobs and that they need seven to eight weeks to qualify. There is no money in the system to pay the public servants to get the job done.

• (1235)

It is not that the public servants cannot do their job; there just are not enough of them. The money does not go to the right places.

Having a program such as POWA to ensure that those 55 and older can live comfortably until they retire at age 65 is one of the good things that we could accomplish.

Therefore, we will be voting against Bill C-50 even if the government falls, because it is a vote that should be—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre for questions and comments.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Acadie—Bathurst for the public service that he has done for Canadians today by sounding the alarm, as it were, and notifying Canadians that a crime is about to take place, if not literally then certainly figuratively and practically, that we are about to get robbed.

It is now 12:35 in the afternoon and by 3 o'clock a crime will be about to take place. Somebody should call the cops and get them in here to witness this because hidden within the budget are two landmines that do not belong there. The first one is the immigration fiasco that the government has snuck into the budget bill. The second one is the manifestation of perhaps the greatest theft in Canadian history: \$55 billion of surplus in the EI fund, paid in by employees and employers, not by the government, will be taken and used for whatever spending priorities it sees fit.

The current government, and the previous government, seem to have a misunderstanding about whose money it is. Marcel Massé was the previous president of the Treasury Board. I will ask my colleague to compare these two things. The former Liberal president of the Treasury Board, when there was a \$30 billion surplus in the public service employees pension plan, by legislation, by the power vested in them, they stole that money from those pension fund beneficiaries just the same as the current government will steal the EI money. Does he not see a parallel there, that those guys do not seem to understand that it is not their money?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about the public service pension plan. When we go into negotiations, we negotiate the wages that we could get right away, but to protect our pensions, we negotiate a pension plan hoping the government will not rob from it later on. The government negotiated the pension plan and then later passed legislation to take it.

As the member said, at 3 o'clock the train will go by and the robbers will jump on the train and take the money. At 3 o'clock this afternoon, \$55 billion will be stolen from Canadians, money that belongs to the working people, men and women who get up in the morning, go to work and pay into a program that belongs to them. This money will be stolen this afternoon by the Conservative and Liberal Parties.

I have been arguing about that for 11 years and I do not feel that I have wasted one minute of my time. I have been doing it for the working men and women who have built and are building this country. It is a real shame what will happen at 3 o'clock this afternoon.

Government Orders

The government has done it in a way to make itself look better. It says that it is a good government because it will put the money into a corporate organization like Radio Canada, the CBC or crown corporations. It says that it is doing it because it is better than the Liberals, that it wants to save the money. However, it does not talk about the \$55 billion that it will take. That is the shame this afternoon.

A study done said that we should have a bank account for \$15 billion but the government will only be putting in \$2 billion. When that \$2 billion goes down, the benefits will be lost again. The people will lose benefits again, which is sad, and it will happen at 3 o'clock Ottawa time.

• (1240)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-50, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 26, 2008 and to enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget.

As a new member of Parliament representing the constituency of Vancouver Quadra, I again thank the residents of Vancouver Quadra for their confidence in me. The people of Vancouver Quadra are educated, engaged and informed citizens whom it is an honour to represent. I intend to advocate tirelessly for their interests in Ottawa.

The Conservative government included many Liberal programs in this budget bill, albeit in watered down versions, for example, post-secondary education. Many of the people who work and study at UBC live in my riding and the quality and accessibility of post-secondary education is an important priority for them as it is for me.

Past Liberal governments were known for their many investments to benefit universities, students and research. Billions of dollars for these purposes in the Liberal budget update of fall 2005 were cut by the Conservative government. I note that due to the work of the Liberal leader and members, the government in this budget has sprinkled back some of those post-secondary investments.

The previous Liberal government left this country's finances in a strong position but Bill C-50 underlines the mismanagement by the government that has drained the fiscal gas tank of our nation. This is entirely consistent with the abysmal record of past Conservative governments, including the Mulroney government and the Ontario provincial Conservatives, whose finance minister, now the federal Conservative finance minister, helped leave the incoming Liberals in Ontario a landmine: a whopping \$5.6 billion deficit.

Most unacceptable in this bill is part 6 and it is to that section to which I will address my remarks.

Part 6 consists of amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. These amendments are substantive, are bad public policy and are of deep concern to new Canadians in my riding and across Canada and to their overseas family members. These amendments should never have been buried in this budget implementation bill.

The Conservative government cannot be trusted, especially when one considers the past comments the Prime Minister has made about immigration. For example, in 2001 he stated:

...west of Winnipeg the ridings the Liberals hold are dominated by people who are either recent Asian immigrants or recent migrants from Eastern Canada; people who live in ghettos and are not integrated into Western Canadian society.

What did he mean by that? Was he referring to my riding of Vancouver Quadra? Is he someone who can be trusted to amend immigration laws?

The Liberals, in stark contrast, have long been supportive of immigrants to Canada and their unique contribution to our multicultural landscape. I am proud to continue that tradition as the member of Parliament for Vancouver Quadra. This is an issue of great importance to me as an immigrant myself.

The Minister of Immigration cannot be trusted. She has already misspoken in the House by claiming that last year about 430,000 new Canadians were welcomed into Canada under the Conservative government, more than under the Liberals. That is not true. She later had to retract that claim and essentially confessed that it was inflated by including students and temporary workers.

Actually, 36,000 fewer permanent residents have been accepted since the Conservative government came to power 27 months ago. Will the door continue to close arbitrarily to immigrants under the government's proposed amendments?

The type of changes to the very foundation of Canada's immigration policy that the government is proposing must be considered in the open and not slipped into a budget bill through the back door. The government is seeking to make changes that would close the door to immigrants, but even more concerning is that the amendment would give the government the power to be prejudicial in their implementation.

The Conservative government has already demonstrated its meanspiritedness over and over by cancelling the court challenges program that supported the most vulnerable Canadians, by weakening the infrastructure helping women advance our equality in Canadian society and by voting against a motion to lower the Peace Tower flag on the day a Canadian soldier is killed overseas. This is meanspirited.

• (1245)

In part 6, section 11(1), for example, by changing one word "shall" to "may" in the regulations, immigrants who meet all the requirements may find Canada slamming the door in their face. That is meanspirited.

As well, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration would have the power to make arbitrary and unaccountable decisions, which would enable her to pick some immigrants over others, send some to the back of the line to start all over again or slam the door shut altogether. We do not know whether applications will be denied due to an immigrant's country of origin or some other factor.

According to Naeem Noorani, the publisher of *The Canadian Immigrant*, as quoted in the *Toronto Star* on Tuesday, "This sets a dangerous precedent for a healthy democratic system".

Government Orders

It is precisely because of past Conservative insensitivity toward Canada's immigrants that it is not appropriate for the government to have that power. The measures the government is seeking to introduce stand in contrast to the fairness, transparency and welcoming of new Canadians under past Liberal governments, a welcoming that has led to Vancouver becoming a thriving urban region underpinned by the contribution of new Canadians.

My riding of Vancouver Quadra has welcomed more than 40,000 immigrants to Canada. Many are long-time residents now, which others have arrived more recently. Vancouver Quadra community members who have self-identified in the census as being a visible minority include Chinese, South Asian, Korean, Japanese, West Asian, Filipino, Black, Southeast Asian and Arab, among others. This diversity contributes to the richness of the community in so many ways.

Of note, more than 23,000 residents of Vancouver Quadra are of Chinese origin, whether from Hong Kong, Mainland China or Taiwan. These new Canadians make important contributions to the social, cultural and economic life of Vancouver Quadra and Canada.

Just 10 days after I was elected, I organized a round table discussion to hear from 20 leaders in the Chinese community, my very first public consultation as a member of Parliament. The changes the government proposes could prevent their family members from joining them here. The changes the government proposes could prevent those working in a particular field from becoming part of Canadian society. Through one stroke of the pen, the minister could place specific countries at the bottom of the list. In reality, we really do not know who will be acceptable to the Conservative government, a government that cannot be trusted to be fair.

The government hopes to change Canada's immigration laws so that at a minister's whim people who aim to come to this great country to make a better life and a better Canada could be prevented from even being considered. These are substantive changes that should be discussed openly and accorded a full debate.

I am against part 6, the section of this budget bill that deals with the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. Part 6 should be considered separately, not as a part of Bill C-50, and part 6 should be rejected.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome my colleague from Vancouver Quadra and compliment her on her thoughtful remarks in what I believe was her maiden speech in this House of Commons.

I am sure her constituents benefited from the consultation that she did on some of the negative aspects of this bill and the subterfuge that is being foisted on Canadians by slipping these immigration amendments into the budget bill.

We in the NDP have dwelt at some length on how we find fault with the immigration section of Bill C-50 and we came to the logical conclusion that what we intend to do is vote against the bill because we disagree with the bill. It follows logically that when we disagree with something and follow our principles, we vote against that.

As my colleague is new to the House of Commons and since this will be perhaps the first challenge of its type that she will have the

opportunity to vote with, I can give her perhaps some guidance and ask her a question.

The way it works here is that if members believe in something they stand up for it, and if they disagree with something, they vote against it. Those are the basic tenets of being a public officer or a public servant. The member's constituents expect that she will come here and vote her conscience on what she really believes and, on those things she opposes, she will vote against.

Therefore, will she or will she not stand up with those of us who oppose Bill C-50 and vote against it at 3 o'clock today, two hours from now?

• (1250)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's welcoming comments. It is a great privilege to be here.

Unlike NDP members of the legislature in my province of British Columbia, the member and his party will never form government, so it is easy and predictable to vote against and oppose everything while never having to put forward the needed constructive solutions were one to assume the reins of responsibilities of government.

I appreciate that the member supports the criticisms that I and my colleagues are making on the immigration amendments. We do not trust the Prime Minister. He has been quoted as saying that "immigration should be essentially economic in nature" when he was chief policy officer of the Reform Party, so how can we trust that these amendments will be applied properly?

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the member. The term "trust" is a big one. Trust and confidence go hand in hand. Throughout her address to the House, the member talked about trust.

I know that if I have real concerns about someone whom I do not trust, I do everything I can to make sure that person does not perpetrate a dastardly deed upon someone. I can only think that if she has strong convictions and is really dedicated to her words, she will make sure that she acts accordingly so that she can plainly explain to her constituents how she was judicious not only in her opinions but also in her actions.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, when the member opposite was talking about perpetrating dastardly deeds, I was awaiting the rest of the sentence, which would have been about the government's blatant broken promise to investors in income trusts. I heard that on doorsteps again and again in Vancouver Quadra.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I can allow a very brief comment from the member for Kenora if he keeps it close to 30 seconds.

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that our colleague from Vancouver Quadra has learned very quickly in the House. One thing she pointed out very quickly is the meanspiritedness of the other side of the House.

Government Orders

She has talked to a lot of people in the short time since she was elected and is a great asset to the House. She mentioned that she met with other Canadians. What are they saying about this legislation? Obviously she clearly has problems with the immigration aspects. Could she please comment?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, people who attended my round table in the Chinese community had a lot to say and have a lot of concerns about this amendment, but other Canadians who are ringing alarm bells include: the Canadian Bar Association, Toronto mayor David Miller, the Canadian Arab Federation, the Ontario premier, the *Toronto Sun*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Regina Leader-Post*, the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Victoria Times Colonist*, *La Presse*, the *Ottawa Citizen* and many others. There is a growing consensus. This is a bad idea.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this matter. I want to welcome my colleague from Vancouver Quadra. Now that I know her better, I hope the 2010 Olympic Games will be held in her riding and that she will participate in the figure skating events because I think she has the required skills, having skated around the questions she was asked the way she did.

When one is against something, one does not vote in favour of it. We may possibly never form the government, in fact we will certainly never form it. Our goal is not to form the government; it is to reform it. It is not true to say that we are going to compromise our principles. The Bloc Québécois is voting against Bill C-50. We could have said to my colleague from Vancouver Quadra that there are very many possible arguments for voting against this bill. I will give just a few, as I seem to have only 10 minutes.

Take agriculture for example. As far as agriculture is concerned, this budget provides only \$72 million over two years. A number of sectors in our country, in Canada, are currently dealing with an agriculture crisis. In the nation of Quebec, the agriculture crisis is present every day. Some \$72 million over two years for all of Canada is certainly not enough. This government has not been listening to the demands of the farm workers.

Then there is employment insurance. I do not want to repeat the arguments of my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst, who gave many arguments on the employment insurance fund. The only thing I want to say to him is that he had better get back to his riding as soon as he can in the next few hours because his junior team from Acadie—Bathurst is going to have a hard time making it to the playoffs, let alone winning. Things are not going well right now, just like with employment insurance.

This government decided to create the employment insurance financing board. The government can go ahead and create whatever board it wants, but we want to know whether it will return the \$57 billion it stole from the employment insurance fund, and that it stole from workers. This started under the Liberals. I understand why the Liberals will vote in favour of Bill C-50; it is becoming clear. They will have to deal with the problem if, by some misfortune, they return to power in the next few decades. The Liberals could end up dealing with the problem of returning the money they stole from workers.

I do not want to repeat what the member for Acadie—Bathurst said, but we could have done so many things with the \$54 billion to address the terrible economic crisis going on in some regions in Canada, particularly in Quebec and Ontario, in the manufacturing and forestry industries. Obviously, this does not affect Calgary very much.

The Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec tells us that if there are not enough jobs in Quebec, all a person has to do is go work in Calgary, because there are jobs there. Try saying that to someone who is 55, 56, 57, 58, who has 12 years left on his mortgage, who works in Béarn in Témiscamingue or in Clairval in Abitibi. This person would say that he spent his life working in a sawmill, that he started at 18, and that he thought he was entitled to a decent retirement.

The employment insurance fund could have helped create a program for older worker adjustment, or POWA, which the Bloc has been calling for for over four years. I have been here for four years, and I have been hearing about it for four years. Neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives are able to, want to, or have the political will to create a POWA. It would not be expensive. The Conservatives could have included it in the budget. But they put nothing in the budget about employment insurance and nothing about assistance for older workers.

• (1255)

Older workers will remember this. And so will seniors, whose situation is even worse.

The employment insurance fund has been stolen. I very much like the comment made by the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst who said that at 3 p.m. today, thanks to the Conservatives with the support of the Liberals, the \$54 billion theft will be legitimized. It is worse than the great train robbery. That is exactly what we will be doing by creating the new employment insurance financing board. That will be the end of the employment insurance fund. It will be gone, but will those who paid into it be reimbursed? No, no. That money was used to buy helicopters that barely fly, submarines that sink because they do not work very well, and rifles and guns. That money was used to invest \$1 billion a year to go to Afghanistan, even though we have no business being there. I hope everyone will remember that.

All things considered, the worst theft is still the election promise the Conservatives made to seniors. I remember it; I heard it. They promised that, if elected, they would give the guaranteed income supplement retroactively to seniors. As soon as they were elected, they reneged on that election promise.

The Conservatives could have included that measure in the budget. They had the money to do so, with their \$11 billion surplus. It would have cost less than \$1 billion to help our seniors get by. I am saying this for the benefit of everyone aged 70 and older, particularly my mother, who lost \$12,000 because of the Conservatives and their ridiculous promise. They would have been better off not to make a their stupid promise to give seniors full retroactivity on the guaranteed income supplement. Many seniors lost \$4,000, \$7,000 or even \$12,000. They were entitled to seven years of retroactivity, but they are being given only one year's worth.

Government Orders

On the other hand, when someone owes the government money, I guarantee it can go back as far as five years and demand retroactive payments. The Conservative Party in power, however, decided to grant retroactive payments for only up to 12 months. Yet the Conservatives owe seniors the money that was stolen from them. Will they pay it back? No. That is another reason why will vote against this bill.

I am the Bloc Québécois aboriginal affairs critic. I have heard some good ones in my time. I do not want to bring up the Kelowna accord, like the Liberals, who turned it into their pet issue. I just want to say that the government could have helped and had the money to help aboriginal peoples deal with the terrible crises they are up against right now. Not far from here, just 165 kilometres north of Ottawa, in the community of Kitchisakik, people are living in 18th century conditions. They do not have running water, a water system or a sewer system, and they live in hunt camps.

The government promised to fix the problem, but it did nothing for aboriginals. The government will argue that it is spending \$660 million over two years—\$330 million per year—but aboriginal communities in Quebec alone need 10,000 housing units. Nunavik and the whole far north shore have to be totally rebuilt because of the melting permafrost.

Unfortunately, I have just a minute left. I have a lot more to say about this, but what I really want to say is that the government would not even have had to put more money into its social housing budget. The funds could have come from CMHC, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, which has an astronomical surplus. The government could have invested \$1 billion from that surplus—which would not even have made a dent—to help with social housing. Yet the government has shunted that file aside and refuses to talk about it.

This government made so many promises that it did not keep.

• (1300)

At 3 p.m. this afternoon, the members of the Bloc Québécois will not be afraid. We will stand up and vote against this budget.

• (1305)

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am speaking to Bill C-50. I have already spoken to the bill in general and now I am speaking to the amendment for which the debate will end this afternoon. This budget bill generally did not satisfy the Bloc Québécois or Quebecers because it does not include any type of support for the crisis in the manufacturing and forestry sectors.

Over the past few days, we have seen that this crisis has nothing to do with the managers. In Quebec, Beauce, which is known as a region that is a major business supplier, is going through a very difficult time. Thousands of jobs have been lost, but we all know that Beauce is not to blame for this downturn. Beauce had a very strong manufacturing sector. I remember that the Standing Committee on Industry, Natural Resources, Science and Technology made 22 unanimous recommendations to the government over two years ago to help the manufacturing and forestry sectors. However, the government has decided not to carry out those recommendations.

Today, this region of Quebec, which is a jewel of Quebec entrepreneurship, is losing jobs by the thousands. Young workers and young couples whose future was secure, are seeing it all collapse. It is not just a result of nature, it is the result of significant changes in the market, including the higher dollar, for example. We could see this coming for quite some time and we would have expected the federal government to come forward with an action plan and a strategy for industry. It is not as though the government had not been informed. The Standing Committee on Industry, Natural Resources, Science and Technology made 22 unanimous recommendations, but the government only carried out one, or one and a half, of those 22 recommendations. The Standing Committee on Finance then sounded the same alarm and informed the government, which then had a motion adopted in this House on that matter. There is still no action plan in the budget. That is one of the reasons the Bloc Québécois cannot vote in favour of this budget.

At a time when the regions need additional support, the budget cuts \$107 million from the budget of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec. This is terrible. After the election, the minister responsible said that there would be the equivalent of a Marshall plan, which he now refers to as the Blackburn plan. Today, as a result, thousands of jobs are disappearing across Quebec and also across Canada, because Ontario is also being affected by the manufacturing crisis. In addition to taking a laissez-faire approach and having no industrial strategy, the government is slashing the programs and funding that have been in place for several years in these regions that could have used more assistance. I believe that this is reason enough to vote against this budget.

My colleague also spoke earlier about the whole issue of the program for older worker adjustment. This is an important social measure that provides people who have worked for a company for 25, 30 or 35 years with bridging income support until they receive their pensions, if they lose their jobs at age 57, 58 or 60. It is also a measure that should be part of an industrial strategy. This is what happens in a sector like forestry. Jobs are cut, the younger workers leave and the older workers sometimes manage to keep their jobs. Eventually, though, as the crisis continues, they also lose their jobs, but they have no income to tide them over until they receive their pensions. At the same time, the younger workers have gone elsewhere and will no longer be available when the forestry industry recovers.

In my opinion, the federal government should come out of its shell. The government thinks that the market will take care of everything and that the government has no responsibility to act. In my opinion, Quebecers and Canadians expect the government to create conditions to develop prosperity and enable everyone to create wealth and distribute it appropriately. There are dark clouds on the horizon. A major economic slowdown is on the way. This is just about the worst type of government we could have to deal with this sort of situation.

Government Orders

Unfortunately, this is perilously reminiscent of what happened just before the Great Depression in the late 1920s and early 1930s in the United States. The Republicans in power said the government should intervene as little as possible. Fortunately, the government changed at that time, and Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democrats implemented good policies to stimulate the economy.

● (1310)

We would have expected a similar attitude on the part of the government, but that is not what we are seeing. A program to help older workers would not have cost billions of dollars. Implementing such a program would have cost less than \$100 million and would have allowed hundreds and thousands of people who worked their entire lives, who supported their families, to have a sufficient, minimal income to get by until they receive their pension.

Unfortunately, as soon as I was first elected in my current riding in 2004, I saw firsthand the consequences of a major closure, when the Whirlpool plant in Montmagny closed. We are still feeling the consequences today. This does not mean that it is not a dynamic, productive region or that it is not creating any jobs. What it means, however, is that when 500 workers are laid off, 150 or 200 of whom are older workers, a large number of them will definitely not be able to find other employment, for various reasons, no matter how hard they try. This government should have done something for those people, although we are seeing no such efforts on the government's part.

For Quebec, this budget contains a very clear, distinct and unacceptable provocation: the desire, the obstinate insistence and the obsession of the current Minister of Finance to put in place a single securities commission in Canada. It seems that he is reliving his past as the Ontario Minister of Finance or perhaps he is aspiring to become the Premier of Ontario. We have demonstrated that Quebec has an efficient securities commission that has worked well and offered useful services. The Conservative minister's obsession is unacceptable.

This budget does not have what Quebec wants, what Quebecers told us they wanted in our pre-budget consultations. Beyond the words, beyond the fact that the government adopted a motion on the Quebec nation, now that the time has come to provide some substance and to indicate what that means for Quebecers, the Conservative government has given us nothing. There is nothing in this federal budget to that effect.

We would have liked to get some answers to these concerns from the federal government. For example, there is not the level of investment in the cultural sector that our society deserves. Yet this is a nation's form of expression. The Quebec nation needs federal support to continue to make itself known throughout North America, and to obtain and expand on the success it has achieved. We need tangible measures to develop this nation. They are not found in this budget.

There is also a cultural difference, at least between the Conservatives and Quebec, when it comes to the distribution of wealth. In the past, Quebec has implemented programs such as the parental leave program and the child care program. Because of the values Quebec society deems important, these programs were implemented and money was set aside to do so. The Conservatives,

however, do not take the same approach. One of the areas most affected is social housing. But they could have killed two birds with one stone. Money invested in social housing creates a need for construction, which in turn creates jobs. At the same time, it would help people get out of poverty. Often, when people are experiencing problems with poverty, it is because they are forced to spend 50%, 60% or even 70% of their income on housing. They are not left with enough money for other things.

So we can see—and I will end on this note—that there are some people who are particularly outraged at the action of the Conservatives, in particular about the budget. These people are women. Quebec women and Canadian women were stripped of an important tool to win legal cases. The Conservatives have chosen an approach more appropriate to a private company than to a government.

For all these reasons, I think that this budget is bad for Quebec and bad for Canada. We want the Conservative government to heed at least some of these messages. We shall see. Now, the Conservatives are taking advantage of the fact that the Liberals have problems within their party, but in practice, this is a bad budget. It is a bad situation, and it does not at all correspond to what Quebecers and Canadians were expecting from a minority government. The government seems to be acting as if it were a majority government. It is making choices that would not have been made by Quebec.

● (1315)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank our colleague for his speech, which was excellent as usual.

However, my colleague said that there are problems and that the Conservatives are profiting from the Liberals' internal problems. I would go even further and say that they are profiting from the Liberals, but that the Liberals do not actually have any principles. People must have principles in life, and they will have to have them this afternoon at 3 p.m.

Our colleague has sat on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities for a number of years. He has worked hard on the employment insurance file, since he hails from a region with seasonal workers. I believe that he has worked hard on that file, I will give him that. This afternoon, what will my colleague think of the fact that the Liberals will join with the Conservatives to legalize the theft of \$55 billion from the employment insurance fund? That is exactly what will happen if Bill C-50 is passed.

Does he really see a difference between these two parties that have been in power for years? Be it one or the other, the Liberals of yesterday or the Conservatives of today, does he see a difference between these two political parties with respect to workers, ordinary people and people who need the government's support? Does he see a difference between these two parties?

Government Orders

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. As I was saying earlier, one of the problems with this budget is the fact that, because of internal leadership problems, the official opposition cannot get with the program and take a clear stance.

However, my colleague is right, and this is not just about internal leadership. With respect to the employment insurance fund, it is clear that the \$54 billion surplus was misappropriated and stolen from the workers and employers who paid the premiums. The government decided to use the surplus to cover other expenses and to pay down the deficit. These people got no return on the money they had invested.

During the battle against the deficit, other people paid taxes and benefited from tax cuts later on. For example, the Conservatives have announced significant tax cuts for big corporations. But people who had paid into the employment insurance program never got any return on their investment. Instead the government tightened the screws, cut benefit weeks and increased the number of hours needed to qualify.

The government could have done something about it in this budget, because there is going to be an agency that will be something like an independent fund—we hope. However, whatever it turns out to be, it will be short the \$55 billion that was hijacked, which should be in the fund, available to be reinvested, because the existing program does not provide the benefits people need. I agree with my colleague on that point.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, does my colleague realize, as I do, that a crown corporation and an independent fund are different things?

An independent employment insurance fund still forms part of the government's general funds but it is independent and thus is not part of the consolidated revenue fund.

With his experience, the member must know that in this House we can ask questions about funds for which the government is responsible. However, with regard to crown corporations, the government will cast off its responsibility and when we rise in the House to represent our citizens, it will answer that, because it is a crown corporation like Radio-Canada/CBC, we will have to ask the crown corporation. The government will no longer answer these questions.

Is there not a danger that this will happen with a crown corporation, whereas it would not with an independent fund because the government would still be accountable?

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right. We will have to keep a close watch on this to see if the final form will be acceptable.

In my opinion, the basic mistake is that the seasonal workers from my riding and my colleague's riding and across Quebec and Canada, who have paid into the fund for years and provided a surplus of \$54 billion, will never see a cent of this money. If there is an economic downturn, if there is still someone to take responsibility and, in the end, if these workers are told that the program does not have enough funds to meet their needs, this year's Conservative budget will certainly leave a bitter taste.

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Ye.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

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

● (1320)

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Accordingly, the vote stands deferred until three o'clock today.

* * *

CANADA MARINE ACT

The House resumed from April 9 consideration of Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Canada Marine Act, the Canada Transportation Act, the Pilotage Act and other Acts in consequence, as reported, with amendment, from the committee, and of Motion No. 1.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-23. It addresses some of the valid concerns of Canada port authorities with the current conditions of the Canada Marine Act, the Canada Transportation Act and the Pilotage Act.

Port modernization is required as part of the government's new policy framework for strategic gateways and trade corridors. This is to bring Canada's ports more in line with what is happening around the world where ports are obtaining government funding for infrastructure, environmental and security initiatives. This includes long term access to federal funding for security considerations as well. This has been intended to satisfy our international trading partners' security concerns.

These goals we support. Our ports are the face we show to the world. Their development and their management should be the best in the world.

Government Orders

My criticism of the bill stems from my observations as a local councillor in a small city with a harbour authority. The bill is deficient as drafted and amended and does nothing to ensure more public accountability for the use or management of what we should remember is public property. It does nothing to ensure the sustainable development of Canadian ports and harbours.

At committee, my colleague from Windsor West presented some amendments that would have gone a long way to ensure accountability. His amendments were deemed inadmissible by the chair because they supposedly went beyond the scope of the bill. It is clear that the bill was deficient as drafted initially and this is what I would like to speak to.

Parliamentarians of this government and the former Liberal government gave the bill such a narrow scope and seemed clearly unwilling at committee or in the drafting of it to address some of the problems of accountability in dealing with the management of lands that belong to the public and that should be managed in the public interest.

I would like to give an example of what our party's critic tried to do at committee. He presented an amendment. I quote what he said:

This amendment here is intended to provide some balance, and also, hopefully, provide better relations between the port authorities in some areas where there are some difficulties. We all heard from testimony that even if you're appointed to the port authority through a municipality—it doesn't matter where, with the federal government, etc.—your loyalty is still, at the end of the day, to the port authority. What I'm hoping through this amendment is that you're going to see greater weight for people in that area.... But we heard testimony that—for anybody who is appointed there—the number one priority is to administrate the port.

In support of the argument made by my colleague, the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority includes a couple of elected representatives, a mix of groups from the tourism sector, the Victoria Chamber of Commerce, and the Victoria-Esquamalt Harbour Society, which is also largely industry representatives. Those are all fine organizations, but they do not necessarily represent public interest. Several private interests do not constitute public interest. Essentially in Victoria and across the country we have private clubs that control public properties with no accountability to the public.

Although one would think the elected officials appointed to the board would be accountable to their electors, this is not the case either. Instead, as my colleague pointed out, they must commit their loyalty to the board, not to their electors. Certainly in Victoria the board has taken on an even more corporate model.

There is an obvious problem of possible conflict of interest that might arise, but even more so, this is happening with the complicity of the federal government. Neither Conservatives nor Liberals seem to see any problems with that.

• (1325)

It was clear in reviewing the testimony at committee that agencies' interests were represented during the review of this bill, but I did not see how the interests of port communities were represented. I think it is fair to question whether the interests of port agencies always coincide with those of the community. I would say that is not the case judging from some of the examples that were identified.

Rather than dwell on the problem, I would like to propose a measure to the government that could have been added in drafting

Bill C-23 to really modernize the Canada Marine Act, the Canada Transportation Act and the Pilotage Act that would have ensured that the interests of the communities were served by port authorities and that would have ensured the accountability in the governance of what is public property, that is, what does belong to the public. The principle is what I would call a triple bottom line approach. This is a business principle that measures corporate or government performance along three lines: profit, environmental sustainability and social responsibility.

Triple bottom line considers people, planet and profit, the principle being that environmental quality and social equity are just as important as profit. In fact, the phrase "triple bottom line" was coined by John Elkington, co-founder of the business consultancy SustainAbility. He wrote *Cannibals with Forks: the Triple Bottom Line of the 21st Century Business*. Triple bottom line reporting has become increasingly popular among large companies worldwide. A KPMG survey shows 45% of 250 global companies publish a corporate report containing details of environmental and social performance.

Adding a clause in the bill requiring that all presently held federal harbour or port properties be managed or divested to port authorities on a triple bottom line basis would begin to ensure public values—

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have had some patience, but the reality is, as you know, Mr. Speaker, this debate is supposed to be on the amendment. The amendment is simply an error in the difference between the French and the English and it is on the insertion of the letter "a".

I do not know that what the member is talking about has anything to do with the amendment. I would ask that she be relevant with respect to the amendment.

We have already debated this. I know the NDP has quite a few more speakers. They want to delay this some more and waste more taxpayer money, but I would like the debate to at least be on point.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I was here yesterday when the parliamentary secretary raised the same point of order after a number of members had already spoken to the bill and had been succinct in their comments and had focused their comments on the bill. In fact the debate did go on in that manner. I think it is disingenuous to raise the same point of order today.

In fact, the member for Victoria is speaking very concretely about this bill at report stage, as she has a right to do.

I take great offence to the member's comments, saying that we are wasting taxpayers' dollars. I would ask the question, what are we here for? We are here to debate legislation, to look at it in a fulsome way, to give it the full weight of opinion. This is not about dragging something out. It is about actually looking at legislation and being allowed to debate it.

I think it is very offensive for members to be told that doing our job is wasting taxpayers' money. We are here to actually represent the public interest and to represent those constituents.

Government Orders

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that you will allow the debate to continue and the member to make her comments. I think she was doing very well in explaining her concerns that she has at report stage with this bill.

• (1330)

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, it is my clear understanding that it is within my right and in fact it is my responsibility to speak to what I think should be in a bill. That is what I was trying to address.

Perhaps my Conservative colleague objects to members presenting where they think the government is not acting in the public interest. That is what I was trying to do in my comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I will hear the hon. parliamentary secretary and then that should be sufficient.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I would agree. I do not make the rules in this place. All the parties make the rules. The reality is the rules are very clear. The rules are that in this particular debate we are supposed to be focusing on the proposed government amendment.

If the NDP members have an issue with the amendment, and with the letter “a” being inserted to make the French the same as the English, then they should deal with that. If they have an issue with the bill, they have already debated that and I would ask for a ruling on the basis of relevance of this particular line.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): To all hon. members, I know that Marleau and Montpetit has some guidelines on relevance at each stage of a particular bill and we are debating a report stage motion. I will allow the hon. member for Victoria to continue. She has only about a minute left in her remarks.

The Deputy Speaker, the chair occupant yesterday, did make a ruling on this. For the sake of consistency, I will be guided by those guidelines today. She has about a minute left. If she could stay as relevant to the motion as possible, I think all members would appreciate that.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, I hope that was not my time that was being used up by these parliamentary diversion tactics.

I felt it was very important to speak about a triple bottom line because it would ensure that public values are protected as opposed to only the interests of a specific group. The absence of this kind of accountability measure in this bill in dealing with public property makes it unsupportable. That is not surprising, as this bill is the twin of Bill C-61 tabled by the then Liberal government and we know how well the Liberals did at integrating environmental and social interests with economic ones, with a 35% increase in greenhouse gas emissions, increase in poverty, and so on.

In the long run, integrating is just good public policy. When these components are integrated, in the long run it yields energy cost savings, better quality jobs, reduced infrastructure costs, and better environment and health.

Such a provision should cover management of port and harbour properties. It would be felt in my riding where an unaccountable body will be given control of more public property. That is just unacceptable.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate hearing from the member for Victoria. As a former municipal councillor in Vancouver, it is interesting to hear from other

former municipal councillors and we will probably hear from more, because we all have experiences with dealing with local ports and the interface between the port in our community and the municipality. I know that the member for Victoria had experiences similar to what I had in the city of Vancouver.

I would just like to ask her what kinds of concerns she had to deal with in terms of representing local residents. In Vancouver East, for example, we have people who live immediately adjacent to the port. There are all kinds of issues about the interface between the port activity and a residential community. One of the problems with this bill is that those issues are not really addressed. In fact, it gives the ports greater authority to undertake unrelated port activities on port land. That is one of the concerns we have.

I wonder if the member could give us some further information on that in terms of her experience as a municipal councillor in Victoria.

• (1335)

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, indeed my criticisms of this bill stem from my experience at that time when there were conflicts that were beginning to emerge, and precisely on the issue of land use where requests for land use changes would have had impacts. The amendment my colleague was proposing would have helped to better integrate the interests of both the port authority and the community. There also was the noise pollution issue that was being passed on to the local council about activities in the port. The amendments that my colleague had proposed could have helped with this.

That is the issue I was trying to raise by asking the ports to adopt a more comprehensive reporting process to be accountable to the community in which it is situated. We all want our port authorities and our ports to succeed, but it has to be in the context of environmental and social good for the whole community.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your ruling in relation to the relevance of this. As such, my question will certainly be on point. I am wondering if the member could comment on the issue of democracy and stakeholders' interests.

In this particular case, I sat on the committee and I know she did not. I heard all of the witnesses and I know she did not. We did not have one port, one municipality, one city or one town say one negative word about this legislation. I am wondering how the member can stand here today and criticize something about which not one stakeholder said anything negative. How can she come forward with that?

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member raised the question, because in reading the committee report, everyone can see for themselves that there were only two representations by an association.

Government Orders

The question I wanted to raise, if he had not interrupted me while I was speaking, was that the port authorities, themselves agencies, were represented, but how were the community interests represented during those hearings? I think the answer is that they were not.

My colleague had asked for a study allowing the committee to go from city to city, which would have allowed the communities to speak out and express their concerns, not with the idea of stopping this, but simply to hear from them, and this did not happen during the review of the bill.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to the amendment that was tabled. Of course there have been some points raised about relevancy, and I want to start by talking about the fact that our duties as parliamentarians include paying very close attention to bills that come before the House.

I wish I could say that errors and omissions in bills are a rarity, but unfortunately in the tenure of this House we have already seen a voter identification bill with such serious flaws that the government had to introduce another bill to try to correct one error. There should have been appropriate scrutiny of that bill by all members of the House instead of the New Democrats standing alone to oppose it because we were concerned about its very deep and serious flaws.

People talk about the waste of taxpayers' money. If appropriate attention had been paid to the voter identification bill, the government would not have had to introduce a bill to fix it, which then took up House time and parliamentary time. Now there is another bill before the House for which a minor amendment has been produced.

The member for Windsor West has done extremely good work in raising some very serious concerns about this bill. The question the NDP has is whether a simple amendment of the letter "a" is sufficient to correct all the flaws in the bill. Of course we would say no, it is not.

I want to thank the member for Victoria for her very good words and I will be echoing some of them, because I too have been a municipal councillor. A number of us on the New Democrat side of the House have been municipal councillors and understand that the rubber truly does hit the road in our communities with municipal councils. I want to talk a bit about the importance of this bill to our local communities.

There is a port authority in my community, the port of Nanaimo, and it is a very important part of downtown Nanaimo. The reason New Democrats have been speaking is that we are very concerned about the ongoing health and vitality of the ports. Certainly there were some positive things in the bill, but there were a number of things that we are concerned about in terms of maintaining the vitality of those ports.

In my own city, the port of Nanaimo businesses generate 3,700 direct jobs and \$115 million in direct wages. There are in excess of a total 10,000 jobs nationwide related to the port of Nanaimo after including a multiplier—these are the induced and indirect effects—and these jobs generate \$335 million in total wages.

In British Columbia, port of Nanaimo businesses generate over \$160 million in direct gross domestic product and over \$410 million

in direct economic output. The total national economic impact of the port of Nanaimo, including indirect and induced impacts, is estimated at \$500 million in GDP and over \$1.1 billion in economic output.

Direct employment is employment that can be attributed to the operation, management and tenancy at the port of Nanaimo, including firms on site at the port and port-dependent businesses off site. Indirect employment is employment in goods and services supplier industries that result from the presence of the port of Nanaimo's direct employers.

An example of port of Nanaimo indirect employment would be the supply of machinery to value added manufacturing tenants at the port of Nanaimo. As such, indirect employment is generated in industries that supply or provide services to the port of Nanaimo businesses. This brochure I am reading from concludes by saying, "Port of Nanaimo produces jobs!"

Anybody who has ever visited my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan and this my part of my community, Nanaimo, sees a vibrant port. The port has a commercial fishing fleet. During the summertime, people come from literally the whole Pacific northwest to enjoy the activities that take place. A walkway built around the port is heavily used. Any Sunday afternoon people will see families from all over the city enjoying the very beautiful walkway.

● (1340)

That leads me to one of the points that the member for Windsor West has raised around the importance of how the boards of directors are made up at these port authorities. Port authorities have a distinct local flavour. They have a direct impact on jobs, recreation, environment and businesses. One would hope that the board of directors would ensure a linkage between the local community and the port itself.

The member for Windsor West has rightly identified some problems with the number of board members and the appointment procedure. One would hope that every effort would be made to ensure that local voices are adequately represented on these boards of directors, because that participation in the local economy and local livelihoods is important. Instead, Bill C-23 fails to address some of the concerns raised by the member for Windsor West.

Other members have raised issues around land use planning at port authorities, connections with local municipal councils or regional districts, and the broader connection to community.

The member for Victoria raised the fact that as former municipal councillors we are hoping that more municipal councils become greener. One way we are encouraging municipal councils to become greener is to look at this triple bottom line accountability that everybody is talking about: people, planet and profits, in the simplest way.

We of course want to see port authorities planning integrated into municipal planning. The city of Nanaimo and most municipalities in British Columbia have something called official community plans, OCPs. These official community plans lay out a vision for the community and are regularly reviewed. If municipalities are going to deviate from the official community plan, they often must have hearings or pass special zoning amendments.

Government Orders

When I was on the municipal council in North Cowichan, the development of the official community plan was a wide, community based consultation process. People from all over the community came together to talk about their vision for the community, whether it was with respect to recreational use, land use planning or community identification. There was a myriad of issues.

As the port of Nanaimo and the city of Nanaimo go through their community planning process, it is very important that the port be integrated into that official community planning process. Again, it is important that these plans consider the triple bottom line.

There are substantial land use planning issues around the port of Nanaimo. When the port makes a decision about land use planning, it must fall in line with how the residents of Nanaimo want their community to look. Unfortunately, when we look at appointments for boards of directors, it does not ensure that this very close linkage happens.

We have examples in other areas. The member for Trinity—Spadina has raised some issues around the Toronto Port Authority. The member for Vancouver East has raised issues around the Vancouver Port Authority and how it often goes off willy-nilly without considering the important issues the community has outlined as its future vision for that liveable community for their children and their grandchildren. Local representation is essential in terms of making sure that ports fit in with a community's vision.

In addition, the member also raised some issues around transparency. Among other things, the member for Windsor West called for the Auditor General to have the power to probe port authorities' financial practices. One would think the Conservatives would welcome this kind of oversight, because they often talk about transparency and accountability, yet when they have an opportunity to do that, they fail to follow through.

That would have been an important amendment. If we are talking about adding the letter "a", why not just stretch it to "Auditor General oversight and accountability"? Those are two very good uses for the letter "a". They would have been welcomed by the New Democrats as an improvement to the bill.

It is time for me to wrap up. Although we will be supporting the amendment on the letter "a", once we get through the amendment stage I would encourage all members to vote against the bill itself.

• (1345)

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that my friend who just spoke did not have an opportunity to review the bill or else she would have seen, of course, that there has been some consultation and that there is a requirement for consultations with communities. In fact, it goes beyond what the current bill has in place. That is indeed included within the bill, which actually goes on for some time about community involvement and how that has to be considered.

I never received an answer to my last question, which I posed to the member's colleague. We heard from those ports. Not one spoke against this bill. Not one city council, not one town, not one city, not one municipality and not one province came forward to speak against this bill. I am wondering why today the member stands in the

House with the New Democratic Party opposed to this bill when not one stakeholder came forward to speak against it at committee.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the member said, I did have an opportunity to review the bill and of course, when we are talking about community input and consultation, it is not in line with municipal authorities. So, they can consult, but they still do not have to abide by things like official community plans.

When we talk about consultation, my understanding is that there were representative groups that came before the committee, but often we need to dig much deeper than that to make sure that we have actually covered the issues that are represented in this bill. My understanding is that there are places like the city of Toronto which simply end up in court in terms of resolving issues that are before them. I would argue that the consultation at committee was not sufficient.

• (1350)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I compliment my colleague for her speech. We are talking about the amendment on the letter "a" and the critical thing is what else has been missed in this bill. What is interesting is that one of the amendments the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan mentioned was the Auditor General amendment that we had put forth. One has to wonder what the government has about accountability and why it is against it.

The bill reduces accountability by eliminating local advocates and people who are representatives on these boards. We are talking about public land. We are changing the bill to allow unfettered access to a series of different funds that municipalities will now be actually competing against, including the border gateway fund right away, and at the same time, we are removing more oversight.

What could be the motivation for the government to reduce oversight and public accountability when an amendment like this regarding the Auditor General would be a simple thing to make sure it is not intrusive to the point where there are confidentiality problems, and at the same time there is accountability from a third party for both the House and also the port authorities, and also clears up some of the controversy that appointments can sometimes create?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, it is beyond me to actually try to ascribe motives to Conservatives when they talk about accountability on one hand and yet their actions fly in the face of true accountability. This would be an example again of where if they truly were interested in being accountable to the Canadian public, they would allow the Auditor General to have oversight on the port authorities.

There is a tremendous amount of money that goes into these port authorities. Canada has the longest coastline in the world and we have a number of port authorities. One would think with that kind of money involved, that Conservatives would be willing to encourage Auditor General oversight.

We know that the Auditor General's reports are well respected. They are seen as independent and certainly removed from any monkeying around by any government, so this would be welcomed, I am sure, from the Canadian public's perspective in terms of transparency and accountability.

Statements by Members

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to this bill and particularly to speak as someone who comes from the city of Surrey which is on the wonderful Fraser River with all of the complexities and challenges it brings, including having a port authority.

When I look at the amendments that we are debating, I am very concerned about what I have seen historically and what is coming through the bill, which would be corrected by the amendment and I hope that it will be.

The people who sit on a port authority need to be representative of the community in which they serve. That is often not the case. They are often, at least in my experience, appointments from wherever. They have been people who are known but they have not always been people who are representative of the needs, in our case Surrey. There is a much better way I think to comprise a board that will understand the unique and niche needs of a particular port and the responsibilities of a particular port authority.

They may be municipal councillors, other elected people, other people in the community who come from different kinds of backgrounds, but there needs to be some kind of balance so that the cities or towns know that there is a public oversight going on. There are very few ports up and down the Pacific coast that are not under considerable construction, have considerable work going on and in our case, and considerable expansion going on. People are very interested and concerned about the direction the expansion will take.

Those decisions should be made by people who are trusted and in a process that is accountable. I wish we could find another word for transparency, perhaps ways that can be seen and understood by the public. For instance, could we explain to the next door neighbourhood the rationale by which certain land is being acquired and certain construction is underway? The city of Surrey is probably one of the most exciting cities and one of the cities that is the most lacking in infrastructure dollars from both the federal and provincial governments.

The infrastructure dollars did go in part to transportation, but the infrastructure dollars that are necessary for the work that will go on to the ports will be a competition now among port authorities and whoever else is applying for those infrastructure dollars. It will make it more difficult, I think, for cities with growing infrastructure needs to access those dollars.

There is a great deal of discussion and consideration in Surrey, in Nanaimo, and in growing communities about municipal consultation for land use. We have seen land that is used very badly where there was no consultation, no thought about what it will look like in five years, what it will mean to industry, and what it will mean to residents.

There must be that opportunity for municipal consultation. It does not mean only consulting the people on the board or saying no witnesses came to committee to put forward a statement. Many people would not have known this was going on. They had no opportunity to have input into this or to make some comments about how the land is going to be used around our ports, and in our case I am talking about Deltaport.

I want to speak now to the compliance within port authorities and municipal planning processes.

• (1355)

We worked so hard, and every growing city would say that, to have a municipal planning process that worked in partnership with other planning processes that were going on that affected that city, whether it was transportation, regional planning, or whatever that might be.

There must be a way to have real consultation between port authorities, that is, the federal government, and the municipalities. That is critical because municipalities will find themselves on the same path with their port authorities as they have with other authorities which they work with, both federally and provincially.

I see your signal, Mr. Speaker. So, on behalf of the amendment, and also on behalf of Surrey and Deltaport, and our need for infrastructure and not to compete with everybody else for all the dollars that are there, I would very much encourage people to look at this amendment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member will have four minutes after question period to conclude her remarks, but as it is now 2 o'clock, we will move on to statements by members.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from domestic organizations like the Canadian Islamic Congress to foreign tyrants like Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, no nation has fully succeeded in escaping the awful spectre of anti-Semitism.

Yesterday B'nai Brith reminded us that anti-Semitic incidents in Canada had increased more than fourfold since 1998. In its annual audit on anti-Semitic activities for 2007, there were 1,042 incidents, mostly vandalism and harassment, but 28 involving violence.

Our government has taken a leadership position in standing up against anti-Semitism. Unlike the previous Liberal government, we withdrew from the racist Durban process and denied funding to Canadian organizations hoping to attend Durban at taxpayer expense. Our government is seeking full membership in the Holocaust Task Force.

The Prime Minister's recent visit to Auschwitz reminds us that Canada must take a stand against anti-Semitism. As the Prime Minister wrote in the Book of Memory:

We are witness here to the vestiges of unspeakable cruelty, horror and death. Let us never forget these things and work always to prevent their repetition.

• (1400)

GOVERNMENT FLYERS

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add my voice to those who are fed up with this government's disregard for the rules that we have all agreed to live by.

As we all know, MPs are allowed to mail a given flyer at taxpayer expense to no more than 10% of their constituents. Yet the government is deliberately breaking this rule by forcing Canada Post to send their flyers out to 100% of constituents, increasing costs to taxpayers tenfold.

I will not comment on the juvenile nature of the flyers because we cannot legislate against bad taste. However, I will pass along the feedback I have received from my constituents, primarily self-proclaimed Conservatives, I might add, who are disgusted with the sleazy, misleading nature of these attack ads. They become even more outraged when they are told these flyers have been sent illegally and at their expense.

Government members may think they are above the law, but Canadians certainly know they are not.

* * *

[Translation]

SENIORS' RESIDENCE

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, a seniors' residence in my riding burned to the ground. Some 30 residents had to be evacuated. Unfortunately, one resident died in the fire.

Several people responded to the fire at Pavillon Campeau, including the brave owner, Alain Campeau, who rescued a number of residents from the flames, and who is currently recovering from his injuries at the Centre hospitalier de Mont-Laurier.

I would like to acknowledge the courage and determination of the firefighting teams of Mont-Laurier and Lac-des-Écorces. They gave it everything they had.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to offer my sincerest condolences to the Plante family as they mourn their loss.

* * *

[English]

LABOUR VOLUNTEER ACTIVISTS AWARDS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to send my congratulations to the Hamilton and District Labour Council for hosting the upcoming third annual Labour Volunteer Activists Awards. On April 19, the labour council will formally honour the contributions that union members make daily to the well-being of our city of Hamilton.

Members of unions not only work for their local union on a volunteer basis, but often contribute many volunteer hours across the spectrum of services and agencies, such as the United Way, retiree clubs, senior centres and the list goes on.

Labour activist volunteers make a huge difference in our community. They are involved with many issues and initiatives,

Statements by Members

the environment, health and safety related activities, cultural events, human rights and peace initiatives, women's issues and other social service based events. Union members commit their time, as all volunteers do, for the satisfaction of improving our community.

I commend the officers and delegates of the Hamilton and District Labour Council for giving recognition to their members who are so deserving of our respect and appreciation.

* * *

ARTHUR ROYAL BROWN

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, April 21 marks the 90th anniversary of the most famous aerial combat of all time, in which the Canadian pilot, Captain Arthur Royal Brown, shot down Manfred von Richthofen, Germany's illustrious Red Baron. By this act, Brown saved the lives of countless allied pilots and brought to an end the career of the deadliest flying ace of the war.

In some ways, Brown and Richthofen were each other's mirrors, handsome, intelligent, athletic and natural leaders. So it was inevitable that this dogfight, which lasted only a moment, would become the stuff of legend, a metaphor for the nobility of aviators of all nations and of the tragedy of war.

However, this legend crowded every other aspect of Roy Brown's remarkable life from the public eye. There is time today to mention only one of his accomplishments. Unlike virtually every other RAF flight commander, Brown never lost a pilot under his command. Indeed, his decisive combat with Richthofen took place because Brown was diving to the defence of another Canadian pilot.

Brave, understated and thoughtful, Roy Brown was the very model of a Canadian hero.

* * *

ORDER OF CANADA

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Sister Margaret Smith on her upcoming induction into the Order of Canada.

Through her dedication, compassion and superior skills, Sister Margaret forever changed and enhanced the delivery of health care and social services in northern Ontario. Serving as a nurse, as an executive director and a coordinator of hospitals, Sister Margaret led outstanding innovative nursing programs, hospital programs and health care organizations.

One of her most outstanding accomplishments was the special medical unit, later renamed the Sister Margaret Smith Centre. This centre for mental health and addiction soon became a model for both the province and the nation, and has helped a multitude of men and women overcome great challenges.

On behalf of the people of Nipissing—Timiskaming, I would like to congratulate Sister Margaret Smith on her induction into the Order of Canada and thank her for her outstanding work and contribution to health care in Canada.

Statements by Members

●(1405)

JOHN MACGREGOR

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week we mark the anniversary of a pivotal event in Canadian history, the Battle of Vimy Ridge during the first world war.

Today we remember a highly decorated hero from that war, Captain John MacGregor of Powell River, British Columbia. Captain MacGregor received the Commonwealth's highest honour for his bravery during the war, the Victoria Cross. From September 29 to October 3 in 1918 near Cambrai, France, he proved his courage and tenacity although wounded. Single-handed he put the enemy crews out of action. His heroism will be recalled at a simple but poignant ceremony in Cranberry Cemetery in Powell River, where a new grave marker will be dedicated at his final resting place.

As we prepare to mark the 90th anniversary of the end of the first world war, let us pledge to never forget those who served their country when we needed them most. Let us be forever grateful.

* * *

[Translation]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 27, 2007, the House passed Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. This bill, for one, required airlines to provide details about pricing when tickets are sold.

Amendments from the Senate, supported by the Conservatives and the Liberals, who gave in to pressure from airline industry lobbyists, removed this requirement. The Bloc Québécois was opposed to these amendments, believing that they went against the collective good. One year later, airline companies continue to hide fees from consumers. This is unacceptable.

As it stands, there is no law or regulation requiring airline companies to publicly declare all of the fees included in ticket prices, unlike travel agents and wholesalers in Quebec and Ontario. The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities must step in immediately and require that airlines publicize all of the fees included in tickets sold to passengers.

* * *

[English]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no policies, no vision, no leadership: When future generations of Canadians look back and review the Liberal Party of Canada's new political manual, I wonder what they will think.

The new manual is called "Inactivism 101". It is available bound and flip-flopped, back to back with another new manual, "Smear 101". Some of its key features include points on speaking loudly and carrying an imaginary stick, bringing a bag of dirt to every party and spreading it around liberally, and, of course, the now popularized "Backing Down and Loving It".

It begins with a preface that says, "At all costs hold on to your seat". From environment, to the economy, to immigration, the manual goes on at great length about many topics, without including those hard to make priorities, and it does not mean any of what it says.

Like some other foolish book published in Canada recently, I do not think it will be long before this new political manual is remaindered.

* * *

DARFUR

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this Sunday Canadians will come together in Toronto for the 5th Day for Darfur, an event that seeks to shine a light on the humanitarian crisis facing the people of the Sudan.

It is impossible for us as members of Parliament to turn a blind eye to the horrors that have engulfed this region of the world. Women live in constant fear of rape and assault, refugees lack basic security and human necessities and civilians continue to be targeted and killed.

Members of the Liberal caucus will stand in solidarity with those who gather this Sunday, and we will continue to push the government to act in Darfur.

Our country must be a strong and persistent voice for those who continue to suffer this tragedy, and we will keep faith with the legacy of former Prime Minister Lester Pearson for a safe and peaceful world.

* * *

FILM INDUSTRY

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some wealthy elites are angry about Bill C-10, which the House passed unanimously. The bill respects freedom of expression and ensures that taxpayers are not forced to pay for purposeless pornographic or ultra-violent films. Such films will continue to be permitted under the law, just not paid for by the public purse.

Today, Sarah Polley, who calls herself a socialist, indicates that she and others in her industry should have the right to spend taxpayer money on whatever they want. Ms. Polley has the right to her socialist views. In fact, she has the right to make any kind of film she wants.

Working taxpaying families only ask that she remember that they are the ones paying her bills. After all, one person's freedom of expression does not entitle him or her to reach into the pocket of another.

* * *

●(1410)

VAISAKHI

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker,

Statements by Members

Vahiguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Vahiguru Ji Ki Fateh.

Right across Canada today celebrations are under way for Vaisakhi, the most important day in the Sikh faith. It marks the founding of Khalsa and the birth of Sikhism, which holds the values of cooperation, justice, equality and freedom as central to human dignity.

Today is also the second anniversary of the House giving unanimous support to my motion formally recognizing the importance of Vaisakhi and the five Ks of Sikhism. Through this motion we acknowledge the contribution of the almost half a million Sikhs in our country and express our gratitude for the vibrancy that the Sikh faith brings to our multicultural mosaic.

The best way we can mark this special day is to stand up for an open and objective immigration system and to speak and vote against the Conservative plans for cherry-picking immigrants and limiting newcomers.

For the Gurdwaras in my constituency, the Sikh Society of Manitoba, Gurdwara Kalgidhar Darbar and Singh Sabha and to Canadian Sikhs everywhere, Happy Vaisakhi and *Lakh Lakh Vadhai, Sat Sri Akal.*

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SEALING INDUSTRY

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the seal hunt has been an important industry and part of the way of life for the people of the Arctic, Labrador, Newfoundland and the Gulf of St. Lawrence for centuries. It sustains aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities, both economically and culturally, and provides income at a critical time of year for fishing families.

The seal hunt is a legal and sustainable use of a natural resource, no different from any other legal and sustainable hunt or fishery.

There are those who use the seal hunt for political gain. That includes radical fringe groups that exploit the issue to raise the money they need to sustain their globe-trotting lifestyles. Sadly, that includes the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans who has played into the hands of the radicals by politicizing the hunt itself. He shows his supposed support for the seal hunt with press releases and media appearances, instead of rallying broad political and interest based support.

I support the sealers in my riding and the sealing industry throughout Canada, by joining members of my family in heading to the ice and participating—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the April 8 meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, witnesses provided a long list of Canadian companies operating in Burma and making money for the military junta.

These companies get a lot of support from the Canada Pension Plan. Tens of millions of dollars have been invested in these companies. The Bloc Québécois is against that. Unfortunately, even though the government has imposed sanctions against imports from and exports to Burma, it is encouraging the military junta through its investments.

Once again, the Conservative government is showing that its actions are not in line with its own policies. Despite the fact that we have repeatedly spoken out about this, nothing has changed: the Burmese junta is still being financed by Canadian funds.

* * *

MICHEL BASTARACHE

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we learned yesterday that Michel Bastarache, a justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, has decided to take a well-deserved retirement after a long and prolific career.

In 1994, while a professor of law at the Université de Moncton, Mr. Bastarache was appointed to the New Brunswick Court of Appeal. In 1997, he was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada, where he is well known for his hard work and productive contribution.

An expert in administrative law, labour law and constitutional law, he is especially well known for his defence of linguistic minority rights. Justice Bastarache drafted the Beaulac decision, for instance, which confirmed the right to a trial before a judge or jury in the official language of one's choice.

With his retirement, Canada is losing an excellent judge and ardent defender of linguistic minorities. We wish Michel Bastarache a wonderful retirement in Acadie.

* * *

● (1415)
[*English*]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Liberals for their support of our immigration proposals. I know they said that they were adamantly against the bill, but that was before they voted for the bill. This is consistent with their pattern over the past couple of years where they criticize our government, but when it comes time to vote on the important issues that matter most to Canadians, they continue to support our government.

The Liberals have helped us pass three budgets, two extensions to the Afghan mission, our crime package, our environment plans and just last night they supported our immigration reforms.

The action, or rather inaction by the Liberals, makes it clear that they have no leadership, no policy and no vision for the future of our great country, and Canadians are not fooled by their desperate attempt to smear the government with imaginary scandals.

On behalf of my constituents, I thank the Liberal Party for sitting down so we can stand up for Canada.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***AEROSPACE INDUSTRY**

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, now that the government has shown good sense and apparently adopted our party's position on RADARSAT-2, it must turn its attention to the next issue: cleaning up the mess it has created at Canada's space agency. The previous head of the CSA lasted only a few months. The agency has now gone without a permanent president since the beginning of the year.

When will the government appoint a full time, permanent president of the CSA so that Canada's space industry can recover from the government's neglect of our space program?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am amused to hear the Liberal Party's support for the actions the Minister of Industry has taken when the party opposite, in 13 years, never turned down a single foreign takeover in this country.

The Minister of Industry is acting within his legal obligations. I do want to comment that, from the Alouette I, to the astronaut program, to Canadarm, this country has had a record of excellence in this sector. No one should doubt the determination of the minister or this government to protect this country's interests.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not enough to simply block the sale of RADARSAT-2. This government has to make a commitment to invest in Canada's space industry.

Engineers and workers in this sector are unanimous in asking what the government's strategy is for Canadian leadership in space. Will the government leave Canadian companies to fend for themselves?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I should point out that the Liberal Party refused to turn down a single foreign takeover in 13 years in power.

This country has a record of excellence in this sector. As I just said, no one should doubt the determination of the Minister of Industry to meet his obligations or the determination of this government to protect Canada's economy and sovereignty.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, jobs in this sector will not be preserved if there is no investment strategy for the Canadian Space Agency. The Prime Minister did not give a clear answer to the question. This government needs to put aside its ideology and make the necessary investment in the industry.

[English]

Will the government put aside its ideology and help protect our sovereignty with a strategy of increased investment in Canada's space industry?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this lost confidence in part of the country is in the Liberals. It has nothing to do with the Canadian Space Agency.

Remarkable things are going on with Canadians in space: Canadarm1 and Canadarm2; Dextre, which was just launched on

the space shuttle; RADARSAT-1 and RADARSAT-2; the James Webb telescope; and a weather station on Mars will have Canadian lidar technology. All of this is going on, along with remarkable Canadians like Julie Payette and Bob Thirsk.

I would ask my hon. friend to get behind the Canadian Space Agency and support what we are doing in this country.

● (1420)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, MDA said that it was selling RADARSAT-2 and its space division because the only way it could get U.S. space agency business was to become a U.S. firm.

Will this government finally stand up to the Americans and fight to gain U.S. ITAR and security law exemptions for Canada's space and defence industry?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely remarkable that my friend is worried. We have only been dealing with this issue for some 30 days.

The essential preoccupation, as the Prime Minister pointed out, should be the fact that the member is associated with a party that in the course of 13 years in government never once stood up for Canadian interests and turned down close to 1,500 foreign investment applications over the duration of the Investment Canada Act. That should be his worry.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that minister did not answer the question because his government has done nothing to stand up for Canadian interests against the Bush White House.

Canada is a defence, security and trade partner with the U.S. We are a large purchaser of American military equipment. The U.K. and Australian governments have successfully negotiated U.S. ITAR and security law exemptions for their companies.

When will the Canadian government do the same and stand up for Canada's space industry, or will it continue to sit back and leave Canadian jobs and Canadian companies in jeopardy?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is a Canadian in any doubt today about who is standing up for Canadian interests in space. For sure, it is not the Liberal Party when its members stand in the House and disparage what we have accomplished, whether it is with Canadarm, with Dextre, with RADARSAT-2 or with the accomplishments of our astronauts in space who will go up on the next space shuttle.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a serious food crisis is currently ravaging parts of Africa, Southeast Asia and Haiti. Mostly because of the rising price of oil, the price of grains such as rice and corn is rising astronomically, which is causing violent protests in some areas. The situation is so alarming that the British Prime Minister is asking the members of the G-8 to focus on the issue at their next meeting.

Following the example of his British counterpart, will the Prime Minister take concrete action and increase his contribution to the UN food aid program?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are a number of reasons for the increase in the price of food products around the world. As the second largest contributor to the world food program, Canada is providing critical assistance to meet those needs.

I know the Minister of International Cooperation is currently in discussion with her counterparts around the world to address these issues.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the famine in Ethiopia in the late 1980s, the Conservative government of the day played a leading role. The current food crisis needs the same level of commitment.

What is the Prime Minister waiting for to introduce a plan to allocate 0.7% of the GDP to international aid, given that the government currently allocates only 0.3%?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has indicated, we are responding to the crisis and, as he said, we are the second largest donor. Last year we were the third largest donor.

Regarding this crisis, I brought this issue to the table at the recent G-8 meeting in Tokyo. There will be further discussions regarding Haiti specifically. I will be meeting with my counterpart, the minister from Haiti, this afternoon.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the past few days have served as an example of the threats to humanity if the world insists on developing biofuels to the detriment of basic food production. These food riots are a direct consequence of bad economic choices that have pushed food prices to record highs.

Does the government realize that its approach, which focuses on the oil industry, is contributing to the imbalance we are currently witnessing?

• (1425)

[English]

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a number of factors affect this type of situation. Our subsidization of a beginning biofuels industry in Canada has had very little effect on the foodstuffs here. We do have the innovation and the market

capacity to feed both the food and the fuel line. It is absolutely in the best interests of Canadian producers and we will continue along those lines.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government must see in this catastrophe—because that is what it is—an opportunity to remedy the situation and devote 0.7% of its GDP to development aid, as the United Nations recommends. If we want to stop a disaster waiting to happen, then we have to have a comprehensive policy not only on the economy, but also on international aid.

Can the government finally commit to achieving this objective?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has always stepped up to the plate when there has been a great need internationally regarding humanitarian issues. We have set impressive targets. We have committed to doubling our aid. We have committed to doubling our aid to Africa. In fact, we will be one of the first countries to meet that target this year.

We will always not only make promises, but fulfill those promises and those commitments we have made. We are well on our way to doing that and we will respond as expeditiously as we have in the past regarding this crisis.

* * *

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, allow me, first, to congratulate the Prime Minister and the Minister of Industry for exercising the government's authority, as we and others have urged, and rejecting the takeover of RADARSAT by an American firm.

Now the hard work starts because we must ensure that the highly paid and important jobs in this globally competitive industry are not only protected, but that we see serious development and investment. The federal government will need to end the years of underfunding, under-investment and lack of strategy that we have seen in our space sector.

Will the Prime Minister commit to funding the next generation of space radar technologies that can put us and keep us on the leading edge?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me assure the leader of the NDP and all members of the House that in this and all related matters, the government will carefully follow the legal prescriptions and the requirements of the Investment Canada Act in pursuing this and other decisions.

I can also assure the hon. member that we have had a very successful space sector in this country and the government is committed to that sector being viable and successful in the future.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we hope the government will not change its mind, but we have to give it credit for listening to the NDP and others and for refusing to allow the Americans to take control of RADARSAT. However, that is not enough. The government has to go even further and stop repeating the negligence and laissez-faire that we saw in the previous government for so many years.

When will we see a real industrial strategy for the aerospace sector in order to keep good jobs in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister and the government are exercising their legal responsibilities under the Investment Canada Act.

As far as the aerospace sector is concerned, Canadians are proud of it. This government is determined to do what it takes to ensure the success of this sector, which is so important to the economy and to Canadian sovereignty in the long term.

* * *

● (1430)

[English]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when members of this House passed a motion that both changes and extends our mission in Afghanistan until 2011, Canadians benefited, especially the men and women serving on behalf of Canada in Afghanistan.

However, the government seems to think that it received a blank cheque. Well, it simply has not.

Could the Minister of National Defence tell this House exactly what changes are being made in our mission in Afghanistan to reflect, not the will of the Conservative government, but the will of Parliament?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the shifting of sand under the feet of the Liberal member opposite again. Clearly, the mandate that was given from this Parliament speaks to the need to put focus on the rebuilding of Afghanistan and the humanitarian aid effort, all under the umbrella of security. That is what is taking place in Afghanistan.

I could not agree more with her assessment that there is great credit due to the men and women in uniform, as well as the diplomats and the civilian workers who are there doing incredible work on behalf of our country. I thank her for her support in this regard.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, fundamental in the motion that was passed by this House of Commons was greater accountability and greater transparency to this House and to Canadians about our mission in Afghanistan.

Now that the minister has had a chance to talk to his NATO colleagues in Bucharest, could he tell us straight out what was discussed at those meetings? Could he tell us what changes are being

made to refocus this mission on development and reconstruction? Explicitly, what will change in our mission after February 2009?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the things that will happen in keeping with the recommendations of the Manley report is that they will have more equipment. They will have greater ability to detect IEDs on the road so that they can continue to build more roads.

I do want to thank the hon. member and her party for her support. I also want to quote Senator Kenny, who said that in his third visit he saw a huge improvement at this time. He said:

We saw a great deal more cooperation in terms of the all-Canada effort. We saw people from CIDA work together with people from Foreign Affairs and with the military. We saw Canadian women who were visiting prisons to assist them. We saw a whole range of services, including the RCMP, providing assistance. And we were impressed with the level of cooperation and the Canadian effort there—

The Speaker: The hon. member for St. Paul's.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for days the Minister of National Defence has evaded a simple question. Did he or did he not inform NATO of Parliament's decision that the nature of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan will change to one of development?

I would appreciate if the minister could honour this House in a one word answer, did he tell them, yes or no?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member followed the issue, she would know the answer to that question.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians cannot understand why he will not answer the question. I will give the minister one more chance.

Can he tell the House and all Canadians whether he specifically informed NATO that in 2009 the mission in Afghanistan will change? We need a one word answer from the minister, yes or no?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not how question period works. She does not get to tell me the answers that I give, but she would know, even before we went to Bucharest, our NATO allies were aware.

* * *

[Translation]

WORLD FOOD SITUATION

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Jean Ziegler, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, has criticized the extensive use of corn and grains to produce biofuels, which is raising the price of these basic foods and exacerbating the international food crisis.

Will the government remedy the situation and commit to taking a sustainable development approach by promoting biofuels made from things other than crops, such as cellulosic ethanol?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, Canada will respond to the food crisis and we will do it in an effective and focused manner.

There are many causes for the crisis and the impacts it is particularly having on developing countries. Not only is it the biofuel usage, but it is lower crops because of changes in the weather, drought, extreme winters, et cetera. The weather is having an effect.

The efforts we have been making in agriculture have not realized their full potential yet.

● (1435)

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one way to fight food insecurity is to reduce dependence on gas and to create substitutes using agricultural, plant and forestry waste. This would be a great opportunity for the Quebec forestry industry.

Does the government understand that it is favouring gas at the expense of food, the environment and Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in our budget our commitment is very clear. With respect to biofuel we committed \$2 billion, but \$500 million of that is to develop the next generation of cellulosic ethanol, from things like waste from the forest and the pine beetle wood that is out in British Columbia.

We are investing heavily in this technology and we are moving forward.

* * *

[Translation]

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning, the media suggested that the Minister of Industry would prevent the sale of the space division of MDA, including the RADARSAT-2 satellite, to ATK. Yet according to the same media sources and ATK, discussions are continuing.

Can the minister tell us which version of events is the correct one?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I made the decision on Tuesday to reject the proposed transaction. In my opinion, this transaction would not be of net benefit to Canada. I also noted that this letter was sent under subsection 23(1). It was a preliminary notice.

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are glad that the minister is backtracking.

Can he tell us when he will send this decision in writing to the representatives of the companies concerned and what steps he will take to boost remote sensing here?

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have done precisely what was required under the Investment Canada Act, which was to provide a notification to ATK.

Looking beyond that, this government, as the Prime Minister has noted, is committed to our sovereignty, committed to a radar program, committed to what we have been able to achieve in this country in space.

I would point out that whether one speaks about the accomplishments of our country with respect to Canadarm, the recent launching of Dextre, the Canadian technology incorporated in the Mars lander, or RADARSAT-2, we have done remarkable things in space that this country can be very proud of.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in light of what is happening in the other place with regard to Bill C-10, it is understandable that the only allies of the blacklist minister are her friends from the religious right. The entire industry has rejected outright her plan to become the Canadian champion of censorship across the board.

I have learned from various sources that the office of the blacklist minister is exerting undue pressure on the industry by making any significant funding through the Canadian Television Fund dependent on it showing the expected and desired support for Bill C-10. Why?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we know and as we saw in the media, particularly yesterday's *La Presse*, the member for Bourassa certainly has an imagination. He has imagined comments and meetings that allegedly took place or even threats purported to have been made by my office. This must stem from seeing UFOs when he was younger.

In 2001, a discussion paper was circulated by the former Liberal government for discussion with the cultural industry. More than thirty—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bourassa.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think I hear an extraterrestrial.

[English]

This is a very serious question that came from very serious sources. The question is simple. I want to know if the minister of censorship, through her office or department, is threatening the industry. Is the minister's staff privately telling arts groups that she will withhold funding from the Canadian television fund if they do not support her back door attempt to give herself the power to decide what is art?

● (1440)

[Translation]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bourassa knows very well that it is impolite to refer to someone by a title other than the proper one.

Oral Questions

[English]

This can lead to all kinds of disorder in the House. The hon. member said “the minister of censorship”. I have never heard of this title and I do not see it on the list of the ministry which I have at my right hand.

The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage has the floor, but we will, I hope, refrain from such conduct. This is the second time this week we have had this problem.

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, naturally I appreciate your correction. I dare not, as a minister on this side of the House, point to the opposition critic with another finger, for example.

That said, I will reiterate that I have a document here that was sent to more than thirty groups in 2001 and in which all the provisions contained in Bill C-10 appear with exactly the same wording.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, given the Cadman family's words and the Prime Minister's words, how can all this be explained credibly and plausibly?

It may be that Mr. Cadman was in a bind. He had this big life insurance policy if he stayed on as an MP, but if there was an election and he did not run, or ran and lost, it was gone and he had his family to think about.

It may be that the Prime Minister and his representatives came to persuade themselves the parliamentary insurance policy itself was the real inducement, that in their minds they were just fighting a wrong, to allow Mr. Cadman to vote any way he wanted.

I ask the Prime Minister, is this what happened?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course if the Liberals believed their own accusations, they would be voting to defeat the government.

I have an email that I would like to read:

My name is Scott and I live on Heritage Mountain [in Port Moody]. We have never met, but I wanted to contact you to let you know that this year, my accountant tells me, my wife and I are going to pay \$1,890 less in taxes this year compared to last year due to pension splitting and some of the tax reductions that have come into effect in Ottawa. We will put the money to good use this summer when we visit our grandkids back East.

I would like to thank the member for York Centre for helping my constituent with his financial considerations.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister talked of conversations he and his representatives had with Mr. Cadman. It may be that over time, in their minds, they decided they were not really talking about an offer, even though that is not what Mr. Cadman told his family, but more an understanding,

something they put on the table for Mr. Cadman so no matter which way he voted, he would have what was rightfully his.

The problem is, no matter how generous the explanation we come up with, it still adds up to an inducement to vote in a way that would bring down a government.

I ask the Prime Minister to just stand, just explain why not.

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said time and again, the accusations by the Liberals on this file are completely false. If the member for York Centre really believes in his accusations, in about 15 or 20 minutes we will have the opportunity to vote in this House. The question will be whether the member for York Centre will walk his talk and vote in this House and defeat this government, or whether he will do what he has become accustomed to do, which is do what the Liberal coach has done, which is pull his goalie and sit him on the bench.

* * *

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that the Liberals across the way now complain about a file and an industry they completely mismanaged is the epitome of hypocrisy.

Today we have heard that based on the current information the Minister of Industry has decided that the sale of MDA is not in the best interests of Canadians. While the space cadets across the way worry only about getting back to power, the Minister of Industry is worried about the Canadian space industry.

Could the minister tell us what he has done and is about to do for the industry in Canada?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker I could not comment on the specifics of the Investment Canada application, but let me say, as is known to everyone in this House, Canada has always been a leader in space. From Alouette I in 1962 to Anik I in 1972, to the accomplishments of our astronauts Steve MacLean, Julie Payette and Bob Thirsk, we have stood up in space and we have stood up in defence of Canadian sovereignty.

Let me say that this government and the Prime Minister ran on a platform to stand up for Canada, and that is what they will do in every decision.

Oral Questions

●(1445)

DRUGS AND PHARMACEUTICALS

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' so-called consumer protection law will legislate advertising loopholes and open the door to a flood of direct to consumer drug advertising. The specific provisions preventing big pharma from advertising directly to consumers have been deleted and replaced with a single, ineffective line handing the minister the power to allow drug costs and drug ads.

Could the minister confirm that this legislation strips Parliament of the power to legislate drug ads and places the decision directly into the hands of cabinet?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I honestly do not know what the hon. member is referring to. There is no policy in this government to start allowing drug companies to advertise directly to consumers. That has never been the policy of the government. I understand the matter is before the courts, so I will end my comments at this point.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first we see the concentration of power with respect to immigration and now we see it with respect to prescription drugs. There are three specific sections that have been deleted from the legislation that would have prevented drug ads. In fact, it opens the door to direct to consumer advertising.

We know from the experience in the United States that this measure will further drive up medication costs for patients, employers, and provincial drug plans. Instead of going in the wrong direction with direct to consumer advertising that forces drug costs up for working families, why will the government not bring in measures that will drive prices down?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government, as I said, has never been in favour of direct to consumer advertising. It is a myth that is being perpetuated today by the NDP. This is its typical modus operandi. It is its system to create an unfounded allegation to scare Canadians and to scare patients.

If it spent as much time voting for our budgets that help the health and welfare of Canadians, this country would be better, but thank goodness that we are in power rather than the NDP because we are protecting the health and safety of Canadians.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, fairness demands that aboriginal children are funded at the same level as all Canadian children when it comes to education. Statistics show that aboriginal children receive less funding per capita than non-aboriginal children.

The government has not taken any action. Are there two standards? Are there As and Bs here?

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

Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are spending about \$1.7 billion on aboriginal education this year and another \$300 million on post-secondary education.

Apparently there has been a sighting of the member for LaSalle—Émard. Apparently he came to the Hill to talk about aboriginal issues. However, the important thing is he could have been here to actually vote for aboriginal issues because we continue to put more money into housing, education, and fixing water systems, but one actually has to be here to vote for that stuff.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that kind of answer shows why there is going to be a day of action next month.

The minister removed capital funding from the crumbling on reserve school system. He cancelled funding for the First Nations Technical Institute and he has indefinitely deferred the building of new schools.

Why, again, are there two standards? Again, why are there As and why are there Bs?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there may well be a day of action, but I doubt it is going to be from the Liberals on the other side of the House.

In my community there is a famous road paved with press releases. Many of them came from the member for LaSalle—Émard's office. Did the Kelowna accord deal with the specific claims mess? No. Did it deal with economic development? No. Did it have hundreds of millions of dollars for both on and off reserve housing? No. Did it contain the Indian residential schools settlement? No. Did it do anything for a treaty conference? No.

Former minister Bob Nault said that the Kelowna deal just did not get it done for first nations. We are.

* * *

●(1450)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the immigration minister claimed that her government does not allow candidates to skirt testing requirements.

How about Raminder Gill, the two-time Conservative candidate that the government allowed to circumvent the screening requirements in order to sit as a citizenship judge?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hate to remind the hon. member but yesterday we were talking about the Immigration and Refugee Board. He needs to get his story straight, but he has a problem doing that. It is like yesterday when Liberals were so adamantly against our immigration reforms, but that was before he stood up last night and voted for it.

Oral Questions

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the immigration minister claimed that her government does not allow candidates to skirt testing requirements.

How about Raminder Gill, the two-time Conservative candidate that the government allowed to circumvent the screening requirements in order to sit as a citizenship judge? We want an answer.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we took over as government from the Liberals, we made the amazing discovery that 25% of the candidates that were put forward by the Liberals and appointed to the Immigration and Refugee Board had not passed the entry test.

That was not acceptable, so we overhauled the system. We brought in independent judges. We set up a new system that is transparent, that is accountable, and that requires the candidates to pass the test.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a study came out showing that Canada is one of the worst countries in the world when it comes to enforcing its child sex tourism law. According to the study, for lack of evidence, only 146 people were charged with assault against children in foreign countries between 1993 and 1997. Donald Bakker was the only person convicted since 1997 on 10 counts of sexual assault against young girls in Cambodia.

Can the Minister of Justice tell us what he plans to do to rid the world of this scourge?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to sex tourism, I can tell the hon. member that there are laws in place and have been in place in this country for quite some time that apply to this.

However, quite apart from that, we have taken a huge step forward with the Tackling Violent Crime Act. For the first time we have protected 14 and 15-year-old Canadian boys and girls from adult sexual predators, some of whom come from outside this country. We should all be thankful for that.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): That was not my question, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about sex tourism abroad.

Given that Canada has to rely on foreign governments to assemble the evidence needed to support charges, can the Minister of Justice tell us what he plans to do to improve coordination with foreign institutions to clamp down on Canadian sex tourists?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know law enforcement authorities in this country take this issue very seriously.

The hon. member wants more things done. Why did she not do more to get Bill C-2 passed, the Tackling Violent Crime Act, that was going to protect 14 and 15-year-olds for the first time in 130 years in this country? Why did we not get more help from the Bloc Québécois?

* * *

[Translation]

DRINKING WATER

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* states that as of March 31, 1,800 communities could not count on the quality of their drinking water, because they were under boil water advisories.

Since the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Health and the Minister of the Environment were provincial ministers during the Walkerton tragedy, how can we count on these Conservatives to take the necessary measures to ensure that all Canadians have access to safe drinking water?

• (1455)

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians can look at the record of this government where we are making major investments to help clean up our Great Lakes. We are banning phosphates in consumer cleaning products. We are helping to clean up Lake Simcoe and Lake Winnipeg.

We are also doing something remarkable for the first time in Canadian history, we are banning the dumping of raw sewage into our lakes, rivers and oceans. Leading the charge against that is the Liberal MP who sits directly behind this member. Leading the charge against this is the Liberal MP for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

The government is taking aggressive action on clean water. We are going to continue to do that.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after more than 10 years as a justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, Justice Michel Bastarache announced yesterday that he will step down from the high court. Throughout his career Justice Bastarache distinguished himself as a skilled lawyer, legal educator and appellate judge.

Would the Minister of Justice comment on his plans to fill the vacancy created by this departure from the Supreme Court?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to personally thank Mr. Justice Bastarache for his contributions to the Supreme Court and his service to Canada.

The government will now begin the process of filling the vacancy on the Supreme Court. We will consult broadly and the process will be open and transparent. The Supreme Court and Canadians deserve no less.

*Oral Questions***CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, family reunification is the most successful part of our immigration system. Immigrants who join family here integrate faster, are happier, and contribute more to society and the economy.

Conservatives, with Liberal support, are downgrading family reunification to instead emphasize temporary foreign workers. Now the minister even wants the power to ignore legitimate applicants.

Why are the Conservatives doing irreversible damage to the promise made to immigrants that they can reunite their families in Canada?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the whole objective of this exercise is to get more immigrants here and get them here sooner, whether that is getting families reunited faster or skilled workers that work sooner.

What we are doing is trying to fix a very broken, messy system that the Liberals left by bringing in transparency and providing flexibility in the authority for the minister and the government to manage the backlog.

I would like to read a brief quote, “The opposition Liberals’ and the NDP’s whisper campaigns...are just that — smear tactics aimed at frightening new Canadians”. They should be ashamed.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, decades of demands by new Canadians have been ignored. Canada invites foreign doctors, nurses and teachers to come to Canada because of their skills. When new Canadians get here, they cannot use their education to benefit Canada or their families. The result is that Canada has some of the best educated taxi drivers in the world. Adding insult to injury, the Conservatives, with the support of the Liberals, want the power to prevent immigration applications.

Why are the Conservatives doing irreversible damage to the promise made to immigrants that they can reunite their families in Canada?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the real question here is, why do NDP members think it is fair to let immigrants wait 10 years in line to get their applications looked at? That is not fair to them. It is not fair to the families they are trying to be reunited with, and it is not fair to the businesses that are trying to hire the skills and talents that these people have. We are going to get the job done in spite of the NDP.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, negotiations to end the aboriginal occupation in Caledonia are in their second year.

Protests have spilled over into Brantford with disruptive effects on residents and on business. Simply put, a developer obtains a building permit, begins construction, protesters come and development stops. The government has to date adopted a hands-off policy and has stayed silent.

Apart from hoping that other levels of government will resolve the issue, what exactly is the Conservative government proposing to do to deal with the matter?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have done quite a lot and quite a bit more than the party opposite ever did in 13 years.

We have put forward so far two separate offers to the first nations in the area. We have put a specific offer on the Welland Canal compensation: a \$26 million offer that we have put forward and another offer on the larger claim of \$125 million.

We are engaging with first nations. We have had meetings between our special representatives and local community leaders as well as the mayor of Brantford and others to talk about the situation and to discuss options.

However, the member might want to talk to his friend, Mr. McGuinty, about the law enforcement side.

* * *

● (1500)

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for years the former Liberal government wasted huge amounts of money on public opinion research with little or no oversight. Liberal-friendly firms conducted hundreds of unnecessary surveys and polls at the expense of Canadian taxpayers.

Recently, the government made a strong commitment to bring the free spending Liberal ways of the past to an end and ensure that public opinion research is used in an effective way.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works please update the House as to what progress has been made up to this date and what Canadians can expect moving forward?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer this question from my good friend from Peace River and I will answer this question very clearly.

We recently announced reforms in order to change the public opinion research regime that is in place in different departments. I am pleased to report to the House and to taxpayers that we have reduced public opinion research and polling by departments by 20% over last years, saving taxpayers millions of dollars.

We are going to continue pushing in the right direction to ensure that Canadians have a government in place, a Conservative government, that knows that tax dollars are precious and should be spent appropriately. We will not go back to the ways of the Liberals of spending money on polling that is not necessary for the public good.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS**

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, at the government operations committee today the Minister of Public Works and his officials confirmed that only 4% of a \$1.5 billion submarine maintenance contract will go through a competitive bid process. Approximately 96% of the contract will now be awarded as amendments with no further competitive tenders on the \$1 billion balance of work.

Will the minister now recall this tender and include 100% of the work in the tender and designate it as a major crown project?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am afraid my colleague from Nova Scotia has his facts entirely wrong on this issue. The minister cleared up this matter and put it forward. In fact, no contract has yet been awarded on this file. This is still a matter of litigation.

We have followed all the rules and will continue to do so to ensure that taxpayers get the best possible value for their dollars when it comes to these contracts.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2008

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-50, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 26, 2008 and to enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Speaker: It being 3 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the previous question at the second reading stage of Bill C-50.

Call in the members.

• (1510)

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

(*Division No. 88*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Alghabra
Allen	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Arthur	Bagnell
Bains	Baird
Batters	Bell (North Vancouver)
Bennett	Benoit
Bernier	Bevilacqua
Bezan	Blackburn
Blaney	Boucher
Breitkreuz	Brown (Oakville)
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Byrne
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)

Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Casey	Casson
Chan	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Coderre	Comuzzi
Cotler	Cummins
Cuzner	Davidson
Day	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dosanjh
Dryden	Dykstra
Easter	Emerson
Epp	Eyking
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Godfrey	Goldring
Goodale	Goodyear
Gourde	Guarnieri
Hall Findlay	Harper
Harris	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Holland
Ignatieff	Jaffier
Jean	Jennings
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Karetak-Lindell
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Khan	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Lee
Lemieux	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKenzie
Malhi	Maloney
Manning	Marleau
Mayes	McCallum
McGuinity	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Menzies
Merrifield	Mills
Minna	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Murray	Neville
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	Obhrai
Oda	Pacetti
Patry	Petit
Poilievre	Prentice
Preston	Proulx
Rajotte	Redman
Regan	Reid
Richardson	Ritz
Rodriguez	Russell
Savage	Scarpaleggia
Scheer	Schellenberger
Scott	Shipley
Silva	Skelton
Solberg	Sorenson
St. Amand	St. Denis
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Temelkovski	Thibault (West Nova)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tilson	Toews
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Members

Angus
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Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bigras
Blaikie
Bouchard
Brunelle
Charlton
Comartin

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Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
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Mathysen
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Nadeau
Ouellet
Perron
Plamondon
Savoie
Stoffer
Vincent

PAIRED

Members

Allison	Barbot
Bellavance	Bonsant
Carrier	Day
Doyle	Gagnon
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The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[*English*]

The next question is on the main motion.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The House has to hear the question. I would remind hon. members of one of the Standing Orders, and I would forget the number, which says that when the Speaker is putting the question no member shall make any noise or disturbance. I will get the number if hon. members insist, but I would ask them to kindly show some restraint when the question is being put.

[*Translation*]

The hon. whip of the Bloc Québécois on a point of order.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in order to make things easier for the House, I ask that you seek the unanimous consent of this House to fully apply the result of the previous vote to the current vote.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to apply the vote just taken?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*Translation*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

● (1515)

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

(*Division No. 89*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Ambrose
Anderson
Baird
Benoit
Bezan
Blaney
Breitkreuz
Brown (Barrie)
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casey
Chong
Clement
Cummins
Day
Devolin
Emerson
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Galipeau
Goldring
Gourde
Harris
Hearn
Hill
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Khan
Lake
Lebel
Lukiwski
Lunney
Manning
Menzies
Mills
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Norlock
Obhrai
Petit
Prentice
Rajotte
Richardson
Scheer
Shiple
Solberg
Stanton
Strahl
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Trost
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa

Members

Ablonczy
Allen
Anders
Arthur
Batters
Bernier
Blackburn
Boucher
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie
Casson
Clarke
Comuzzi
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dykstra
Epp
Finley
Fletcher
Gallant
Goodyear
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Jaffer
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lemieux
Lunn
MacKenzie
Mayes
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Poilievre
Preston
Reid
Ritz
Schellenberger
Skelton
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
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Tweed
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Wallace
Warkentin

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NAYS

Members

André
Asselin
Bachand
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bevilacqua
Bigras
Blaikie
Bouchard
Brunelle
Chan
Christopherson
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
DeBellefeuille
Deschamps
Dhaliwal
Duceppe
Freeman
Gravel
Ignatieff
Laforest
Lalonde
Layton
Lessard
Lussier
Malo
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
McCallum
McTeague
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Nadeau
Ouellet
Perron
Plamondon
Savoie
Stoffer
Vincent

Angus
Atamanenko
Bains
Bell (North Vancouver)
Bevington
Black
Blais
Bourgeois
Cardin
Charlton
Comartin
Crowder
Davies
Demers
Dewar
Dhalla
Faille
Godin
Guimond
Julian
Laframboise
Lavallée
Lemay
Lévesque
Malhi
Marston
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
McDonough
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Minna
Nash
Paquette
Picard
Priddy
Siksay
Thi Lac
Wasylcia-Leis— 76

PAIRED

Members

Allison
Bellavance
Carrier
Doyle
Gaudet
Guay
Hinton
Komarnicki
Mourani
St-Cyr

Barbot
Bonsant
Day
Gagnon
Grewal
Guergis
Khan
Miller
Pallister
St-Hilaire— 20

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, this bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

[English]

The Speaker: Order. It being Thursday, I believe the opposition House leader has a question.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government House leader could indicate his proposed schedule for the rest of this week and next week, which will take us into the late April adjournment.

At the same time, could I ask him again what his plans are with respect to Bill C-21? It was reported back to the House from the

committee dealing with aboriginal human rights on January 30. There has been more than enough time to deal with that legislation. I wonder when the minister intends to call it.

● (1520)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the House of Commons has just now voted to approve the budget implementation bill at second reading. The bill will now proceed to the Standing Committee on Finance where it will be studied by members of that committee.

I know that the Liberal Party originally said that it adamantly opposed the bill, so we welcome its change of heart yesterday with its help to defeat the NDP motion, which would have effectively killed the bill, and its kind cooperation today to make sure it passed at second reading.

As I am sure the Liberal House leader is aware, the passage of the bill is important to the stability of the Canadian economy during a time of global economic uncertainty and to reduce the immigration application backlog that is causing Canada to lose much needed talent from potential immigrants. We hope it will be dealt with quickly at committee so that we can have it back to the House for third reading, where I am sure it will once again receive the same warm greeting.

[Translation]

Today and tomorrow, we will continue to debate Bill C-23, which amends the Canada Marine Act; Bill C-33, which will regulate a renewable content of 5% in gasoline by 2010, and 2% in diesel fuel and heating oil by 2012; and Bill C-5, which has to do with responsibility in the event of a nuclear incident, as part of Improving the Health and Safety of Canadians Week.

[English]

Next week will be a stronger justice system week. We will start by debating, at report stage and third reading, Bill C-31, which amends the Judges Act to allow the application of additional resources to our judicial system.

We will also consider Senate amendments to Bill C-13, which is our bill to amend the Criminal Code in relation to criminal procedure, language of the accused, and other matters.

We will then continue by debating Bill S-3, our bill to reinstate modified versions of the anti-terrorism provisions—the investigative hearings and the recognizance with conditions provisions—in the Criminal Code. This important piece of legislation, which has already passed the Senate, will safeguard national security while at the same time protecting the rights and freedoms of all Canadians. I hope all members of the House will work with the government to ensure its quick and timely passage.

[Translation]

We will debate Bill C-26, which imposes mandatory prison sentences for producers and traffickers of illegal drugs, particularly for those who sell drugs to children.

Lastly, time permitting, we will start debating Bill C-45, which has to do with our military justice system.

[*English*]

With regard to the bill dealing with aboriginal human rights, we understand, sadly, that the opposition parties gutted the relevant provisions and protections in it. Therefore, I am surprised by the enthusiasm of the opposition House leader for it. Perhaps if the members are, as they were on Bill C-50, prepared to reverse their position and support the restoration of those meaningful principles, we would be happy to bring it forward again.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I have two further questions.

First, with respect to Bill C-21, as the minister will know, the amendments that happened in committee were indeed a reflection of the hopes and the aspirations of aboriginal organizations in this country, so I would hope the government would take a fresh look at that and be willing to respect the will of those aboriginal organizations, because that will is reflected in the amendments that were made.

Further, with respect to Bill C-50, I would remind the government House leader that the vote at second reading is not passage of the legislation. It is simply reference of the legislation to the appropriate standing committee. In the standing committee, the defects in the legislation can be debated and exposed, and of course Canadians for the first time will have the opportunity to speak in a parliamentary forum to tell parliamentarians what Canadians think about this legislation, which is extremely important.

I would ask the government House leader this question. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has indicated, I believe, a willingness to see not the bill itself but the immigration subject matter of Bill C-50, in addition to what may happen in the finance committee, also referred to the House Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. I wonder if the minister would be willing to confirm the government's willingness to see that subject matter referred to the citizenship and immigration committee while the finance committee is dealing with Bill C-50.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, that is a rather novel interpretation by the opposition House leader. I think every grade 5 student in this country could tell us that second reading approval of a bill is approval in principle and is passage of the bill in principle. For that reason, I make those observations.

In terms of study, the bill of course will be studied at finance committee. As for the immigration committee, any committee of the House is free to study any subject matter within its jurisdiction.

* * *

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

PRIVILEGE

ORAL QUESTIONS—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on Thursday, March 13, by the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst alleging that the hon. Minister of Canadian

Speaker's Ruling

Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages misled the House with her response to an oral question the previous day.

I would like to thank the hon. member for raising this matter and for his additional comments, as well as the hon. member for Gatineau, the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier, the hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, and the hon. Government House Leader for their interventions.

[*English*]

I think it might be useful to remind hon. members of the events that led the member for Acadie—Bathurst to raise his question of privilege. On February 14, 2008, the Standing Committee on Official Languages adopted a motion calling upon the minister to appear immediately before the committee in relation to its study on the action plan for official languages.

Subsequent to this, during oral questions on Wednesday, March 12, 2008, the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier asked the hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages a question concerning this invitation to appear before the committee, claiming that the minister had declined the invitation to appear.

In her response to the House, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages stated that she had not refused to appear, noting that she had appeared before the committee on December 6, 2007. Furthermore, the minister added that, once work on the next phase of the action plan for official languages is completed, she would be pleased to appear before the committee again to discuss the matter.

[*Translation*]

In addressing this matter, the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst alleged that the minister had misled the House since her response in the House contradicted her letter of February 25, 2008, to the committee in which she declined the invitation to appear before the committee. However, on April 1 last, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages responded to this allegation, describing it as an unfortunate misunderstanding and stating that she would be pleased to appear before the committee in due course.

[*English*]

The Chair is fortunate that the minister's letter of February 25, 2008, which lies at the centre of this dispute, has been tabled and is therefore available for review. In that letter, the minister, on the one hand, clearly declines the committee's invitation to appear immediately while, on the other hand, she clearly states that she would be "pleased to appear before the Committee to discuss the next phase of the action plan as soon as I have finished working on it".

At the very least, I find this to be an ambivalent response, with the result that a reader may choose to put the emphasis on the minister having declined or the minister offering to appear in due course and so arrive at very different conclusions about the nature of the minister's reply in the House on March 12.

Government Orders

[Translation]

The House is often seized with disputes of this kind. As Mr. Speaker Fraser aptly stated on December 4, 1986, at page 1792 of the *Debates*: “Differences of opinion with respect to fact and details are not infrequent in the House and do not necessarily constitute a breach of privilege”. This lends further support to the extract I cited previously on this matter from page 433 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*:

In most instances, when a point of order or a question of privilege has been raised in regard to a response to an oral question, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among members over the facts surrounding the issue.

[English]

In that respect, the situation before us today is like many others the House has seen. There is obviously a disagreement between hon. members with respect to the completeness of the minister's responses in this matter.

The House has noted that part of the minister's letter to the committee certainly declined the committee's invitation to appear immediately. However, hon. members will recognize with the Chair that the minister's response to the March 12 question selectively focused on another part of the same letter where she expressed willingness to appear before the committee at a future date.

Similarly, in their subsequent interventions, both the minister and the government House leader persisted in quoting selectively from the letter rather than acknowledging the ambivalence in the letter that appears to lie at the heart of the complaints.

● (1530)

[Translation]

In summary, then, I do not doubt that hon. members are vexed by the ambivalent letter and that they are disappointed by the evasiveness they encountered when they voiced their complaints. One might have wished that, in her intervention of April 1, 2008, the minister had put the matter to rest by simply explaining her decisions more thoroughly. Nevertheless, I can only conclude that this remains a dispute as to facts and I do not see here sufficient grounds for a prima facie finding of privilege.

I thank the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst for bringing this matter to the attention of the House.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA MARINE ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Canada Marine Act, the Canada Transportation Act, the Pilotage Act and other Acts in consequence, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motion in Group No. 1.

The Speaker: Before I call for resuming debate, I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded divisions, government orders will be extended by nine minutes.

Resuming debate. Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion No. 1 agreed to)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (for the Minister of Transport) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried on division.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-33, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

[Translation]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: There are two motions in amendment on the notice paper relating to the report stage of Bill C-33. Motion No. 1 will not be selected by the Chair, as it could have been presented in committee.

[English]

The remaining motion has been examined and the Chair is satisfied that it meets the guidelines expressed in the note to Standing Order 76(1)(5) regarding the selection of motions in amendment at the report stage. Motion No. 2 will be debated and voted upon.

[Translation]

I shall now put Motion No. 2 to the House.

● (1535)

[English]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-33, in Clause 2, be amended by replacing line 13 on page 3 with the following:

“Canada, including a review of the progress made in the preparation and implementation of the regulations referred to in subsection 140(1), should be undertaken by such commit-”

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this amendment, although it is not the complete amendment that we were looking for in this bill and certainly not an amendment that would lead us to understand how this bill would impact on Canada.

Government Orders

Bill C-33, as put forward by the agriculture minister and through the agriculture committee, is enabling legislation. It would give the government power to make regulations that would open up the ability for biofuels to be used in the Canadian transportation industry across the country. As such, it really does not have any of the characteristics outlined that may be the most important in dealing with this issue in the future.

Concerns are mounting around the world about the nature of the directions that countries have taken with the development of biofuels and with the promotion of ethanol from corn, sugar cane and soybeans. This movement, albeit having good intent, the process has shown and is showing a very detrimental impact on the food supply across the world. In much of the scientific material, it is not showing much improvement in environmental characteristics regarding greenhouse gas emissions and the use of agricultural land. The deforestation of land for the production of these crops has also added to the environmental concerns that people around the world are starting to recognize and talk about.

With the amendments that I proposed, which have now been reduced to the one amendment, we felt there was a need to have greater understanding of the direction that Canada was going to take with its biofuels policy from the House of Commons, not simply leaving it in the hands of the government to make regulations but to have a fulsome and complete understanding in the House of Commons as to the nature of the kind of businesses that we are entering into with biofuels.

That is the nub of it in terms of the motion that we are putting forward here today. We are down to the single motion and I understand, through the process of Parliament, how this has happened, and I respect that. I trust that other members will respect that we are trying very hard to understand how we can ensure this bill will work for Canadians.

This bill also represents the promise of a \$2 billion expenditure by the government over a number of years toward subsidies to those who grow the product and develop the fuel that will be used in a 5% mix in gasoline across the country, as well with a significant percentage of biodiesel that will be produced.

The evidence is coming in quite strong that the greenhouse gas emissions from the development of the industry so far across the world have been less than satisfactory. If one includes the deforestation that has taken place in many countries outside of Canada that have bought into the biofuel idea, we find that greenhouse gas emissions per unit of energy consumed in a person's vehicle in this biofuel mix actually turn out to be higher, and that is unfortunate.

● (1540)

As well, there are potentially other ways in which this industry could go where we would see improvements in the greenhouse gas emissions. With the use of corn ethanol, we see about a 20% improvement in CO₂ emissions over conventional gas coming from farm production. However, that creates the problem of using greater quantities of arable land in order to produce corn for ethanol production.

In the United States, through its programs, 16% of its corn production is now turned into ethanol, and it is looking at increasing that to 30%. It has caused an increase in the price of corn around the world. It is not healthy for mankind to be moving in this direction at a time when considerable poverty and malnourishment still exists around the world.

In Canada, the move toward a 5% ethanol content in our gasoline will not be accomplished on our own land. If that is the direction the government takes with regulation and with the investment of subsidies, we will find that much of the corn production will come from other countries, specifically the United States. We will be competing with the U. S. industry for the same product, as well as with people around the world who rely on it as a food stock and in many other ways.

This is a problem that we need to address in Parliament. We need to talk about it, understand it and include it in the bill that is being put forward. Simply allowing this to move to regulation without considering the desirable characteristics and the direction the government will take when it does produce those regulations is not proper governing. It does not represent careful choice.

We saw that in the agricultural committee when it reviewed the bill. My colleague, our agricultural critic, tried unsuccessfully to put forward amendments that would allow more careful consideration of this issue. Many witnesses came before the committee but most of their testimony was in vain. We have come to where this bill is now at report stage.

Most of the political parties in this Parliament at one time or another have supported the concept of biofuels and yet, as we move along in the world, opinion is changing rapidly about the nature of what we are creating.

I had the opportunity earlier this week to have lunch with the minister of energy from Great Britain where biofuels was a topic of discussion. When he was asked what the thinking was of the European Union and his own country with regard to biofuels, he said that we needed to change what we were doing. When asked if this could be done through regulation, he said that we needed to have some policy that outlines the direction that we need to take with biofuels.

There is an emerging consensus around the world that, however well-intentioned the move to biofuels is, the end result is not practically looking to be the way that we wanted it to be. The best laid plans of men and mice sometimes go astray. In the case of biofuels, I think it is quite correct that we need to be very careful. Canada is at an advantage right now. We have not passed any laws. Since we have not entered into the large scale production of biofuels with any particular process, we can make sensible and correct choices that can lead this country in a direction that will work.

● (1545)

It is imperative that we deal with this issue in Parliament. It is imperative that we understand the direction we are going in. It is imperative that the people of Canada understand what we are doing, how we are working toward the future of our country, how we are making correct choices about our energy future.

Government Orders

It is not good enough to simply say, “Here is enabling legislation. Let’s just turn it over to the government”. The government has not won that kind of respect yet. The government has not demonstrated that kind of commitment to climate change. It has not demonstrated that kind of commitment to energy security. It is not demonstrated those commitments that would make this kind of choice to simply turn over enabling legislation in the fashion that we are prepared to do in order make the correct choice. We are really caught on the horns of a dilemma.

I will leave my comments there. I am very happy to engage in this debate. It is a debate that needs the attention of Parliament.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand the member’s concern, which is out there. There is no question that over maybe even the next decades the linkages and the conflicts between food policy, energy policy and environmental policy will be quite evident. We have a responsibility, globally, to ensure that our environment is protected and that there is a good food supply for the public. I understand his concerns. I do, however, feel we are moving in the right direction with this bill.

The question I have relates to the amendment itself. As I understand the bill, a review process is in place to review the economic environmental impact of developing production and the ethanol policy as we move ahead. The motion really refers to expanding the review into “preparation and implementation of the regulations referred to in subsection 140(1)”.

Could the member explain to me what is specifically meant by that amendment? Does it go beyond ethanol? Does it go to other energy areas? Could he give us an explanation on that amendment so we know specifically what the intent of it really is?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, subparagraph 140(1)(g)(iii) is the determining clause, “the adverse effects from the use of the fuel...on the environment, on human life or health, on combustion technology and on emission control equipment...”. We have a process that would expand the review to ensure it encompasses all the details within the bill and would help out with that.

The amendment is taken in the absence of the other amendments that were declared out of order, and I recognize that. I will attempt in all ways to ensure that we proceed correctly with the amendment. The member can take it that the amendment will, in fulsome detail, help with the review process as outlined in the bill.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will talk a little about the legislation and put a question forward for the hon. member about his speech.

There are different aspects of this legislation. It is very important that we recognize the diversity of this. We have to ensure we take steps forward on the environment and we have to ensure we concentrate on it. However, this is also about agriculture. This is also about ensuring that we can increase the farm gate prices for our farmers by giving them more options.

I am really tired of seeing the NDP members consistently standing up for their cheap food policy in Canada. An amendment was put forward in committee. We worked with the NDP member of the committee to ensure a review process was put in place with which the NDP was happy and that everyone around the table could accept.

Then we come to this place today and the NDP members are trying to put restrictions on it. They are trying to stand in the way of enhancing agriculture for our farmers once again.

When is the member going to finally stand up and support our farmers and support putting good prices and rising commodity prices in place for them rather than a cheap food policy?

● (1550)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, the situation in the world speaks for itself on food prices right now. That is probably what we are having trouble with in response to the legislation. The situation in the world is changing. What may have been appropriate two years ago is changing rapidly.

We want to ensure that we make legislation that is good for the future, not good for yesterday or even today, but that works as we move along in the future. I am sure that is the ultimate goal of everyone in the House of Commons.

I do not particularly think this is a partisan issue to deal with the changing situation in the world as we speak. It is incumbent on all members to view very carefully what we are attempting to accomplish with the bill and put it into a perspective that will work. When we say that—

The Deputy Speaker: I think we will have to leave it at that.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to talk about the biofuels policy, one that we promised in the last election and are delivering upon now. I think all parties can support this issue. I think everybody believes that biofuels are not only good for our environment, but also good for our agricultural industry.

As the chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, we had a good discussion when we reviewed the bill. We heard from witnesses and we covered all aspects of this issue, from the ones who were pro-biofuel to those who were con. At the end of the day, the members around our committee table, from all parties, agreed that this policy needed to move forward.

We made some minor amendments to the bill. The main purpose of doing that was to ensure a review process would be in place. This way, as we move forward, as manufacturing comes online in our country in the production of biofuel, we can look at all the downstream impacts and ensure that not only are our farmers benefiting, but our environment is benefiting as well. We also want to ensure that the industry can supply the domestic market, especially as we see more vehicles on the road that are ethanol based or flex-fuel based and can use both biodiesel and ethanol as well as traditional gasolines and diesels.

We brought the policy recommendations to committee and they were agreed upon by all parties. I am disappointed this motion would come forward as an amendment to the bill today. Essentially it would obscure what we have already been able to accomplish.

Government Orders

We have to remember that we are talking about the entire Canadian Environmental Protection Act, which regulates all aspects of fuel production. By going ahead with this review, it is opening this up beyond biofuels. Right now we are only reviewing biofuels under Bill C-33 with the amendments we brought forward.

In the proposal, in clause 140(1), the whole review process will be opened up to all fuels and that is not the intent of Bill C-33. Bill C-33 is about the biofuel policy and how it will be implemented and carried forward.

One of the concerns of my NDP friend, which was also brought forward by a number of people opposed to this policy, is that grain prices are getting out of control and that is affecting the price of food. They are blaming biofuels in the world for creating this price increase.

The reason the price of grain is going up so fast is because we have the lowest carryover stock in the last 50 years. Coarse grain stocks around the world are at all time lows, but that is not because of biofuels. That is because we have a growing population. It is also because countries like India and China have a growing and blooming middle class who are buying up higher quality food products and are consuming not only Canadian grains, but grains around the world.

We have also had some very difficult growing conditions. The prairie region last year only brought in a 78% crop. There was some drought in certain areas and difficult harvesting conditions in others. The same is true in Australia, a major grain producing area. It has had three successive droughts and last year brought in less than 50% of its normal production. The U.S. mid-west and western Europe have also had extremely difficult situations and came in with less than a bumper crop.

As long as these major areas, which produce the bulk of the food grains in the world, are having difficulty, we are not going to have the carryover stocks that we need to feed our growing population, especially certain areas of the world that now find themselves with better wealth and ability to buy higher quality food stocks.

We have to look at the whole gamut of the biofuel policy and how that impacts grain production around the world. We have to remember that biofuel production in Canada is really at its infant stage. We are only starting to move forward now. Some minor production has happened historically.

• (1555)

We are only now starting to see spades in the ground and new plants actually being built. That will start to produce the biofuels to hit our target of 5% ethanol in all fuel content and 2% on biodiesel. If we look at the total acreage in this country and the amount of grain it takes to produce either ethanol or biodiesel, it will only take about 2% of our land base.

There are also other opportunities. We already have a couple of biodiesel plants in this country that are making use of feedstocks from abattoirs and rendering plants. They are using excess brown oils, old greases from the cooking industry and those left over from the rendering industry to make biodiesel. A waste product can be used for some good to produce a biodiesel product that is still very clean for the environment.

There is a great deal of research in the cellulosic ethanol industry that our government as well as other governments around the globe have been supporting. Cellulosic ethanol can be manufactured from products such as switchgrass, wood shavings and wood chips, byproducts left over from our forestry industry. That is starting to come into production as well.

When we look at the overall aspect, a number of different feed stocks can be used to generate the biofuels that we want to see accomplished through Bill C-33.

It is unfortunate that this amendment is coming forward. It is muddying the waters. It is not looking at what we have already accomplished at committee, in consultation with the various players around the table. I am concerned that this has greater implications than just in the biofuels industry and could impact upon the entire fuel industry.

Finally, one of the concerns of Canadians is the rising prices of gasoline and diesel. I am really supportive of the biofuel policy not just because it is good for the environment, good for the farmers and will create jobs and rural development in the rural towns I represent, but because it provides another competitor in the marketplace.

We will have players in an industry that are community owned, owned by farmer groups or smaller businesses who will go out there and sell ethanol and biodiesel against the other refineries out there that are controlled by the major oil companies. This is an opportunity to have true competition in the marketplace with some new products.

Right now the price of ethanol in the North American marketplace is less than gasoline and it has the ability to keep the price of gasoline below what it would be if it was 100% petroleum.

It is important that we bring this biofuel policy into play as quickly as we can so that we can actually have that increased competition, hopefully bring down prices or at least have another source of product that can not only increase supply, but also undercut the other petroleum products that are being offered as normal gas and diesel.

Overall it is a win, win, win. It is a win for consumers, a win for the environment and a win for our farmers.

• (1600)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is quite unusual to be able to agree with the government on something.

The bill moving forward and bringing in the regulations to make it possible to have the ethanol and biodiesel blends, we believe, is very important.

We have had a number of discussions about this at committee. The member has been to the U.S. and elsewhere. I ask the member, where is the government intending to go in terms of research and development into other products?

There are discussions in the United States that they will move toward production of cellulosic ethanol in the not too distant future, in five or six years. I am wondering if the member can give us some estimation of what will happen in terms of research and development in this country. That is important as well.

Government Orders

Could he explain a little further what this is doing for the hopes and aspirations of the farm community in terms of grains and oilseeds? It is the first time in quite a while that I have seen a sparkle in the eyes of some of the grains and oilseeds producers and I think that is a good thing.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Malpeque for his great work on this policy, something that both of us agree we need to go forward on.

There is no doubt that the grains and oilseeds industry across this country has had some incredibly difficult times. It does not matter if the grains and oilseeds producers were dealing with drought, depressed world markets, or increased subsidization from Europe, Japan and the United States, it always seemed that they were against the wall and there was just no long term outlook that proved to be favourable.

Now the circumstances have suddenly changed. There is a biofuel industry that has essentially created a marketplace for grains and oilseeds producers that is equal to the market of Japan, just right here in Canada. We also know that world prices are going very high and that is good news for our farmers. It means that they can make some long term plans on reinvesting in their operations and on making sure that they invest in the proper technology, and continue to be at the leading edge of new production and management techniques.

The member asked me about other sources in research and development. We do need to be doing a lot of work in this area. That is why we have invested dollars in research and development and through our community futures development groups to ensure that local organizations, as they move forward with developing their own plans for ethanol and biodiesel plants, have the resources for business and environmental planning and are able to get their companies off the ground. We have also supported companies like Iogen, which is doing a lot of great work in cellulose and making the sugars in cellulose available for ethanol production.

We are going to continue to move ahead and work along with our partners around the world to ensure we produce a better product, and a product that is going to be definitely good for the environment and make use of more of these waste products that right now we are just throwing into landfills.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in some ways, my colleague's speech and the questions that followed are making my point in saying that there is very much a need to set standards and understand where those standards are going to go before we pass enabling legislation for this particular industry. We have an industry that we can influence, that we can put in the right direction, that we can give those qualifications to that will drive it toward being greenhouse gas compliant and that will drive it toward investors investing in land that will be used strictly for the production of biofuels. Those sorts of things are available to us right now. They should be considered.

The member has made the point quite clearly that he wants these things, so why would we not include these in a bill in a very careful fashion?

• (1605)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, the member talked about standards and those types of guidelines. Those are things that are

put into regulations, not in the act. The member for Western Arctic is trying to muddy the waters and tie the hands not only of government but of industry. We want to make sure that we provide the proper regulations so there are quality standards when it comes to fuel.

As a farmer, I do not think I am really that interested in having somebody dictate that only a certain amount of my land base is going to be used for biofuels when there is a biodiesel plant sitting across the road. If that operation wants to make sure it is getting the best for its operation, it should be allowed to sell to whoever will pay the most money. I do not think we should be regulating that.

We know we need to have a lot more research done, and this is again something that we do not need to do through regulation, but in new variety research. Especially as we look to western Canada, we want to do more in ethanol. That is going to require a wheat based ethanol industry, and new varieties that produce more and produce the type of ethanol we want. Those types of varieties need to be bred and registered. We need to move forward on that as quickly as possible. The same can be said for canola, soybeans and corn. We want to make sure farmers have the ability to make the decision that is right for their own operations, so they can get the most out of the marketplace.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to join the debate this afternoon on Bill C-33. For Canadians who are watching or who might read *Hansard* at some point in the future, this bill is a technical amendment to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act to simply allow a government, the present government or any subsequent government, to regulate, for example, the ethanol content in our fuels, to help in setting standards for the export of Canadian fuels that are blended, and so on and so forth. At first blush, it is a technical amendment.

I would like to respond to the member for Western Arctic's proposed amendment and pick up on some of the comments he made in his speech. He said that the testimony at committee was, in his own words, in vain, that many experts had testified in vain. I disagree. I disagree because the text of the bill already embraces the need for a review of the language of the bill every two years, a "comprehensive review of the environmental and economic aspects of biofuel production in Canada" that would be undertaken by the Senate, the House or a combination thereof.

What he is now calling for is something entirely different, but it appears as if the review that is already going to be performed under this act, once it becomes law, would embrace much of what he is seeking to get in, to a certain extent, through the back door today, that which was not presented at committee some time ago. I would say it is a moot point. I would say that the amendment he put forward today is not necessary because I believe the regulatory standards will be reviewed as a function of the comprehensive review of the environmental and economic aspects of biofuel production at some later date.

That is my opening statement on the merits of this particular amendment put forward by the NDP and the member who is speaking on the NDP's behalf.

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I would like to now make a couple of more generalized remarks about the bill, which is about expanding the scope of the Minister of the Environment, not the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food but the Minister of the Environment, to regulate fuels in Canada.

I would like to talk about the government's 5% ethanol standard. I would like to talk about the government's excise tax exemption changes brought in on April 1, which have a direct bearing on this question, and about how this does not quite fit in to the government's climate change plan, a plan which is supported by no third party in Canada today.

First, the official opposition leader has been calling for a 10% ethanol position since last January. In a speech to Saskatchewan farmers in Regina, he asked for an increase to 10%, but it had already been put forward in our own election documentation of 2006 calling for a 5% ethanol content. There is a significant difference here between 5% and 10%. The government is proposing 5%, but we are still supportive of 10%. Why is that?

First of all, for every car on the road today, car owners can use a 10% ethanol content in the engines of their vehicles. There is no need to retrofit the engine as it is presently built. We know that if we had a 10% mandate in Canada as opposed to the weaker 5% put forward by the government, it would double the amount required to some four billion litres a year. That is a figure that is already surpassed in terms of those plants that are presently operating, under construction and even those being financed.

When the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and his parliamentary secretary or members of the government talk about supporting our farming community, one has to ask the question, why is the government pursuing such an unambitious target of 5%?

In late June, in fact, the former minister of agriculture labelled the official opposition leader's call for 10% as overly aggressive, which the Canadian Report on Fuel Ethanol described as an excessive term in itself. Ontario, the largest provincial gasoline market in the country, is already moving from an existing annual average, E5, to 10% starting in 2010.

•(1610)

Why is the federal government lagging behind the province that consumes the largest amount of gasoline in the country? There is no explanation so far which is a question that I have raised before.

Speaking now quickly to some of the environmental implications and considerations that ought to be paramount with what we are trying to accomplish here, there are all kinds of important questions around the environmental impact, for that matter even social justice questions, when it comes to the expanded use of ethanol in Canadian and worldwide markets.

In this, I think, the member from the NDP is quite correct. Those are precisely the questions that we see and envisage being treated and dealt with by the Senate committee and/or the House of Commons committee that will review the performance of the country every two years as the bill contemplates.

However, here is another angle and I would like to conclude on this. That is the incoherence between the government's purported 5%

ethanol content regulation and what it is actually doing when it comes to the taxation policy for these very fuels.

On April 1 the government repealed the excise tax exemption for biodiesel and ethanol fuels. We know the effect of the repeal on low level blends is small, maybe even minimal, but we know the additional taxes are substantial for higher blends. The price of what they call E50 for example will increase by 2¢, for E85 it will increase dramatically to 8.5¢ a litre higher than it is, hardly making the fuel competitive.

This is at a time when we are trying to kickstart the fuel market and lend the added hand to our farming community if it is done in an environmental and responsible way. We only have 31 vehicle models today on the road in the Canadian market that can use E85 as we speak, but there are only 2 E85 retail fuel stations in this country compared to 1,250 in the United States.

Therefore, we have incoherence here between the government's purported claim to support our agricultural farming communities, which is a very important initiative, with its own fiscal and tax policies. They are leading to higher costs for this fuel and do not necessarily reflect, as we heard in the original speeches here in the House and at committee from the government members, the profound environmental considerations that are inherent in making a shift to a wider use of a specific fuel.

I go back to where I began on why it is so important that we have built into the bill a two year review of the economic and environmental performance across the country as to how we are doing as a country.

We are not Brazil. We are not transforming vast amounts of tropical forests into for example eucalyptus plantations or sugar cane plantations where it is obviously having profound environmental impacts on ecological integrity of those regions and of course ultimately the lungs of the planet. We are not in that kind of situation. Our concerns are different, yet just as important.

As we go forward with this bill, I find it hard to understand why the NDP would at the very last moment seek to bring through I guess the back door of the House that which it did not bring to the committee. I also cannot reconcile at all the amendment put forward by the member with the call already inherent in the bill to have this two year review on the economic and environmental implications, not that his concerns are not important, not that they are not valid, not that they should not be treated and dealt with but I think they will be dealt with precisely at that period of time, 24 months after the bill becomes law.

Twenty-four months later we will have a much better idea of where we stand and I think that will allow us to make mid-course corrections as a country as we go forward and deal with this particular fuel source.

•(1615)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member across the way for his comments. I want to touch back on this review. A review of policy is fine when we are dealing with things that we can change easily.

Government Orders

What is going to happen here with the industry is that it will move ahead in a certain fashion. The industry will make investments. Farmers are going to line up land and change their agricultural practices. There will be many things that go ahead once we put this bill in place, once the regulations are in place, and once the subsidies go on.

A review two years from now may be at the start of an industry. It may be when industry has just made major investments and it is not going to be a great time to decide that we have made the wrong decision here, made the wrong choices or moved in the wrong direction. The time to decide what the right direction is, is before we start.

That is why quite clearly my colleague on the agriculture committee brought forward many recommendations. I spoke to this issue when it was in Parliament before. We are saying it again to the hon. member across the way, do you really think that a review two years from now is going to—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Western Arctic should ask questions of the hon. member and not of the Speaker. He should be saying “does he think” rather than “do you think”.

The hon. member for Ottawa South.

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, when we talk about a review, I do not see any material difference between what we are contemplating here and, for example, the five-year mandatory review that is built into the Canadian Environmental Protection Act as a whole. That is something that was just completed at committee, which delivered up I think profound recommendations for change and improvements and enhancements to improve CEPA and how it is, for example, operationalized in the Canadian context. That is my first response.

Second, it is true that choices will be made. Investment decisions will be made. I have every confidence in the free market in Canada. I have every confidence in farmers. I have every confidence in investors and in companies that are going to be following this emerging market very carefully.

They know that investing in cellulosic ethanol, for example, and making a quantum leap into those kinds of feedstocks to generate the cellulosic ethanol is probably going to be a wiser and more intelligent investment than not.

It may take some transition time in some parts of the country. We know that cellulosic ethanol has much less impact in terms of GHGs and on the atmosphere as a whole.

I do have confidence that people will begin by beginning. They will start by starting and they will invest and they will build this sector. In 24 months, I think, we will be able to make a mid-course correction shot. We will examine it and we will make improvements.

• (1620)

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the hon. member. I have worked with the member on the committee before, so I understand his passion for the environment, much like my own and much like this government's.

Indeed, I know he is happy that this government has moved forward with the estimated 5% renewable fuel standard in Canada because it would obviously equal somewhere in the neighbourhood of a four megatonne reduction in net GHG emissions which is great news for Canadians. That is actually equivalent to 1 million cars taken off the road.

The member mentioned that we are not aggressive enough on this side of the House. I would argue that point. I would ask him specifically this. The fuel industry has indicated that indeed these are aggressive targets and they can be met by the dates that we have set, but there is an issue of capacity in the distribution of infrastructure for this upgraded capacity. How does he see that we would meet these additional requirements, if indeed as his leader has suggested we have this additional target of an increased percentage in the fuels themselves even though we do not have the distribution capacity at this stage to do so?

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I do not agree that it is a distribution problem. I do not believe that it is strictly a distribution problem. I think there are a few things that the government should keep in mind.

First, why is it that Ontario, that represents 47% of the Canadian economy, has made the quantum leap to 10% by 2010? Why is it that Ontario can do it but the federal government cannot?

Perhaps the government could bring in a coherent policy that did not, on the one hand, remove the excise tax exemptions to actually help kickstart the sector while bringing in an inferior standard of 5%. Perhaps we could actually have more coherence between fiscal, agricultural and environmental policy. After all, it is the government that has, I am told, some kind of cabinet committee that is trying to reconcile energy, environmental and financial considerations.

Clearly, I do not think that this policy has been put through that gauntlet. I do not think that we have seen, here, this kind of baby given birth to really reflect the need, in the way that our leader of the opposition speaks about all the time, to really integrate environmental, social and economic considerations.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, to address the amendment proposed by the NDP. First of all, it is an amendment to Bill C-33, a bill intended to provide for the efficient regulation of fuels. This bill would amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999.

The amendment reads as follows:

That Bill C-33, in Clause 2, be amended by replacing line 13 on page 3 with the following: “Canada, including a review of the progress made in the preparation and implementation of the regulations referred to in subsection 140(1), should be undertaken by such commit-”.

This amendment is meant to improve a clause added by the committee. This addition specifies that a thorough analysis of the environmental and economic aspects of biofuel production in Canada should include an analysis of any progress made regarding the regulations developed and enacted by the governor in council. This will allow for a more thorough assessment of the impact of biofuel production and the enforcement of the related regulations.

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Today we had a fine example of that in this House. The leader of the Bloc Québécois opened question period with a question on the famine that is occurring throughout the world because grains, a basic food source, are becoming increasingly less available to certain people. This is connected to the current production of corn and other grains in the world that are not being used for human consumption. We are using the soil and cultivation to produce ethanol.

We can, and rightfully so, ask the government to increase its humanitarian aid to 0.7% of its gross domestic product. However, it is still illogical for the government to be presenting programs to convert cereal crops to ethanol, when people around the world are dying of hunger because they do not have enough grains. I was listening to the Liberals earlier. They want ethanol production to increase.

One of the advantages of this amendment is that it will have us look at other existing technologies. We have cellulosic ethanol, for which we can use fibre, agricultural and wood waste to produce ethanol. There has not been enough research yet to release this product on the market, but the product exists.

We need to find ways to solve the problems we are causing by producing ethanol from grains. We have to find a way of doing this. I understand that, because it promotes producing oil from the oil sands, the Conservative government is trying to ease its conscience by producing ethanol, but if ethanol production is creating a world famine, then it is not a better option. Parties have to stop setting short-term political goals in order to get elected. We have to try to save the planet and, above all, protect the peoples living on the planet.

One way to do this would be to make an amendment that would provide for a review of the environmental and economic aspects of production. That would enable us to examine all the new technologies and change direction while there is still time. While we are setting ethanol production targets to gradually reduce our dependence on oil, we could choose the right type of ethanol to produce, cellulosic ethanol, which would come from agricultural and wood waste, instead of ethanol from grains. We saw this today. Around the world, the media are reporting a grain famine. Grains often form the basis for people's diets. They are the basic foods for survival.

•(1625)

That is why members will not be surprised that the Bloc Québécois is in favour of this motion. This is the direction the Bloc Québécois wants to take in committee.

When discussions on the production of ethanol are held, we must focus on cellulosic ethanol, increase budgets for research and development, and think more about stopping the use of ethanol made from grain crops. Instead of using crop land, we should use forestry and agricultural waste. These fibres could be used to produce ethanol in a way that does not harm the production of grain, which often forms the basis for feeding humanity.

We will be in favour of this amendment. In committee, the Bloc Québécois will defend the interests of Quebecers. We are the only party in this House that defends the interests of Quebecers. At the same time, it is clear that Quebecers do not want anyone to go

hungry, but do not want to sacrifice energy production. This needs to be done using waste instead of crops.

•(1630)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my Bloc Québécois colleague. I would like to ask him a very simple question. He says that he is in favour of the motion by the member for Western Arctic that refers to a review of the progress made in the preparation and implementation of the regulations referred to in subsection 140(1). I do not understand his reasoning. I do not understand the difference between what is proposed here in the motion and what is already provided for in the bill, which says:

—every two years thereafter, a comprehensive review of the environmental and economic aspects of biofuel production in Canada should be undertaken by such committee of the Senate, of the House of Commons or of both Houses of Parliament as may be designated or established by the Senate or the House of Commons, or by both Houses of Parliament, as the case may be, for that purpose.

I do not understand exactly how this motion would change what is already provided for in clause 8 on page 3 of the bill. In my opinion, it is clear that this is already covered. Every two years, there will be a review of exactly what should be reviewed.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, which he answered himself. The amendment proposes that the review take place immediately, rather than after two years. I have been trying for some time to explain that we are helping to create a world famine with the way we produce ethanol. We must therefore not wait two years before looking at the economic and environmental impacts of what we are doing now. We must conduct a review immediately.

It is simple. We will maintain that position. You will understand that the Bloc Québécois, in committee, will want to refocus ethanol production immediately on cellulosic ethanol rather than grain ethanol, which uses a portion of the world's food supply to produce energy. We need to conduct a review right away, not after two years.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on Bill C-33, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, and on the amendment put forward by the NDP.

As I said earlier, I do not see why the amendment is necessary. There is already a review in the act and I think the amendment is redundant. Many of the aspects of what the NDP is trying to do through the amendment are already covered by the review process established in the bill.

The bill gives the authority to allow for the efficient regulation of fuels. In so doing, it does open up opportunities for the biofuel industries in quite a number of areas, especially for ethanol and biodiesel.

Government Orders

With the bill in place it should give some confidence to investors to put up the kind of capital required to build plant capacity for the refining of those fuels. As we all know, without that assurance in terms of industry being willing to invest, there will not be a market for the products coming from the farms, be it corn for ethanol or, in my neighbourhood, new varieties of canola for biodiesel.

This is also a benefit to our environment by utilizing these fuels and therefore producing fewer greenhouse gases. The evidence is certainly in on that area.

I realize, though, that there is some controversy. As I said earlier, I do not think there is any question that in the next decade for sure, and probably beyond, there is going to be a constant debate between the linkages and the conflicts between food policy, energy policy and environmental policy. We need to be at the forefront of that debate.

We hear it and I am sure you hear it, Mr. Speaker. There is the whole debate about whether we should be using what could be called a food product to fuel SUVs. There have to be other policies in concert with this one to try to limit the wasteful use of fuels that is adding to greenhouse gases. There has to be a lot done in that area as well.

One such area is the whole area of transportation policy. I raised a question with the Minister of Transport the other day, who basically ignored my question. My question was on the government doing a costing review following the study by the Canadian Wheat Board and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture that showed the railways are gouging primary producers in this country by \$175 million. That cannot be allowed.

I would suggest that the government needs to act in that area, because we know that rail transportation is a lot more efficient than road transportation in its use of energy. What we have seen taking place with the railways, beyond their excessive profits, is a major thrust over the last several years in terms of tearing up branch lines. I certainly remember, and I know you will, Mr. Speaker, that just 15 years ago Canada had about the best rail infrastructure in the world in terms of branch lines moving out into communities.

• (1635)

However, the railways in their wisdom decided they would go to two major lines and tear up those branch lines. As a result, there is damage being done to rural communities, to the availability of farmers to ship on those lines. Now there is much trucking on highways, which uses more fuel down those highways. It is really a transfer of the infrastructure cost back to the provinces and to producers.

Although this is a debate on ethanol, it all ties together. We need to be reducing greenhouse gases and the government of the day needs to be challenging the railways on their excess profits and doing a costing review of what they are doing by tearing up railways and reducing infrastructure for the use of communities and producers in our country.

The government should go beyond this bill in providing regulatory authority to allow biofuels and ethanol and go to other areas as well. It should show some concern about the environment by taking other means to reduce greenhouse gases. One of those is to

challenge the railways on their destruction of infrastructure to gain more profits for themselves and to heck with the rest of the country.

The bill and the regulatory authority changes would open up some opportunities for the agricultural community. There is no question that is direly needed. As the minister himself has said, close to three billion litres of renewable fuels will be needed annually to meet the requirements of these regulations.

That kind of expansion will represent an economic opportunity, we hope, for grains and oilseeds producers. It will be a new market for Canadian producers. We in fact are seeing that in my province of Prince Edward Island, not so much in the ethanol area but in the biodiesel area. A cold pressed canola operation is now in place with quite a number of canola acres that will go in this spring. This will help the environment in a number of ways. It will give us an alternative crop with which to rotate other crops. It will move us away from our dependence on the potato crop as the major economic generator and therefore we would have less erosion, less use of nitrogen fertilizers and less silting of rivers as a result of growing that alternative crop.

As we go down this road, although it is not all tied into this bill, it is important for the government to also expand funds in R and D and look at cellulosic ethanol and the use of wood byproducts and waste. They might even be able to use it out west for the damage done by the pine beetles. There are many other areas with regard to the whole idea of producing biofuels where we can take what is now seen as waste in many areas, or excess production, and use it in a positive way.

I am nearing the end of my time, but I understand where the NDP are trying to go with the proposed amendment. However, I firmly believe the review aspects already in the bill will cover those members' desire. The review of the economic aspects and the environmental impact will take place as already designed in the bill. Yes, we need to do that. We need to understand what is happening.

• (1640)

We also need to ensure the bill does not just set up a situation where cheap ethanol is floated up the St. Lawrence River and into Canada and also that cheap corn from the United States does not come into this country, undermining our pricing structure and being produced through Canadian plants.

We have to ensure this remains an opportunity for Canadians, especially Canadian farmers, in a way to reduce greenhouse gases in Canada as a whole.

The Deputy Speaker: Before I proceed to questions and comments, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Gatineau, Official Languages.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my learned colleague has demonstrated his expertise in the area of agriculture and today gave us an indication of his insights into developing economic innovations.

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Could I get his comments, especially from an agriculture perspective, with respect to what is happening in the biofuel industry and the implications for agriculture, international affairs and the automobile industry?

My colleague is aware of the numbers the government side tried to put forward and that every time there is a 10% increase in the number of automobile owners in India and in China alone, there will be an additional 200 million cars on the roads requiring some kind of fuel. I know he is aware of those figures. He is aware as well that the international demand for energy consumption is flowing into what we are talking about today, and that is biofuel, biomass and the demand on agriculture production worldwide.

My colleague talked about the production of cheap corn in the United States and what happens not only in the United States, but everywhere else. For example, Nebraska is dedicating an additional one million acres for the production of corn dedicated to ethanol production. It is already producing some one billion gallons of ethanol on an annual basis. Four hundred and fifty plants are scheduled to go into production this year in the United States alone.

With these kinds of pressures, does he not believe that the price on agricultural products, specifically food products, will continually escalate upward and that farmers will be protected by the increased demand that takes place not only in North America, but worldwide and has already hit critical and urgent proportions in Europe today?

I ask him to think about that for a moment while he reflects on the fact that South Africa is already considered the Middle East of the biofuel industry. It has already dedicated over one billion acres of land to the production of biomass for biofuel production. Brazil, India and Indonesia are dedicating literally tens of millions of acres of land that would normally go to feeding the world's hungry, and we are all going to be hungry. There is greater demand in those parts of the world, a demand that reflects back on our obligations for food aid and world commitments that we have already made.

My colleague knows—

•(1645)

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, but I have to give the member for Malpeque some time to answer.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, we have had a cheap food policy in our country and in North America for much too long. It is one of the things that has led us here. There certainly is a huge desire by the farm community to see these new markets open up.

The hon. member makes a valid point in terms of some of the cautions of which we have to be aware. I said in my opening remarks that three policies are going to collide, food policy, energy policy and environmental policy. We have to be aware of those. We have to be conscious of them. That is part of the reason for the review as well.

In the agricultural sector, I point out that the upward pressure and the price of grains and oilseeds is also causing tremendous problems in the agricultural community itself, especially with our rising dollar and other factors. These very same products that are going into ethanol are the feed stream for hogs, beef, poultry, chicken, dairy and so on. It is causing a cost price squeeze on farmers who are producing these commodities.

As China and India come on stream, beyond the energy use of increasing automobiles on the road, there will be the increasing demand for meat and other protein foods. This is the reality of the world that—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. One very brief comment and response, the hon. member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite comes from Prince Edward Island. Not a lot of wheat, barley or such things are grown there.

Would he be advocating that wheat and barley straw, for purposes of the bill before us, be put under the Canadian Wheat Board, yes or no?

Hon. Wayne Easter: The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker—

The Deputy Speaker: I know the member for Malpeque is anxious to answer the question, but he could at least allow the Chair to recognize him first.

The hon. member for Malpeque.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the reality is we grow the best potatoes in the country in Prince Edward Island, that is for sure.

I have always advocated a national grains board. The Wheat Board is even more important with the ethanol production now because it maximizes returns back to primary producers. It is so sad the government is only interested in the profits of the multinationals rather than defending the rights of producers.

In terms of straw, we would like to see it used as biomass production for ethanol, not just allow it to go to waste. Yes, it is needed sometimes for organic matter, but it could also be used for the production of ethanol itself.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have to say at the outset that I did enjoy the speech by the member for Malpeque. He made some valid points and certainly laid out in a fairly clear fashion the complications that exist in this bill and this initiative going forward.

It is not a simple piece of public business. It is very complicated. We really do need to pay close attention to it and make sure we put in place all the necessary checks and balances so that we monitor and assess as we go forward and minimize the negative impact of this seemingly very positive initiative by government and industry.

I want to say right off the bat that I am certainly standing in support of, and am going to actually speak to, the amendment put forward by my colleague from Western Arctic. Earlier I was pleased to hear the Bloc also joining us in putting in place this further check and balance on this rather large and, I would guess as it rolls out, very impactful piece of business that will take us in a new direction and open up some avenues and opportunities, but which on the other hand will create some real difficulties for some folks.

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I do not think we really know what all those difficulties will be yet. I do not think we have been able to quantify the impact. As was said by the member for Malpeque and the member for Western Arctic, who spoke earlier, we have not been able to quantify the impact on our food policy: security of food for all people, the cost of food, and the sustainability of our farm and agricultural industries.

I also do not think we understand the impact it is going to have on both energy and the environment. When the whole concept and idea of biofuel was first put out there, everybody was gangbusters to come on board to support it, but in some jurisdictions, particularly across the border, we are seeing that in fact is not the elixir that everybody thought it was perhaps going to be.

I think it is really important to have this in the bill. My colleagues participated in the evaluation and the process of amendment in looking at this bill when it came before the committee after second reading. They made a number of amendments that were not accepted, so I think it was only the rightful duty of the member for Western Arctic to take this opportunity yet again.

This amendment was found to be in order and it is an amendment that will give us an earlier opportunity to see what is going on. If it is not in the best interest of the public out there, which is what we are about here, protecting the interest of the public and putting forward good public policy that benefits the most people, we need to have the opportunity to actually take a look at it.

I have served in public office for 18 years now, first at the provincial level and now at the federal level, and there are many people in this House who have been around for a long time. We understand that oftentimes the devil is in the details. When moving large pieces of legislation that have widespread impact out there, we really need to pay attention to the regulations. It is in the regulations where we find the real meat in these kinds of bills and initiatives.

We have to be concerned when, holus-bolus, the development of regulations is turned over to the government, a government, I have to say, that is lobbied and that speaks regularly with the large corporations and multinationals out there. It runs up some red flags for a lot of people. Somebody has to be there to speak out loudly and clearly on behalf of the smaller entities that can get caught in the crunch or be bulldozed or rolled over in these instances.

• (1650)

What we are asking for is really not a big deal. As the government rolls out its regulations, which will be the highway down which the new initiative will go, we are asking that this be brought back to the committee to be reviewed so we can see that it turns out to be all that it was hoped to be in the first place. I think this is a good move. It is a smart move. It is in the public interest to do it. I commend the member for Western Arctic for doing the work necessary to bring it forward and have it accepted.

In the last number of years, particularly when I was in the provincial realm, we looked at biofuels, but we were looking at products that were not in the food stream and could be grown on farmers' fields, or at waste that could be gathered in forests and in the varied territory that exists across the country. That could be gathered and used. Perhaps it could be turned into oil, chips or different types

of fuel sources and used to provide energy that would heat our homes. Wood pellets are used in some parts of Canada to heat homes and buildings in a very progressive and environmentally friendly way.

In my area, a very important and good debate was initiated by a local maker of particleboard when he said we should just hang on for a second. He said we would be taking his raw material, for which he pays good money and which he uses to make products. That creates jobs in the area and contributes to the local economy. He said we would be taking it to start making energy out of it. He asked what he would do then and said we were robbing Peter to pay Paul, so to speak.

This is the kind of impact that a good idea can have sometimes when we do not look at all of the ramifications. If we simply allow this kind of public policy to roll out without an opportunity to look at it as it develops through regulation, we may end up at the end of the day missing somebody, not hearing from somebody, or witnessing an outcome that we did not expect to happen in the first place.

Everything in this new venture that we are into now, where energy, fuel, new fuels, biofuels and the environment are concerned, is very interconnected and complicated. It requires the close attention of all of us in this place, who have been elected to give leadership and to be responsible for what will happen in those realms, particularly where energy and food are concerned.

Yes, I am concerned that this will drive up the price of food. We hear from across the way, particularly from the Liberals, that they want to move away from a cheap food policy. I do not know exactly where the line is there and who we are talking about when we talk about cheap food. Anybody who knows of the work I do around here knows that I have a great passion on the poverty front in regard to trying to make sure that all people who live in Canada and in fact around the world are able to feed themselves and their families.

What we may see as cheap food and cheap food policy may be quite different from what the people in a neighbourhood in downtown Toronto, let us say, might consider cheap food or expensive food. I am not arguing for one or the other. I am just saying that we really need to be careful about how we do this, because it is already having and will continue to have a huge impact on the whole food supply system.

We have heard from across the way that the Americans are moving lock, stock, and barrel with great energy, investment and enthusiasm in this direction. The facts actually tell a different story, certainly in some sectors of the U.S. I have a press release that came out on February 28, 2008, not all that long ago. It states, "The ethanol boom is running out of gas as corn prices spike".

• (1655)

The article states:

Cargill announces it's scrapping plans for a \$200 million ethanol plant near Topeka, Kan. A judge approves the bankruptcy sale of an unfinished ethanol plant in Canton, Ill. And that was just Tuesday.

Indeed, plans for as many as 50 new ethanol plants have been shelved in recent months, as Wall Street pulls back from this sector, says Paul Ho, a Credit Suisse investment banker specializing in alternative energy. Financing for new ethanol plants, Ho says, "has been shut down".

Government Orders

So is the government going to get into the financing of some of these things in a big way? Are we going to find out, if we do not have access to some of what is going on, that in two years, when we actually get to this review, the government has spent a ton of money and is now in a place where some of these plants are not economically viable any more because of the impact they are having in other ways?

I also want to share with members the fact that there is another article, this one in the *Edmonton Journal*, entitled “Green gold or fool’s gold”. I think we have to be really careful about this. We are not saying that we should not move forward. Biofuel makes a lot of sense in many ways, but it is fraught with landmines.

That is why I stand shoulder to shoulder with the Bloc to support the amendment by my colleague from Western Arctic. I am supporting him and inviting the Liberals in particular to join us in making sure that we put yet another other check and balance in place so that we do not end up in the same place as some of these American firms.

● (1700)

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my friend speaking about how some of the laws passed by this Parliament should be reviewed, or at least that is what this amendment says. If we kept doing that, we would never get anything done, because we would just be revisiting things we have passed already. That is why ministers are given powers to pass regulations pursuant to certain acts. This just lays down the parameters under which the regulations can be made.

The member made reference to the United States and some of the problems with regard to ethanol. That is why the states are going to cellulosic, or cellulose based, ethanol and that is exactly some of what this government is investing in. It is cellulosic ethanol. That is what is happening in northern Ontario.

He mentioned particleboard using chips and said that somehow we may be diverting wood products from the forest industry because that is what particleboard is made from. That is what oriented strand board is made from. However, we know that our forestry industry is in trouble, and one of the things cellulosic ethanol will do is add another value added product to our forestry industry. Instead of being a negative for people who work in the forestry industry, it is going to be a positive.

I heard mention of Brazil. I was reading an article recently with regard to Brazil’s economic situation. One thing bringing it out of some economic hardship is that it is not relying on very expensive hydrocarbons, very expensive petroleum products. That is the very reason it is coming out of that economic hardship. A few years ago Brazil was having difficulty making enough vehicles to run on ethanol, but it made an economic decision to move away from petroleum to ethanol, which is bringing up that country’s standard of living. It is not a negative but a positive.

Europe is moving to biodiesel. It is not concentrating on ethanol necessarily and there is a good reason for that. It does not have the kind of agricultural base that we in North America have in order to support it, but what it does is buy a heck of a lot of canola oil from Canada. Canola is driving some of the economy in the west.

I just cannot understand this. There is everything positive about the bill. I suspect there is something sinister about the amendment that the NDP members want to bring in. They probably know they are never going to form government so this is—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member has used up half the time for questions and comments so maybe we could give the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie some time to respond.

Mr. Tony Martin: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I am told that cellulosic ethanol has not been proven to be economically viable yet. It will be like the road that the folks who got into ethanol in the first place have found, in that it is fraught with difficulties that they are now trying to chase. This speaks to the issue in front of us here today, which is that we have to be really careful and cautious.

The member spoke of Brazil. I am told as well that Brazil is into ethanol fuel, but at the expense of the rainforests. Is that what we want?

● (1705)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on my colleague’s speech because he touched on the issue that there are many uses for biomass product. In fact, a paper that was presented to the agricultural committee showed that if one wanted to get a better greenhouse gas reduction at a lower cost, it would be much simpler to make up straw pellets or wood pellets and put them into existing thermal situations than it is to create either cellulosic ethanol or just corn ethanol. The return is much greater.

There are a lot of unanswered questions even about the nature of biomass energy within this country. I would recommend that hon. members take a look at the study that was done by a Canadian company. Samson was the primary researcher on it from Quebec. It lays out very clearly what the issues are around the use of wood products or any other organic product in reducing CO₂ emissions.

When you talk about the nature of the interaction between wood pellet development in northern Ontario and the use of pulp in the industry, could you elaborate on that issue a bit more?

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I asked the member for Western Arctic earlier not to put questions directly to members but to do it in the third person and he is doing it again.

The hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie, very briefly.

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, he is absolutely correct. That is why, in our areas, we are trying to pull the various interests together to not only look at both the benefits and the opportunities but also the impacts. Some of them are very negative.

We are taking ourselves—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to engage in this debate because we are beginning to give some scrutiny to an emerging industry. I say “emerging industry” because it has developed over the course of the last decade in a fashion that seems to be changing the world literally overnight.

Government Orders

We have been dealing with legislation such as this for quite some time. I can say that in principle we need to support a bill such as this, although I do not know that we would be as supportive of the amendment.

In the debate today, we have seen that people are looking at the dynamics of this industry. The dynamics, as my colleague from Malpeque has said, go through agriculture, industry, energy and the environment.

I know my colleague from Malpeque can speak for himself, as he always does and does so forcefully, but I know what he means when he talks about cheap food prices, et cetera. He is talking about the prices paid at the farm gate. He is not talking about, at least in the way I interpret it, in terms of the amount of money that a consumer must pay for products at the point of purchase. He is looking at a situation that sees equitable return on an investment made and contribution given.

I know there are agricultural groups around the country that are calling for the government to get its hands off and to allow market forces to drive the new economy. Everyone in this place is in favour of rewarding initiative and rewarding enterprise but we need to keep in mind the impact this kind of development will have on the structure around the world, the usual economic dynamics.

For example, my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake said earlier that this would only have an impact on 2% of the land mass of Canada. It is nice to throw out a figure like that, but 48% of the land mass in Canada is covered by forest and about another 46% is covered by ice. When we are talking about the rest that is arable, if we are looking at a 2% mass, are we not talking about the overall mass and, in which case, it would be an enormous amount of land dedicated to biomass and biofuel production, or are we talking only about 2% of the arable land already available in Canada?

I think that is significant because we are talking about food policies and their impact worldwide. I will reflect for a moment in a moment on energy and biomass and biofuel.

If we think for a moment about what has been happening around the world where, as I said in the previous question, South Africa is already being considered the Middle East of the biofuel production business, it has in excess of one billion acres already dedicated toward the production of biomass for biofuel. In a part of the world that is constantly looking for food aid, we can imagine what is happening to the food sources.

In fact, in countries around the world where the agricultural production is dependent upon rainfall for its water sources, production costs and food costs have now gone up by 50% over last year, and that rise is escalating. It is escalating at such a rate that UN agencies are already concerned, not only about the quantum of demand for food aid, but also the cost. Over the last year, costs have increased by 20%. One can just imagine the demand on all the countries that are engaged in attempting to provide food aid to the most needy when the land closest by is being dedicated to biomass and biofuel production.

We are going down that same road. In North America, for example, Nebraska has decided that it will use as its economic strategy an increase in the land utilized for corn or biomass and

biofuel. Nebraska is dedicating an additional one million acres this year alone. It is already producing a billion gallons of ethanol per annum in order to feed the growing American demand, the American demand that has seen production plants increase from 100 to 150 last year and is expected to reach 450 plants in this coming year.

• (1710)

There will be a huge and constant demand as we cross over into environmental concerns and greenhouse gas emissions, especially in North America and in Europe where we see that 80% of personal energy consumption through vehicles takes place.

Of the 800 million vehicles on the road today, 70% of them are on roads in Europe or North America. As I said earlier on, when China and India begin to produce vehicles to meet a demand for an emerging middle class, it will equal North America and Europe.

Every time 10% of the population in India and in China buy a car, 200 million more vehicles will be on the road. Clearly, the demand on traditional energy sources, those greenhouse gas emitting sources, will be huge. It will be equally impressive on those new technologies that are emerging in the ethanol production and other biomass products.

I mentioned Brazil earlier on. My colleague on the opposite side made reference to Brazil as well. Brazil has 300 million acres dedicated to the production of biomass for the purpose of ethanol production. India already has 35 million acres dedicated to the same type of industry. Indonesia has 16 million acres. These are not places that we have traditionally associated with land utilization for the production of anything other than food.

My colleague from the NDP said a moment ago that they were doing it at the expense of the rain forest and the consequent result on multi-environment and on other issues associated with the depletion of rain forests, not only in the Amazon but everywhere else around the world.

We must deal with those pressures because they are closer to us today than we imagine. It is great to talk about the competitiveness and productivity of our own agricultural sector. We want our farmers to make more money but we want them to do it in terms of producing for the demand that is there in the world. For what? The first goal should be to provide, with all due respect to my colleague from Malpeque, cheap food or low cost, high quality food but not at the expense of the farmer. How many people would be in business if they could not get their money? We want them to do that but we also want them to be wary about the kinds of policies that may have implications for virtually everything else.

One area that I do not think has not been explored sufficiently is the true cost of the production of ethanol. Some of these factors, which we used to rain upon all the industrial enterprises not that long ago to include all the true inputs in industrial production, need to be applied to any kind of alternative energy sources.

However, we must develop the new technology for those energy sources. We need to build a green economy. We need to invest in innovation. We need to invest in the technologies that will make us not only competitive but environmentally friendly and conscious of the impact for greenhouse gas emissions.

Government Orders

However, we can never forget those who are less fortunate than us. As I said earlier on, over 40 million Americans who live below the poverty line will experience this year a 40% increase in the cost of their food.

In an environment where the economy is submitting to all the vagaries that we normally see in the cyclical economic environment, the last thing people need is to see the vulnerable, not only in North America, but everywhere else around the world, submit to the high pressures of excessive food costs at the expense of environmental issues, technological issues and international relations.

We owe it to ourselves in this kind of debate to ensure that our governments keeps their feet firmly to the ground and understand that the implications of amendments like this to a bill like this go well beyond the stated purpose of the debate in the House.

• (1715)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with some of the issues the member is raising because he is talking about the need for food in countries that cannot afford it. If we look at the developing world, we realize that they are agrarian-based societies. The best way to start generating wealth in an agrarian-based society is allow it to start getting paid for what it produces.

Here is an opportunity with biofuels where it can actually see an opportunity for increased revenue through the biofuel industry as well as have the incentive to grow more. The problem we have in today's world is that the commodity prices have been so low up until this year that there was no incentive, especially manually in developing countries, to go out and plant a crop.

It is important that we provide these countries with an incentive, and that incentive comes from the marketplace which we all can support, to plant more crops and with that generate more food for their people as well.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I fully understand that concept. There is no reason why anyone would plant anything in the ground if they are not going to get a return not only on their investment but also their labour and effort.

I fear that on occasion we tend to romanticize a career or a job decision that has long gone beyond the moment that we fixed it in time. While this absolutely true about family farms, many of those family farms are such in name only.

I do not think that any part of this debate is designed to in any way undermine the viability of any agricultural enterprise. I do not think anyone has that in mind and if they do, they are in the wrong place.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was intrigued by the member's comments with regard to the impact that this will have on the food supply and food security, particularly when we look at the whole world.

Many of us who paid attention to what happened in some of the third world jurisdictions, particularly Central and South America, will understand what happened when North America decided it was going to respond to its craving for coffee. Whole tracts of land were taken over to grow a crop that was a cash crop, the product that came to North America, but really did not provide for the local folks who

used to have that land to grow their own food, vegetables, fruit and so on. We saw the impact that has had on the world and some of our poorer countries.

That could actually happen here in Canada in our backyard if we are not careful. That is why we are asking for greater scrutiny on this brand new initiative, one that is taking us places we have never been before. The member might want to comment further on that.

• (1720)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his observation and it is quite fine to think in terms of oversight and scrutiny. My understanding of the bill and the bill that preceded this is that we already have the oversight capacity in this House. Whether we utilize that oversight capacity is another matter. Maybe the member is right to be concerned that people in governments do not always implement the kinds of things that they say they have already approved.

In general, it would be equally a mistake to think that people who actually consume an end product are culpable because the redistribution of the wealth that is generated as a result does not flow in its appropriate proportions to those who are at the origin of that production cycle.

The hon. member mentions coffee. Some of the wealth that has been created around coffee is just absolutely mind-boggling. I can cite an example because I happened to have studied this a little while ago. For example, in Italy alone there is the consumption of three espressos per day, per person, at a retail value of about \$180 million a day, every day of the year. That is only for that product. So there is a production cycle that should be producing wealth for the original farmers of the coffee beans and those who work the lands to generate that.

I cannot have an influence on the countries of origin. I can only have an impact on how we might view our responsibilities internationally. If the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. It is with regret that I must interrupt the hon. member. We are resuming debate, and the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh has the floor.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to the amendment to Bill C-33 that has been brought forward by my colleague.

In spite of the comments made by the last speaker, it is crucial that oversight by parliamentarians be an integral part of this bill and of this process within the department. The prior speaker raised a number of issues that emphasize the need for that oversight. The NDP is going to support this bill. Should it go ahead and become law of the land, it will impose that additional responsibility on us as parliamentarians.

My experience on these reviews has been less than positive because we do not follow the law and we do not fulfill our responsibility as regularly as we should.

Government Orders

There are other ways of doing it. If the committee that is ultimately responsible for this review is not entirely capable of doing it, the responsibility can be assigned to a subcommittee made up of members of Parliament who are particularly interested and knowledgeable with regard to the use of ethanol and its progress, and the use of it in our economy. Even a smaller committee can be put into place as a subcommittee of the standing committee.

We need to do that because of a number of points that have already been made, and let me just reiterate some of those.

Just in the last year there have been increasing riots, and I use that term advisedly, around the world with regard to the cost of food. As the former speaker suggested, this is not just happening in the undeveloped world. There were riots in Italy earlier this year over the cost of pasta, which of course comes from various grains, and the cost of those grains had escalated dramatically, by more than 100% in some cases. That ultimately is reflected in the end product.

I can tell members about my experience in my riding in the county of Essex. The cost of corn has more than doubled in a little over 12 months. It is true that is great for corn producers. Farmers in my community who are producing corn by and large are very happy with the increase in price because for too many years it has been too low to cover their input costs and allow them to make a living from the farm.

This doubling of cost is now significantly impacting dairy farmers as well as several hog farms and a significant number of poultry farms in the county of Essex. These farmers need the same corn that is now being used for ethanol because of the plant over in Chatham. That ethanol is taking the cost of their inputs up dramatically.

They have to compete with that new market that values that corn much higher than they are able to meet, and I have to say that quite bluntly. The cost of their feed grain has gone up by more than 100% in less than a year. A small farming operation faces great difficulty when it is faced with such a significant increase in the cost of a key ingredient for their operation over a short period of time.

There have also been food riots in Asia and Africa. Some NGOs are coming back and asking for hundreds of millions of dollars more to meet the demand in refugee camps and other areas where there is drought or famine. That is a direct result of the very dramatic escalating costs in grains.

● (1725)

In terms of Asia, for instance, I am hearing reports that there are a number of countries where again the cost of grain, rice in particular, has more than doubled in less than a year's time. There does not seem to be an end. For some countries, the estimate is that it has more than tripled in the past year or year and a half. A good deal of this is being driven by the demands that we are putting on the supply of grain for the use of ethanol.

I will use another example. Shortly after the second world war, Brazil made the conscious decision not to run its vehicles on carbon-based products but on ethanol. It has a requirement that 50% of all the fuel used in vehicles comes from sugar. Last year, Brazil, for the first time, was forced to curtail the amount of production of sugar that would go into the sugar market because of the demand it had for ethanol.

There was a very strong reaction and I do not think using the word "riot" is too strong a term. There were a number of large demonstrations over the fact that the population of Brazil could not access as much sugar as it had historically. The reason for that was that it needed the sugar for the purpose of producing ethanol.

At the end of the day, when we look at this amendment, and although we have overall some reservations on the bill we are generally supportive of it, it begs the attention of the House on an ongoing basis, in a parliamentary committee, to continue to review the use of food products, grains in particular.

One of the other points I want to make is that the review would also allow us the opportunity to continue to bring forward alternatives in the use of ethanol. Instead of actually using the food product, we could use the stock and waste, including garbage, in a number of ways, but there is a need to develop the technology.

There is a company right here in Ottawa, Iogen, that has done some great work in this area. It is using a product that is not food. It is using straw and stalks from other grain such as corn, et cetera. There are other experiments going on and plants operating around the globe that are using, for instance, waste products from forestry and they are able to produce ethanol.

The other thing we have to be monitoring on an ongoing basis is the efficiency of this. If we are using food products and not achieving an efficiency ratio that is substantially better than carbon-based technology, then we have to look for those alternatives and develop those technologies.

● (1730)

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully while my friend from the NDP was speaking. I can remember vividly, shortly before and after I was elected to this place, meeting with some members of my farming community, particularly the grains and oilseeds part of the farming community. I listened to some third and fourth generation farmers who said they were at the brink of losing their multi-generational farms. Now when we meet, they say they are beginning to have some pluses, some black ink on their ledgers.

I hear now from the NDP that food is too expensive and we have to shut down ethanol production because people cannot afford their food. In other words, it wants really cheap food and for farmers to go out of business. That is what I am hearing.

I also had a chance to speak to my friend from northern Canada and he talked about his community heating with wood pellets. I lived in northern Ontario and Shell Oil Company, BioShell Ltd., had two wood pellet plants when I moved there. When I moved back to southern Ontario less than four and a half years later, those two plants were closed. Why were they closed? They were closed because the price of oil, natural gas and propane went down, and it no longer became economically viable for the wood pellet plants to stay in business. I suspect that because oil and gas prices are going up, some of those alternate fuel plants will come in.

I am at a loss. I am at a complete loss as to why we should wish our farmers not to get a reasonable price for their products, because now they have multi-markets and some value added. My farmers in my riding are very happy with the situation with regard ethanol and food prices.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I know it is the end of the day and I am probably being a little facetious here, but I was going to suggest that the member for Northumberland—Quinte West have his ears checked.

I grew up on a farm and my sister and brother-in-law still run that farm. I have nephews who operate farms in the Essex county area. I did not for one minute, nor did anybody from the NDP, suggest for one minute shutting down ethanol production. We are not talking about that.

What we are talking about is that we have a responsibility as parliamentarians to recognize the impact it could have. It does not just mean positive things. Poultry producers in my riding are having serious trouble meeting their feed bills. I am worried about them, as should everybody who is looking at this sensibly and with any degree of wisdom.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Northumberland—Quinte West went on quite an attack against the member opposite saying that the NDP were basically in favour of a cheap food policy. I do not believe that.

However, I will say that the member for Northumberland—Quinte West, by supporting his leader's position on the Wheat Board, is certainly supporting the disempowerment of farmers in western Canada who are challenged by the corporate sector.

Yes, there are concerns about food supply, but is not the biggest problem we have with regard to food supply in the world some of the trade agreements and the dominant position that the multinational grain trade and others are in, in not only exploiting farmers but exploiting people around the world? That government over there seems to support that multinational sector against farmers in this country.

• (1735)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the analysis by the member for Malpeque. I see it in my riding. I see it in that plant in Chatham. Most of the corn is coming from large corporate farms. They are agribusinesses that are supplying the market on our side and there is no regulation of it. I am not suggesting protectionism here in the extreme, but there is no level playing field here.

The member for Malpeque is absolutely right. The problem we are confronting here is one of a Conservative government that has blinkers on when it comes to protecting our farmers.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I spent five years of my career, prior to becoming a member of Parliament, with an organization called United Co-operatives of Ontario which has over 100 retail outlets across the province of Ontario. Ethanol was one of our big new areas of endeavour, and now most Canadians will recognize that ethanol as a biofuel is very popular and highly used in some countries but not in Canada yet because of the production and the distribution.

Private Members' Business

I have a constituent who bought a very expensive vehicle, E85 to operate on ethanol. The nearest place for him to get ethanol fuel for his vehicle is in Guelph or Ottawa. It gives one a sense of where we are on this.

I know we are talking about the amendment but, generally, with respect to the bill, as the members have noted, we also have some changing circumstances with regard to the supply of crops that provide what is necessary to produce ethanol. All of a sudden, the demand around the world for crops, such as wheat and corn, etcetera, are in greater demand in terms of the supply. A strategy is going on with regard to food and biofuel uses, demands and priorities.

I intend to continue my speech when we resume debate and I want to address specifically the amendment. I know the member for Eglinton—Lawrence had a few words. This is quite an important bill and, from time to time, although we do not realize it, there are people in this place who bring to Parliament some expertise and insight into some of the realities that face the agricultural community, particularly farmers, regardless of whether it be in the feed and crops area or in the dairy side as well.

It is a very important sector. Seventy per cent of the people involved in agriculture are employed outside of the farm. It is referred to as off-farm gate. It is a very important sector. It requires the attention of Parliament and I hope we will continue this debate at the next sitting of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 5:39, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private member's business as listed on today's order paper.

When we return to the study of Bill C-33, the hon. member for Mississauga South will have seven minutes left.

* * *

• (1740)

[Translation]

BILL C-531—CURRENCY ACT

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It seems that there is an administrative error in the text of Bill C-531. The Chair has therefore requested that the bill be reprinted and that the new version be posted on the parliamentary website.

[English]

I am tabling, for the information of all members, a copy of the letter received by the Speaker from the law clerk, outlining the required changes.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM ACT

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ) moved that Bill C-505, An Act to amend the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (non-application in Quebec), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Private Members' Business

He said: Mr. Speaker, obviously, I am very pleased to introduce Bill C-505, An Act to amend the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (non-application in Quebec) today. Before explaining the implications of this bill, I would like to read the amendment that this bill seeks to make to the preamble of the act. This amendment is in the text of Bill C-505.

AND WHEREAS Quebeckers form a nation and must therefore possess all the tools needed to define their identity and protect their common values, particularly as regards the protection of the French language, the separation of church and state, and gender equality;

We believe that this preamble must be used to interpret the following amendment:

Section 3 of the Act is amended by adding the following after subsection (2):

(3) The Government of Canada's multiculturalism policy does not apply in Quebec.

This is what is being brought forward in this House by the Bloc Québécois. As I have mentioned a few times, this bill is part of a series of proposals made by the Bloc Québécois. During last Tuesday's opposition day, we urged the government to take concrete action to give effect to the recognition of the Quebec nation. In addition, my colleague from Drummond tabled Bill C-482 to make French the language of work for employees of firms under federal jurisdiction.

Our caucus is working on other bills to provide some substance with respect to recognition of the Quebec nation, as the member for Jonquière—Alma was saying. More specifically, the bill we are presently debating would require the federal government to exempt Quebec from the application of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act.

As I was saying, this bill recommends that action be taken because everyone now recognizes, at least in theory, the national character of Quebec. Now that we have recognized the nation of Quebec, we must take concrete action accordingly. Bill C-505 does just that by allowing Quebec to apply, in its territory, within its nation, its own model of integration for new arrivals and to be exempted from the Canadian model, or Canadian multiculturalism, which is derived from British multiculturalism.

I would like to point out that the Quebec nation is a reality that has been recognized in Quebec for a very long time, by the federalists as well as the Quebec sovereigntists. It is a reality for which there is consensus. We did not have to wait for it to be recognized by this House of Commons for it to be a reality that was felt, lived and recognized by Quebeckers. On October 30, 2003, the Quebec National Assembly unanimously adopted the following motion:

That the National Assembly reaffirm that the people of Quebec form a nation.

I would like to draw the attention of my colleagues to the fact that the motion does not say that Quebeckers form a nation if the rest of Canada remains as is. We are not subject to the constitutional forms that the Canadian nation might decide to adopt. Nor does the motion say that Quebec is a nation if it opts for sovereignty. This motion says that Quebeckers form a nation. Period.

Under the terms of the motion that was adopted by this House, the same attitude should guide parliamentarians here. It is no coincidence that the National Assembly of Quebec specified, in the motion I read earlier, that is was reaffirming that the people of Quebec form a nation. For at least 40 years now, if not 50, the

premiers of Quebec, regardless of political stripe, have reaffirmed that the people of Quebec form a nation.

I will go ahead and quote Jean Lesage, who said in November 1963:

Quebec did not defend provincial autonomy simply for the principle of it, but because, for Quebec, autonomy was the specific condition not for its survival, which is assured, but for its affirmation as a people [and a nation].

That was in 1963.

● (1745)

I could also talk about Daniel Johnson Sr., who also said a number of times that Quebeckers form a nation. According to him, if Quebec were unable to find equality within Canada, then it had the choice of opting for national independence.

René Lévesque said in June 1980, that "Canada is composed of two equal nations; Quebec is the home and the heart of one of those nations and, as it possesses all the attributes of a distinct national community, it has an inalienable right to self-determination... [This right to control its own national destiny] is the most fundamental right that Quebec society has". That was in June 1980.

I could also talk about Jacques Parizeau and Robert Bourassa, but I want to close on one last quote from October 1999, by Lucien Bouchard, who sat in this House, as hon. members know. He said, "The Quebec people adhere to the democratic concept of a nation characterized by its language, French, and a diverse culture, and which is broadly open to international immigration—". We have here undeniable proof that Quebeckers form a nation and that this has been a consensus in Quebec for an extremely long time.

As mentioned in the last quote from Lucien Bouchard, taken from the time when he was at the helm in Quebec, the Quebec nation is open to international immigration but not to the kind of integration practised in Canada, which is to say, multiculturalism. This point arises among all those who criticize Canadian multiculturalism and commend the Quebec model, because there really is a Quebec model.

There is nothing new, therefore, in Bill C-505 regarding Quebec. The model already exists. It is slowly taking hold, despite the confusion sown by the existence of this other multicultural model. The Government of Quebec just announced last week some more investments to further its method of integrating immigrants. It is a model that could be called interculturalism. This method of integrating newcomers requires everyone, whether already in Quebec or just arriving, to respect the shared values of Quebec society as a whole. These include secular public institutions and the equality of men and women. The Quebec model also requires all citizens to have a knowledge of French, which is the common public language.

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This is a very important point because if we do not have a common public language, it is impossible to have a democratic debate and the kind of public discussions that enable a society to progress. It only creates cacophony. This is done with the utmost respect for the anglophone national minority in Quebec, whose institutions have been protected for a great many years.

People will say, of course, that there are two official languages in Canada. But that is the problem. In Quebec, there is only one official language and that is French. In actual fact, of course, we know that there is really only one public language in Canada too and that is English. This problem sows confusion in Quebec, though, and hinders the francization of immigrants.

The requirement that all Quebecers respect our common values and learn the common language of French, at least to some extent, in order to take part in the public debate is offset by our recognition of cultural pluralism. Cultural pluralism refers to the contributions made by everyone all over Quebec to help enrich our common culture. This Quebec model can be found in other countries as well and has become a source of inspiration for them.

The idea of Canadian multiculturalism is the exact opposite. It rejects all notions of common values and culture. In fact, the idea of multiculturalism promotes a society of multiple solitudes. Each newcomer, each immigrant keeps his or her language, culture and customs and is protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In Quebec, I would remind you, we have the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.

Instead of using Quebec's model and promoting one culture, one language and certain common values in public life, it promotes the coexistence of multiple cultures. This idea of multiculturalism has always been rejected by Quebec. I will come back to that.

• (1750)

To demonstrate that multiculturalism is as I have just said, allow me to quote a document from Citizenship and Immigration Canada titled "A Newcomer's Introduction to Canada". It is a general reference for newcomers that is available on the department's website. I am reading from page 31:

Canada is populated by people who have come from every part of the world. Through the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, the government encourages Canadians to take pride in their language, religion and heritage and to keep their customs and traditions, as long as they don't break Canadian laws.

This quotation from Citizenship and Immigration Canada is the best illustration of multiculturalism and of what is rejected by Quebec.

I would also like to say there is some uneasiness within the Canadian nation concerning multiculturalism. I would like to draw the attention of the House to a letter written by Carol Dunn, published in today's *National Post* on page A17, in which she says that her 16-year-old son, who attends a Toronto high school, is often asked where he is from. He has learned to answer, "Scotland and England", because when he says he is "Canadian", he is told there is no such thing. I draw the House's attention to this letter because it is an excellent illustration of the problem that exists even for the Canadian nation in its chosen model of integration for newcomers.

As I said, in Quebec's case, this model of multiculturalism has been rejected, especially since that model trivializes Quebec's position within Canada and refutes the existence of the Quebec nation because we would all be additional ethnic groups—French-Canadian ethnic groups or Quebecers of French origin, depending on the definitions that people, or federalists, wish to give the notion, being one ethnic group among the others. Federalists, like sovereignists in Quebec, have long rejected multiculturalism as a model for integration.

Already in 1971, Robert Bourassa, a Liberal premier and federalist, wrote to Pierre Elliott Trudeau that "that notion [of multiculturalism] hardly seems compatible with Quebec's reality".

Quebec's model of interculturalism, on the other hand, overcomes immigrants' feeling of isolation. The notions of multiculturalism tend to isolate newcomers in their culture and customs. These two conflicting models exist in the same place. And even though sovereignty is the only way to clear up this confusion, it seems to me that Bill C-505 would recognize, not only the level of integration in Quebec, but also the fact that the Quebec nation is capable of drafting its own laws on applying an integration model for newcomers.

The confusion caused by the conflict between Canadian multiculturalism and Quebec interculturalism sends a message that is very difficult for immigrants to understand. Unfortunately, I will not have time to quote an excerpt from the brief the Conseil des relations interculturelles du Québec presented to the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, which clearly shows that these two integration models confuse newcomers and make it very hard for them to understand the message of the Quebec nation.

Canadian multiculturalism promotes Canada's two official languages, French and English, while Quebec interculturalism promotes French as the common public language and the language of communication. Quebec has already developed tools to protect and promote French in Quebec. Although nothing is perfect and there is still a great deal of work to be done, the application of interculturalism in Quebec has enabled French to make progress, while multiculturalism is a constant barrier that sets French back. French is and must remain the common language of the Quebec nation, with all due respect for Quebec's aboriginal peoples and anglophone minority.

Even though only full sovereignty for Quebec can promote and protect the French language, Bill C-505 will lessen the influence of multiculturalism in Quebec and the negative effects I mentioned that are leading to the anglicization of many newcomers to Quebec.

In conclusion, if we recognize Quebec as a nation, we must walk the talk and take real steps to give effect to that recognition. The bill that I am introducing today and that I would like to see adopted by this House is one more step in that direction.

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•(1755)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it very insulting that the member for Joliette is claiming that outside Quebec, the only real language is English. What about the other francophones across Canada who fight for their language day in and day out? We are talking about multiculturalism. How great that the Bloc itself does not even recognize its own language outside of Quebec.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, the member's comments just go to show the confusion surrounding multiculturalism. I did not say that French is not important in the rest of Canada and throughout the world. What I said was that the real official language of the Canadian nation is English.

That nation has a linguistic minority, a francophone minority, which the Bloc Québécois supports much more than the Conservatives do, by consistently demanding respect for the Official Languages Act, which is not the case with the Conservative government, and was not the case with the Liberals.

That is not what I was talking about. I was talking about the fact that Quebec needs the tools to ensure that French is the common public language. This is not possible through multiculturalism. This was proven long ago, even by friends of the Conservatives. If they ask their ADQ friends what they think about multiculturalism, or ask Quebec Liberals what they think about multiculturalism, all of these parties, including the Parti Québécois have said so. The National Assembly has said so many times. Multiculturalism is an obstacle to the integration of new immigrants under the Quebec model, and an obstacle to the francization of new immigrants.

We are not talking about the same thing. I think the member is a beautiful example of the confusion surrounding multiculturalism.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his very eloquent speech. My question is, in concrete terms, what does he mean by "multiculturalism"? Does the concept not defy definition? Are there federal or provincial programs in Quebec—concrete, reality-based programs—that the member feels are obstacles to integration? What does he mean when he says that multiculturalism is an obstacle to the integration of newcomers in Quebec and elsewhere?

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, that gives me an opportunity to quote the excerpt that I know by heart but did not have time to quote earlier, from the submission that the Conseil des relations interculturelles du Québec presented to the Bouchard-Taylor commission. It said:

Today, the programs and practices of the secretariat of multiculturalism and Canadian identity do not encourage separate development and activities based on single-ethnicity groups.

That was the case under Pierre Elliott Trudeau. But once again, as we all know, people in Canada are starting to ask questions about developing common ground to achieve the social cohesion that any society requires. The board's submission goes on to say:

However, the ideological way of thinking that emerged in the 1970s, which presented society as a mosaic of cultures, has since been encouraging certain groups to develop beliefs that clash with Quebec's vision.

We must be very clear about this. I mentioned it earlier. The Quebec model is in place, interculturalism is in place, but the federal government's ideological vision of multiculturalism is an obstacle to integration and we have to put an end to the confusion. I suggest we do so by adopting Bill C-505.

•(1800)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Hochelaga may ask a very brief question.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, could our colleague remind this House of the main components of interculturalism: taking part in democratic institutions, having French as a common public language and believing in the equality of men and women?

Can our colleague remind this House that even though multiculturalism has no real substance, this Parliament adopted a multiculturalism act in 1988? If multiculturalism is not concrete, it is difficult to imagine why there is still a Secretary of State for Multiculturalism. Can he remind the House of this on my behalf?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Hochelaga took all the available time. However, I will allow the hon. member for Joliette 20 seconds to answer.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. The member for Hochelaga gave a good summary of what interculturalism means: a common language, common values, a common culture for a society, a nation that is enriched by the contributions of newcomers from all over the world. That is what we want in Quebec.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are here today to debate the bill introduced by the hon. member for Joliette. This bill aims, among other things, to exempt Quebec from the Canadian Multiculturalism Act.

The concerns of Quebecers in the area of immigration and the integration of newcomers are shared by the rest of Canada.

Statistics from the 2006 census, recently published by Statistics Canada, indicate that there are now more than 215 different ethnic origins represented in the country, 11 of which have surpassed the one million mark in population.

Canada's ethnocultural portrait has never been so diverse. Clearly, this means new challenges will arise and we must be able to overcome them together. Immigration plays, and will continue to play, a crucial role in Canada's development, today and tomorrow. Canada's multiculturalism policies must constantly adapt to our changing social realities.

Canada is recognized around the world for its multicultural and human rights principles. Our approach allows us to create an inclusive society that values differences and promotes a feeling of belonging.

Nevertheless, according to the hon. member for Joliette, the Canadian multiculturalism model creates confusion among newcomers and completely contradicts the Quebec model based on interculturalism.

However, when looking at the two systems in place, it is the similarities that stand out, more so than the differences.

The primary functions of the Quebec department of immigration and cultural communities are to support cultural communities by promoting their full participation in Quebec society, to encourage openness to pluralism within society and to facilitate intercultural ties among Quebecers.

These functions are clearly completely in line with the priorities of our government's multiculturalism program, which aims to support the economic, social, and cultural integration of new Canadians and cultural communities, to facilitate programs for at-risk cultural youth, and to promote inter-cultural understanding and Canadian values.

The Quebec government's Programme d'appui aux relations civiques et interculturelles, or PARCI, aims to “develop knowledge and understanding of Quebec's history, values and democratic institutions among immigrants and members of cultural communities.”

Clearly, this objective is very similar to that of our multiculturalism program, which aims to “promote inter-cultural understanding and Canadian values (democracy, freedom, human rights and rule of law)”.

The irreconcilable nature of the two models, as suggested by my Bloc Québécois colleague, was contradicted in the consultation paper prepared by the Bouchard-Taylor Commission which states, “Over time, it might be said that they have evolved in a convergent manner and the difference between them has faded.”

You will note that this convergence of views is also reflected in the priority given to the fight against racism put forward by both programs.

PARCI speaks of “preventing and fighting prejudice, discrimination, intolerance, racism and exclusion”, whereas the multiculturalism program seeks to help “communities and the broad public engage in informed dialogue and sustained action to combat racism”.

The words are different but the message is the same: a Canada that is proud of and respectful toward its cultural diversity.

Given these great similarities, it is not surprising that a number of initiatives and projects financed by the Government of Canada through the multiculturalism program have the support of the Government of Quebec.

Action Week Against Racism, supported by both levels of government, is one of the most important activities in the fight against racism and in bringing cultures together in Quebec.

There is also the travelling exhibit, “Québec interculturelle depuis 400 ans déjà”, which highlights the contributions of Canadians of diverse backgrounds to the growth and development of Quebec City.

• (1805)

Similarly, projects initiated in Quebec and supported by the Governments of Quebec and Canada have been used as models elsewhere in the country. Such is the case for the Equitas International Centre for Human Rights Education, which teaches

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young people about human rights and intercultural relations through a day camp program. This initiative, which began in Montreal, is now used in Vancouver, Toronto, Winnipeg, Moncton, Dieppe, and Fredericton.

If our priorities and objectives were so different, would such collaborations be possible? The answer seems obvious: of course not.

When 82% of Canadians agree that Canada's multicultural composition is one of the best things about this country, we have to believe that, although it is not perfect, the Canadian model is working. This success is seen equally in Quebec, where 75% of new arrivals who settled in the province between 2001 and 2006 have chosen French as their primary language.

Upon reading the recent report from the Office québécoise de la langue française, we also see that in the area of culture, there is a marked increase in the consumption of French cultural products. The percentage of allophones who watch productions in French has gone from 27% to 54.5%. What is more, the percentage of those who read newspapers in French only has reached 51.8%.

It seems clear to me that the multiculturalism and interculturalism models, beyond the inherent differences in the specific context of Quebec, have one and the same goal: to promote the full participation of all Canadians in society. In light of this fact, it seems obvious that Quebec has everything to gain by staying. It is with one voice that Canada wants to welcome immigrants who choose this land as their home.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in this House today to participate in the debate on Bill C-505 from the Bloc Québécois, which I, and the official opposition multiculturalism critic, the member for Brampton West, both oppose.

I have a lot of respect for the work done by Bloc members on human rights issues, but I think Canada's multiculturalism policy should remain a policy that protects human rights—particularly the right to equality and the right to be protected against discrimination—a policy that promotes and protects both diversity and the uniqueness of Quebec, and that is enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

We must appreciate the transformative impact the charter has had, and that it has enabled us to change from a parliamentary democracy to a constitutional democracy, where individuals and groups, including those in Quebec, have access to a panoply of rights and remedies that were not available before.

The transformative impact of the charter is not limited to the effects of the provision providing for equality before and under the law—“equal protection and equal benefit of the law”—; the charter also provides for the preservation of cultural heritage. Section 27 states:

This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.

This includes Quebecers.

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It is not just that this principle is indivisible, but it is an important part of a celebration of equality and diversity as parts of the same general charter. This makes me wonder how in Quebec—and I do this myself as a Quebecker—we can invoke the charter, as we should, to protect legal and equality rights, but at the same time, declare that we want to invalidate the meaning and application of the multiculturalism principles and policies within the province of Quebec? The charter also effectively protects the values of Quebec.

In fact, I have several questions about the content of the Bloc proposal. Why would the Bloc object to—and want to invalidate—the application of a policy intended to “promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution...and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to such participation” and “ensure that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity”? Is that not part of Quebec's values?

Why would the Bloc want to invalidate the application of a policy intended to “promote the understanding and creativity that arise from the interaction between individuals and communities of different origins”? Is that not part of Quebec's values?

Why would the Bloc want to invalidate the application in Quebec of a policy, in fact, a basic principle, to “recognize the existence of communities whose members share a common origin and their historic contribution to Canadian society, and enhance their development”? Is that not part of Quebec's values?

Why would the Bloc want to invalidate the application in Quebec of a policy intended to “strengthen the status and use of the official languages”? Does the Bloc really want to eliminate the application in Quebec of a law designed to “preserve and enhance” the official languages, including French?

In short, the Bloc Québécois bill does not take into account the fact that multiculturalism is an integral part of the charter, in general, and also an integral part of promoting and protecting the principle of equality, in particular, as well as a basic value in Quebec and a fundamental characteristic of Quebec society.

In 1993, when the Bloc formed the official opposition, the Bloc members did not oppose the amendments to the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, when the act was amended to recognize the creation of the territory of Nunavut. Why did the Bloc vote to broaden the application of this act to Nunavut when today it does not want the act to apply to Quebec?

● (1810)

It seems to me that the real reason the Bloc is opposed to the multiculturalism policy, which carries with it the right to equality, is that it is opposed to federalism. The Bloc will therefore not support the concept of a Quebec nation within Canada, as I do, but only the concept of a Quebec nation outside Canada.

In conclusion, equality, multiculturalism, diversity, uniqueness and the uniqueness of a distinct Quebec society are concepts that can coexist in harmony. It is important to understand why the Bloc introduced this bill today. Although the House adopted a motion saying that Quebeckers form a nation, the Bloc does not like the words that come after that statement, the words “within Canada”.

● (1815)

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Discussions have taken place between all parties and I believe that you would find consent for the following motion. I move:

That during debate scheduled for later this day on the motion to concur in the third report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, no dilatory motions, quorum calls or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair and at the conclusion of this debate, the motion to concur in the third report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics shall be deemed carried without amendment on division.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Galipeau): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-505, An Act to amend the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (non-application in Quebec), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to the bill by the member for Joliette which proposes in part that the Canadian Multiculturalism Act does not apply in Quebec.

Before I speak directly to the bill, I want to point out to the members of the House that the NDP has already worked in the interest of Quebeckers in a number of areas. We did so when we showed support for the recognition of Quebec as a nation. We in the NDP have supported better protection for francophone workers. We have proposed bills that included asymmetry on child care and education.

In addition to our own initiatives, the NDP has supported bills by the Bloc in the past, but we believe Bill C-505 proposes to make changes that have broad implications for Quebec that Quebeckers themselves would question. On this one we think the Bloc's proposition goes too far and as a result, our members will not be supporting this bill.

Often in this House the Bloc members suggest that they alone can represent the interests and aspirations of Quebecers, but we do not think that is true. For instance the NDP believes that in order to build on the distinctiveness of Quebec, we do not need to tear down the positive effects of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act.

Canada was the first country in the world to pass a national multiculturalism law. I would submit that the province of Quebec and many of its communities have benefited in a significant way from the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988. The act acknowledges multiculturalism as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society with an integral role in the decision making process of the federal government.

It was directed toward the preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act sought to assist in the preservation of culture and language, which would include the French language and the French culture. The act also sought to reduce discrimination, to enhance cultural awareness and understanding, and to promote culturally sensitive institutional change at the federal level that was required at the time and continues to be.

I believe that the very nature of the act works in the interest of all Quebecers and all Canadians. The act states that it will work to: encourage and assist the business community, labour organizations, voluntary and other private organizations, as well as public institutions, in ensuring full participation in Canadian society, including the social and economic aspects of individuals of all origins and their communities, and in promoting respect and appreciation for the multicultural reality of Canada; and provide support to individuals and groups or organizations for the purpose of preserving, enhancing and promoting multiculturalism in Canada; and undertake such other projects or programs in respect of multiculturalism, not by law assigned to any other federal institution, as are designed to promote the multiculturalism policy of Canada.

As I alluded to earlier, many multicultural groups and municipalities in Quebec, including the city of Montreal, receive funding for certain cultural events and programs which is provided by Canadian heritage under its multiculturalism program.

By passing the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, Canada became the first country in the world to pass a national multiculturalism law clearly reaffirming multiculturalism as a fundamental value of Canadian society.

Today if we ask Canadians to describe Canada, 85% describe Canada as being a multicultural society. For many Canadians, multiculturalism refers to the presence and persistence of diverse racial and ethnic minorities who define themselves as different and who wish to remain so, their own nation, so to speak.

Ideologically multiculturalism consists of a relatively coherent set of ideas and ideals pertaining to the celebration of Canada's cultural diversity.

Multiculturalism at the policy level is structured around the management of diversity through formal initiatives in the federal, provincial and municipal domains.

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Finally, multiculturalism is the process by which racial and ethnic minorities compete to obtain support from central authorities for the achievement of certain goals and aspirations. Canada's cultural diversity is manifest at the level of ethnic and immigrant composition.

• (1820)

At this point, I would reiterate that the new multiculturalism policy, which came into effect in 1988, offered a clearer sense of purpose and direction. The act acknowledged multiculturalism as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society with an integral role in the decision making process of the federal government.

In seeking a balance between cultural distinctiveness and equality, the act specified the right of all to identify with the cultural heritage of their choice, yet retain full and equitable participation in all aspects of Canadian society.

In effect, the act sought to preserve, enhance and incorporate cultural differences into the functioning of Canadian society, while ensuring equal access and full participation for all Canadians in the social, political and economic spheres.

A crucially important focus of the act was on the eradication of racism and removal of discriminatory barriers as being incompatible with Canada's commitment to human rights. I would suggest that multiculturalism serves as a positive instrument for change.

I understand that some Quebecers have expressed unease about the federal multiculturalism policy since its inception, but I would say that the efforts of Quebec to protect and promote its language and culture are not contradictory with multiculturalism.

We in the NDP do not see the relationship between Quebec and Canada being win-lose situations all the time like the Bloc seems to. We like to think in terms of creating win-win situations. We salute Quebec's effort in many regards, but that does not mean we have to throw out the law on multiculturalism.

It is important for those involved in this debate, no matter which side they come from, to realize that there is still a special contract between the two founding nations of Canada. That contract is intact but challenged from time to time in this rapidly changing world.

Some critics hold the opinion that the multiculturalism policy has promoted too much diversity in recent years because it emphasizes the differences of Canadians rather than the values of Quebecers and Canadians. On the other hand, defenders of Canada's multiculturalism argue that it encourages integration by telling immigrants they do not have to choose between preserving their cultural heritage and participating in Canadian society. Rather, they can do both. Also, many have come to the conclusion that ultimately our multiculturalism policy has actually helped integration.

There is so much more that can be said in defence of the value of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, but I am sure other points will arise in the course of this debate.

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I will close by saying that when it comes to preserving their language and culture, the NDP supports the aspirations of Quebecers. We in the NDP view the Canadian Multiculturalism Act as an important tool that is not in contradiction with those aspirations.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise here this evening to debate the bill put forward by my colleague, the hon. member for Joliette, that is, Bill C-505, which aims to exempt Quebec from the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. I would first like to congratulate my colleague from Joliette for introducing a bill that is so important for the Quebec nation of course, but also for Quebec and Canada.

When the House of Commons passed a motion in November 2006 recognizing the existence of the Quebec nation, everyone wondered what this recognition actually meant or would mean. From the very beginning, we were of course in favour of Canada's recognition of this notion of nationhood. Quebecers have known for a very long time that they form a nation, but to see that recognized by the House of Commons is quite meaningful.

However, since that time, we have been asking the government to tell us how it intends to concretely bring forward initiatives that would incorporate into everyday actions, government actions, the notion of the Quebec nation.

The Bloc Québécois did not wait for the government to take action. It decided to make some suggestions for all parliamentarians to give the concept of the Quebec nation a tangible and effective meaning. Nationally, internally, we decided to issue a number of ideas.

In order for the Quebec National Assembly to have all the tools or means necessary to make choices for the nation, we first have to agree on what is meant by resolving the fiscal imbalance. This is one of the paths the Bloc Québécois is proposing to the government, to truly and effectively resolve the fiscal imbalance.

Of course, there is the entire issue related to culture. As a member of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, it is clear that when I sit in that committee, I would like to hear my colleagues from all political parties and from the government say that the Quebec nation can express itself differently when it comes to culture and can also have all the tools it needs to promote its culture. Until now, we have to admit that the Minister of Canadian Heritage does not, in fact, want this notion of Quebec culture to be entrenched. The proof is that she still refuses to admit that Quebec has its own film industry.

There is also the issue of Quebec's place in the world. How can the Quebec nation recognized by this House express itself on the international stage? We know very well that what was proposed by the current government for Quebec, that is a seat at UNESCO if and only if Quebec agreed with Canada, means nothing. In light of the recognition of Quebec, you would expect that Quebecers would be recognized as a nation and that it would have a certain number of extended powers in terms of Quebec's representation internationally.

A little earlier, I heard the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek say that the Bloc Québécois is going too far with this bill. I wonder why. Basically, we are just identifying in a clear, distinct and

precise manner the way in which the Quebec nation can express itself by showing that in Quebec, interculturalism is a way of life. Canada, on the other hand, has adopted the multiculturalism model.

• (1825)

The member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek was saying that he expected to find a win-win situation. In my opinion, if Canada wishes to continue with multiculturalism and if Quebec, for its part, wholeheartedly embraces interculturalism then that is a win-win situation. At present, as he mentioned, Quebecers do not identify with multiculturalism.

The Bloc Québécois has introduced a set of proposals expressly in order to put forward a certain number of elements so that the Quebec nation has a status that is more than just the simple recognition of the nation in empty words. These elements would foster a win-win situation for the nation of Canada and the nation of Quebec.

Earlier, the member for Beauport—Limoilou seemed to be saying that immigrants who settle in Quebec do not really experience confusion. I disagree with that point of view. A document published by the Secretary of State of Canada entitled, "How to Become a Canadian Citizen", says that in Canada, there is no official culture. As an ardent defender of Quebec culture, reading that kind of thing scares me a lot. Everyone knows that in Quebec, there is a culture, a strong culture as expressed by our artists, our artisans, our film, our dance, our television, our way of creating pictorial art. All of these things describe our Quebec culture.

So when an immigrant arrives in Quebec and reads an official document from the Canadian government that says there is no official culture, that person might be surprised to see us defend the existence of the Quebec culture so fiercely because that immigrant no doubt does not realize that there is a difference between Quebec and Canada.

Earlier, my colleague from Joliette very eloquently pointed out that language policies in Quebec and Canada are completely different. Canada has bilingualism, the two official languages policy, while in Quebec, the official language is French. From the outset, we have to make it clear to people who settle in Quebec that there is a common language: not English, but French.

In that respect, the Bloc Québécois also made another legislative proposal through our colleague from Drummond, to entrench French as the common language of work in Quebec. This is yet another proposal that arises from our desire to give shape to the notion passed by the House of Commons to recognize the existence of a nation for Quebecers.

That is why the bill introduced by my colleague from Joliette is absolutely relevant and, in my opinion, should be adopted by all parliamentarians. It would enable the Canadian and Quebec nations to find common ground that would allow each to develop in its own way, as they see fit, and in the best interest of the citizens living within their respective borders.

Routine Proceedings

•(1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages has the floor. Although he has ten minutes, he will only get six tonight. He will have the other four when debate resumes.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today in the House to speak to Bill C-505.

This is a very important debate. If this bill were to pass, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act would no longer apply to the province of Quebec. That would be an appalling situation because everyone benefits from multiculturalism, including the people of Quebec.

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act is a pillar of the Canadian legal system that promotes diversity. In addition to the Canadian Bill of Rights, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and other such documents, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act helps to strengthen and reinforce our pluralistic society.

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act provides many benefits and applies to all Canadians, including the people of Quebec. For example, it states that multiculturalism is a core value of Canadian society. It also encourages federal institutions to adhere to such values as respect and equity and equality for the members of various groups. We expect these institutions, including those that serve Quebecers of course, to respond to the needs of all Canadians of all origins through their programs, policies and services.

Finally, I should mention that the Canadian Multiculturalism Act helps protect the rights of all Canadians and encourages all members of society to participate fully. The act celebrates Canada's diverse heritage and recognizes the contributions made by all Canadians, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, racial, religious or linguistic origins.

In view of the positive effects of this act, it is hardly surprising that so many Canadians from all across our marvellous country are deeply and unfailingly attached to the principle of multiculturalism. Surveys have shown that 68% of Canadians believe that our multicultural society helps to prevent extremist opinions and acts from posing a serious problem. In addition, 75% of Canadians agree that it is better for Canada to have a variety of people practising different religions. What is even more impressive is that 42% of Canadians think that Canada's multicultural composition is one of its best features.

Of course, even though so many Canadians appreciate our country's multicultural composition, we still face some challenges. For example, the social and economic integration of new Canadians is not what it should be. Studies have shown that there is a 15% difference in income between visible minorities and other Canadians. Furthermore, 37% of visible minorities have low incomes, compared to 16% of the rest of the population. That is unacceptable. We must work even harder to ensure that immigrants and their children can fully achieve the Canadian dream.

We must also strive to build communities that truly reflect our country's diversity and avoid the predominance of ethnic enclaves.

We must encourage more civic involvement by providing better education for our citizens and more in-depth knowledge about Canada for all Canadians. We must find the right balance between protecting public safety and individual freedoms.

We must also ensure that immigrants do not bring conflicts that originated in foreign countries to Canada, and we must prevent the radicalization of the most vulnerable members of new cultural communities.

•(1835)

At the same time, we must find the right balance between respecting the customs of new communities and recognizing well-established Canadian values.

In the interest of tackling these challenges and encouraging an even more inclusive citizenship, the multiculturalism program has defined a set of clear and distinct priorities. For example, the program will support the economic, social and cultural integration of new Canadians and cultural communities.

I will continue my speech next time.

•(1840)

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 we resume consideration of this bill, the parliamentary secretary will have four minutes to complete his remarks.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

The House resumed from March 14 consideration of the motion.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my riding of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert consists of two magnificent communities located right next to each other on Montreal's south shore. I would like to take this opportunity to say that and to salute the people in my riding.

I would like to go back to what I said on March 15, and by that, I mean "revisit", not "start over". I want to go back to the point I was discussing. As everyone knows, I have been given 10 short minutes to follow up on a speech I started on March 15. Today is April 10, so it has been nearly a month. I should therefore situate my listeners.

Routine Proceedings

First of all, as everyone knows, we are talking about the Mulroney-Schreiber affair. On March 15, I started sketching a broad outline of the Bloc Québécois' supplementary opinion, which we added to the report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. Of course, we approve of the main part of the report, but we also prepared a supplementary opinion. Although I went into great detail last time, I would like to revisit two or three of the points in the supplementary opinion so that the people listening and watching will understand where we are going with this.

First, I asked why Brian Mulroney made the mistake of accepting cash and why he then publicly apologized. Was it because he needed the money? He said no. Was it out of greed? That is a question he should be asked during a public inquiry. Of course, Mr. Mulroney tried to prove that he did nothing illegal, instead of trying to correct the negative perception of what he did.

We have to understand—and that is one of the main reasons the Bloc Québécois wants there to be a public inquiry with as broad a mandate as possible—that the transaction that was discovered at the last minute, 15 years after the *fait accompli*, was truly questionable. A former prime minister, who was in fact still a member of the House of Commons, received one hundred \$1,000 bills in a hotel room without a written contract, without a receipt, without having to report it to anyone. He took that money and instead of depositing it in a bank, as any normal person would do in a legal transaction when there was nothing to hide, he put it into a safe. Did he do that once? No, he did it twice, even three times.

Mr. Schreiber gave him that money for so-called lobbying work, the terms of which are absolutely unclear. As far as that lobbying work is concerned, neither Mr. Mulroney's nor Mr. Schreiber's version is credible. Neither version makes any sense nor was corroborated by other witnesses to prove that Mr. Mulroney was seen promoting Thyssen's armoured vehicles to Chinese representatives. No one has confirmed that. No witness anywhere in the world has been found to testify to Mr. Mulroney's lobbying work. No one was found to corroborate Mr. Schreiber's version either, in other words, that he asked Mr. Mulroney to lobby Canada and Quebec to set up a Thyssen plant in Nova Scotia or Quebec.

When the public learns that a former prime minister, who had been the most influential politician for eight years, received \$225,000 or \$300,000—even the actual amount of money is not clear—from a powerful lobbyist, a businessman who obtained contracts of at least \$2 billion from that prime minister's government and collected for himself or his friends some \$225 million, it comes as no surprise that the public thinks that money was paid for services rendered, as a thank you and perhaps for future considerations.

That is what I said on March 15, 2008. I talked a little bit about the mysterious contract. As I said earlier, no one is sure about the exact amounts and, regarding the mandate, neither version is credible.

•(1845)

If that transaction were a bribe, Brian Mulroney and Karlheinz Schreiber would not have acted any differently. That is why a public commission of inquiry is needed. It is needed to shed some light on the entire situation, to clean up this mess, to be sure there is nothing to this. For many years now, books have been published and articles printed in newspapers on this. No less than four books have been

written about it in English Canada. They have never been translated into French. Perhaps that explains why Quebecers do not know as much about this affair. These four books written in English in Canada were published, distributed and enthusiastically reviewed, yet no one has been able to shed any more light.

So, once and for all, let us shed some light on this. Let us go through everything from A to Z. A public inquiry, with a commissioner, should hear witnesses and shed some light, once and for all.

Since March 15, all we have seen is the report from the Conservative Prime Minister's special adviser. He appointed a special adviser, as though he could no longer make his own decisions. This special adviser suggested a limited mandate, even though the majority of the members of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics recommended a broad mandate for the inquiry.

Oddly enough, the Conservative Prime Minister always said that the government should heed the democratic decisions of this House and that the opinion of the House was paramount. He said that when he was in opposition. Yet now that he has a choice between the opinion of a special adviser he appointed and a committee of the House, he is choosing the opinion of the special adviser. It seems clear that the Conservative Prime Minister should be more inclined to heed the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

The special adviser, David Johnston, is recommending confidential interviews. This is not what the committee or the public wants. If we really want to shed light on this affair once and for all, then we should do nothing behind the scenes, nothing in secret. Let us be clear and transparent. It is true that this Conservative government pretended to be transparent at the very start of its mandate. Since then, we have discovered more and more layers and opacity in its actions.

This time, because a committee of the House has made a recommendation, the government should be very attentive and responsive to our recommendations and set up a commission of inquiry with the broadest mandate possible, but it should do so quickly and not conduct confidential interviews. It should make the inquiry completely public. That is what the public wants.

The Prime Minister's special adviser acknowledges that the hands of the future commissioner must not be tied. That is obvious.

Routine Proceedings

As I am being signalled that I have only two minutes left, I will be brief. There is another important point. The Prime Minister gave a statement on January 11 of this year, and not January 11 two or three years ago. This statement, as we speak, can be found on his Internet site under “Statements”. He said he would appoint a commissioner once the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics finished its hearings. He did not speak of the work of the committee but of its hearings. Conservative members of this house have tricked those listening to us by saying that he said when their work was completed. That is not true. The Prime Minister said once the hearings were finished.

The committee finished its hearings on February 25, with the last witness Elmer MacKay. The report was tabled in the House on April 2. Therefore, on February 26, he should have appointed his commissioner and set up the public inquiry because we finished on February 25. It is now April 10. The hearings of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics have been completed. We tabled our report in this House on April 2. That was eight days ago and there is no commissioner or commission of public inquiry on the horizon. That is unacceptable.

This government boasts too much about keeping its promises and following through. Well I can say that this commission of public inquiry is another example—and there are many more—of a promise broken by the Prime Minister and by this government.

●(1850)

On January 11 he said—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I regret that I must interrupt the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, but I had given her warning.

The member for Burlington now has the floor for questions and comments.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague from the Bloc, with whom I have spent many hours sitting through the ethics committee meetings on, as the report calls it, “The Mulroney-Schreiber Affair—Our case for a full public inquiry”.

I must take some exception to the Bloc member's view of how things are going. Out of respect for Mr. Johnston, he was asked to do a job, in terms of coming up with some preliminary concepts. He did that. Then he was asked to come up with a set of recommendations, in terms of what the inquiry's scope would be. He is a fully qualified, independent commentator on this issue.

If the Prime Minister had done it without an independent individual, and I have not heard from any side of the House, from any party, that Mr. Johnston was not qualified, the opposition would have said, “Look at the bias. The Prime Minister is trying to hide something”, because that is kind of approach it likes to take about the integrity of the Prime Minister.

First, there was a call for an inquiry from all parties, and that is what he committed to. To be clear and to be fair to not only everybody in this House but to all Canadians, he asked an

independent adviser to work on the terms of reference. That is exactly what he did.

The Bloc's approach tonight is an attempt to bring some sort of cloak-and-dagger attitude toward the issue. That is totally opposite. It is completely transparent. The member may not like what the special adviser has submitted, but that is what happened.

At committee, the Bloc member was very keen on getting a report to the House so that Mr. Johnston could get started on his activity and get back to the Prime Minister so we could get started on it. That is what happened. Then tonight I heard her complaining that we did not have enough time to finish, that our recommendations were not included in what he looked at, that he had it out the next day.

Is she not satisfied that the inquiry is going to begin and that there are a set of recommendations from an independent adviser that this Parliament and Canadians trust?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, I did not quite understand the question asked by my colleague in the Conservative Party. However, I must say that in terms of how the situation has developed, it is very clear to me. This Conservative government tries, every time, to postpone the decision to establish a public commission of inquiry. These are all just excuses. When it appointed a special adviser in December and gave him two months to submit his response and make recommendations, that was an excuse for doing nothing.

On January 11, when he said he was going to appoint a commission of inquiry when the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics concluded its work, this was another excuse. When he saw that the work was going to conclude too soon for his taste, he claimed he had not been talking about the hearings, but about the work. Then, when he saw that was still going too quickly, he assigned the special adviser a second job. I have never understood why he gave him a second job, other than, once again, to push back his decision to create a public commission of inquiry.

That is the only reason why he is making all these decisions. He assigns someone else a job to make sure that it will take more time. And I do not know what he is going to hand us now, but he has no reasons left for not appointing a commissioner who will immediately chair this public commission of inquiry. I am expecting it any minute, because the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics submitted its report to the House 10 days ago now. It is clear, it is concrete, and it is not complicated.

I am expecting the Prime Minister to announce as soon as possible that a commissioner has been chosen and the public commission of inquiry will be starting. I have to say that there have been so many delays that journalists in Quebec are starting to make suggestions for him. This morning, *La Presse* made the actually quite interesting suggestion that Louise Arbour be appointed to head the public commission of inquiry. I am therefore impatiently awaiting this Prime Minister's decision and I am hopeful that he will not find yet another excuse for pushing his decision back and gaining more time.

Routine Proceedings

•(1855)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the member's speech and her work on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

I have one brief question regarding Mr. Mulrone's lawsuit against the Government of Canada, which was settled using the information that the government had at that time. The information is clear: Mr. Mulrone denied his alleged connections with Mr. Schreiber.

We now know that in the testimony at the preliminary inquiry in Montreal, Mr. Mulrone did not tell the whole truth in answer to the questions put to him by the government's lawyers. He denied that there was a connection and there had been meetings with Mr. Schreiber. We know that was false. And yet it was the basis of the settlement. Mr. Rock's testimony was clear: that if he had had knowledge of those facts, there would not have been a \$2.1 million settlement. That is money that came from Canadians.

Very simply, I would like to know whether the member agrees with Mr. Johnston's report, which very clearly concludes that it is not in the public interest to have an inquiry into the settlement of Mr. Mulrone's lawsuit. In my view, and the view of this side of the House, it is appalling that there will be no testimony in that regard. I would ask the member for her opinion and the opinion of the Bloc on that question.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my Liberal colleague for his excellent question. This is indeed an aspect that I did not address in my speech.

I have to say that Mr. Mulrone did in fact sue the Canadian government, claiming that he had been unfairly accused. In the statements he made at the examinations for discovery, he did not tell the lawyers everything. The decision to give him \$2.1 million in compensation was made on the basis of his statements, which were incomplete.

One of the questions he was asked was about his business dealings with Karlheinz Schreiber, and he denied them. He did not report that he had received \$300,000. He did not report that he had been retained—perhaps also because he was not—or report his business dealings with Karlheinz Schreiber.

And so the former Minister of Justice, Allan Rock, who appeared before our committee and who acted in good faith when he gave him the compensation—or rather when he, as Minister of Justice at the time, allowed him to be given compensation—told the committee, and subsequently said it publicly, that if he had known, the negotiations would have been handled differently.

If we have the common sense of the public, who are listening to us, the common sense of the people, the voters, who are also taxpayers, we can assume that if everyone had known this in 1999 or 2000 when the action was settled and the compensation paid, and if Brian Mulrone had been candid about his dealings with Karlheinz Schreiber, there would have been no compensation.

That being said, the commissioner who is to hold a public inquiry will have to examine this question. I think that he will inevitably come to the conclusion that the settlement will have to be revisited.

•(1900)

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to speak to the concurrence motion. Tonight I wish talk about the report that has been generated by the committee where I and my Conservative colleagues sat through every single meeting. We made sure we were well prepared. There was a tremendous amount of reading material provided to us as members of the committee to prepare for each and every witness.

I want to put on the record what our perspective was regarding the study, as the report would call it, "The Mulrone-Schreiber Affair: Our Case for a Full Public Inquiry". The motion that got us there stated in part:

—in order to examine whether there were violations of ethical and code of conduct standards by any office holder, the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics review matters relating to the Mulrone Airbus settlement, including any and all new evidence, testimony and information not available at the time of settlement and including allegations relating to the Right Hon. Brian Mulrone made by Karlheinz Schreiber and, in particular, the handling of allegations by the present government including the circulation of relevant correspondence in the Privy Council Office and Prime Ministers Office; that Karlheinz Schreiber be called to be a witness before the committee without delay; and that the committee report to the House its findings, conclusions and recommendations thereon.

That is the actual motion that got the committee started. As committee members we went through all those hearings. They were virtually all on television. Many Canadians tuned in and by the end of it many Canadians tuned out because they realized what it was about.

I am not here tonight to support one side or the other. I think the motion was to look at what happened around the Airbus settlement and that was part of the work that was done. Let us be frank, based on the witnesses we called, from chefs at 24 Sussex to a number of former lobbyists here in Ottawa, the actual hearings or study went a lot further than what the actual motion said. But that is fair. Members of the committee had the opportunity to call witnesses and they did, and we heard them all. We asked them all very good questions.

The report that we have in front of us, entitled "What We Heard", basically has, at the end of the day, one recommendation. The report is a review of what witnesses told us, quotes from them, and the direction they were taking. For 99.9% of it our committee supported that because it is what we heard.

The staff from the Library of Parliament did an absolutely fabulous job in putting together a synopsis of the issues that we had talked about, what the witnesses came to tell and the responses. In the end there was one recommendation and I think that should be clear to everybody, that there was only one recommendation from what we found. It was that the government appoint a commissioner of inquiry pursuant to part I of the Inquiries Act at the earliest possible date and that the commission be granted a broad mandate to inquire into the Mulrone-Schreiber affair.

Routine Proceedings

This report was sent to Dr. Johnston in order to assist him in evaluating what the terms of reference should be for an inquiry and he took that under consideration. He has, as was mentioned before, sent his second report for the independent adviser on what he thinks based on the testimony he heard. Another analysis that he has done is on where the inquiry should go.

At no time did we, as Conservative members of the committee, advocate that there should be no inquiry. The Prime Minister had committed to one. The evidence indicated that there were some questions and I think it became obvious that dealing with this kind of item at a parliamentary committee might not be the wisest way to go, but we did the work that we were required to do and made sure we did the best job we could in terms of asking appropriate questions.

● (1905)

Attached to the report, to which all parties are entitled, is a supplementary report or, as some people call it, a minority report. Each party's position might not be exactly what is in the body of the report, but we all had an opportunity to say what we wanted to do.

One of the things we were very diligent about, based on the motion that brought us there, was we wanted our work to be done in a non-partisan manner, which is very difficult at the committee level, let us be frank. We did our best and asked basically the same set of questions to get the same sort of response from all witnesses in order to be consistent. We wanted a consistent approach to the responses to the questions we asked.

We heard 10 full hours of personal testimony and saw 100 pages of documents from Mr. Schreiber in addition to the testimony of Mr. Mulroney and a number of other witnesses. We asked the question over and over again and everyone answered the same way, that there was no evidence of any wrongdoing on the part of Mr. Mulroney was ever produced. I think the member who spoke previously said the exact same thing in her speech, that there was no real evidence of any wrongdoing on Mr. Mulroney's part.

The real issue we were there for was the Airbus libel case. From my understanding at the time, the Liberal government had sent a letter to Switzerland, which not only accused the Right Hon. Brian Mulroney of wrongdoing, but had already found him guilty. He found that offensive and sued the Liberal government. My understanding is the Liberal government settled.

The Hon. Allan Rock appeared before the committee. He had been the minister of justice at the time and had made the decision. In his testimony, he speculated, that if he had known the information, it may have changed the position he recommended to the then Liberal government in its settlement. However, he admitted to me and all committee members that it was speculation and, from the committee's perspective, it could not clearly say yes or no that it would have changed things.

I am not a lawyer, though I know a number of my colleagues on the committee are. I do not know if we could legitimately say that we knew for sure what the material difference would have been in a lawsuit process, or whether he did or did not have dealings, or whether information was missing, when it came to the actual wording in the letter in this lawsuit. From the Airbus perspective and the reason why this committee was charged with the study, we could

not find any conclusive evidence that would have made a difference in the Airbus settlement.

I will get to the recommendations in a few minutes, but in our the conclusions we clearly outlined that the language used was the essential harm and that was the reason the government apologized and paid a cost. The committee was following what Mr. Rock had said. There had been a decade long RCMP investigation into the Airbus purchase and, from the committee's perspective, we could not find anything that would have made a difference in the Airbus settlement.

As for the public inquiry, which we all called for and the Prime Minister committed to, in his second report Mr. Johnston indicates that has been looked after and there may be other issues at which we may need to look. Those are possibilities that the inquiry can follow up on and review. The fact is the Airbus issue is what drove us to this committee, it drove the study and we could not find a single witness to tell us that there was some sort of connection.

● (1910)

On the first day of Mr. Schreiber's testimony he said "absolutely not". The next day he was not sure, but he would provide us more information. He sent me two binders full of news articles he had photocopied out of newspaper articles and so on. His testimony in front of us was less than credible, confusing and often contradictory over the number of times we saw him. Maybe, and let us hope so, a public inquiry with a lawyer system and a research team behind it will be able to find the truth if that is possible from Mr. Schreiber.

However, we could not find any evidence of wrongdoing from anybody in terms of testimony. There was speculation from some about other issues. There is no doubt that we go into other issues. It was not just about Airbus. We got into other projects that Mr. Schreiber was trying to bring to Canada. We got into the issues of a private deal between Mr. Schreiber and Mr. Mulroney. There were no facts. It was "he said, he said". Who knows what the actual truth is? We certainly were not equipped to do that.

On the correspondence branch and how it handled Mr. Schreiber's correspondence, once we saw Mr. Schreiber's correspondence, there were really no witnesses to the issue and it did not become the issue that some people thought it might.

There was the discussion of the transfer of cash and whether it was an appropriate code of conduct for a member of Parliament, a former prime minister. The timing was a big issue and if he had left office as prime minister. If members read Mr. Johnston's report, those are the kinds of allegations that probably we could use a little more investigation from a public inquiry. Maybe out of the public inquiry will come the need for changes to the code of conduct for members of Parliament and public office-holders and that those changes and improvements will be made. I hope the public inquiry will accomplish that.

We did have some recommendations at the end of our report. Let me just read the recommendations on the record so people understand. They are:

Therefore, given:

The lack of any evidence of wrongdoing

That it is unlikely that any substantial new evidence will be produced...

Routine Proceedings

We asked Mr. Schreiber to come and tell us more, but he would not produce anything more or anything that was even remotely useful, unless people like reading articles from the newspaper about pizza-making machines. We could not find anybody who had any more evidence, so there was no new or substantial evidence of any wrongdoing.

Therefore, we recommended:

—that, should the Government deem an inquiry necessary, the terms of reference for the inquiry should be restricted to examining those questions that will lead to recommendations designed to guide the decisions made by public office holders after they have left office.

As I was involved with the committee for months, the people often called me, or emailed me. They asked me what we were doing. It became obvious to them that this was not the appropriate forum. We did the work as we were asked to do, but at the end of the day, people asked whether we should have the public inquiry or not. I am a firm believer, as our Prime Minister has outlined, that we need a public inquiry.

I do not deny the fact that there are still some questions to be answered. None of my colleagues on the Conservative side deny that. Some issues were identified through this study on how public-office holders, and in my view members of Parliament, deal with their business after leaving office to ensure there is a transparent, ethical approach to their life after leaving office and that the public can be confident that there is a set of rules, a code of conduct that will be followed by members of Parliament upon leaving office.

• (1915)

At the end of the day, it was a good experience for us as a Parliament to go through and to understand what was needed in this kind of study. It was not like a study in any other committee that I have been on thus far. I have not been here that long, but I have been on a number of committees where experts can be called to talk about the issues, where we can get opposing sides to the issue. We have people who do the research, we have time to look at these issues and then come up with recommendations and report. We may not get everyone on side around the committee table, but hopefully there is some consensus to make improvements to the operation of government and to the development of policy and of the laws of our country.

In this case, the type of inquiry did not add a whole lot of value to policy. It did not add anything to the legislative branch in terms of what we wanted to do legislatively. It was a learning experience for parliamentarians. We were concerned this kind of inquiry would be a political football, with people trying to make political points. At the end of the day, this showed it did not work, that this was not the right forum for that. A public inquiry is the right forum, so that is the direction we will be heading.

To summarize, we came together to look at all the issues such as why the Liberal government settled on the libel suit on Airbus. We found no evidence that pointed to any issue in that area. We had no evidence of any wrongdoing of any public-office holder. This Conservative government believes there should be an inquiry. There are still a number of questions to be answered, which came out during the meetings, and we have committed to do that.

With respect to my former colleague, the Prime Minister made the right decision by getting a third party to prepare the terms of reference so Canadians could not accuse us of bias in how we set this up or what the inquiry would undertake. That is the whole purpose of having an independent adviser to do that. Nobody criticized the individual's credentials. I never heard it once. We are taking his advice. We will have a public inquiry and we will get answers to the questions that are still unanswered from our public study at the ethics committee.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to have been chosen over all the distinguished members in the House this evening, wishing for the floor to ask the member for Burlington a question on his presentation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Provided the hon. member will give us the score.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Habs, les porteurs du tricolore, les Glorieux, in short, Montreal, are leading 2-0. I ask all ladies and gentlemen not to touch the dial. We will give reports regularly on CPAC for viewers following the debates of the House of Commons.

I want to thank the member for his presentation and also for his participation on committee. He was there throughout this thing. It was difficult at a parliamentary committee to deal with something this sensitive. He correctly pointed out that this is not really what parliamentary committees are set up to do. Parliamentary committees are not the best way to do this.

However, my colleague may remember that I was the one in this House of Commons and in an interview who said that this matter should not go to committee when there was a movement by the NDP to have it there. I was asking for a public inquiry. I said that the only way we could deal with it properly was through a public inquiry, but at the time the Prime Minister refused. Plus, he was threatening to extradite Karlheinz Schreiber, with the Minister of Justice telling us he could not keep him in the country.

Only after the committee was preparing to start its work did the Prime Minister go ahead on that fatal Friday night when Mulroney said that he should have a public inquiry. He was forced to announce one. It was only when the signed affidavit by Karlheinz Schreiber implicating the Prime Minister came out that he said there would be a public inquiry, but we still had no guarantee that Mr. Schreiber would be in the country to participate. We agreed and this matter went to committee. That is the reason it went to committee. It is the same thing that we had with the public accounts committee in the Parliament before the member joined the House, when we dealt with the sponsorship issue. It was equally difficult.

Routine Proceedings

Parliamentary committees are meant to hear from constituents on matters before Parliament and to hear from experts to guide us in the establishment of laws or reviews of programs. They are not necessarily meant to do investigations of this type. On that, I agree with my colleague.

Here is where I part from agreement with my colleague, although I also must say to his credit that he did a pretty good job in committee. He asked questions. Sometimes when people associated with Mr. Mulroney were on the stand he even asked questions that surprised them. Sometimes I think he missed the preparatory meetings beforehand.

However, my colleague talked about the bipartisan approach that his side took on this issue. I failed to see that. Today he was at the ethics committee, as I was. Some members may remember reading in the press that Brian Mulroney took exception to things that I said in an interview. He threatened a lawsuit against me, which he eventually filed.

Before that lawsuit was filed, before I was threatened, the member for Dufferin—Caledon asked the ethics commissioner to review the matter and also made the motion that I not be on the committee. I found out today at the ethics committee that a full two months before I saw the statement of claim the member of the Conservative Party had a copy of the statement of claim. He gave it to the ethics commissioner fully two months before I was aware of it, yet I was the party being sued.

If someone told me that was not a set-up by the Conservative Party, I would have to tell them that I find that difficult to believe. I think there were a lot of links between Mr. Mulroney, Mr. Mulroney's communications team, Mr. Mulroney's legal team and the committee.

I will give the House one further instance. In the *Chronicle Herald*, after Professor Johnston came out with his recommendations, the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, who also served on committee, stated that it was a brilliant report. As a matter of fact, it was exactly the same as the minority report that the Conservatives attached to the committee report. That is not a surprise. I believe it was written by the same people.

● (1920)

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I am glad we are in questions and comments. I appreciate the comments of the member for West Nova, who also was very active on the committee, but I am very disappointed. He needs to talk to the chair of the committee, because unfortunately his picture did not make the report. I do not know why, but it has everybody else who was on the committee.

I do not know what the question was or if there was a question, which is fine. The hon. member is able to make comments. However, I can say that as a committee member it made me a little bit nervous when I found out that the member for West Nova, who was on the committee and asking questions, was also having dinner with Mr. Schreiber.

He made an accusation tonight that there was some connection with the Mulroney group or something, but he also said that based on my questioning. I can tell members that is an absolute falsehood. There was no such connection in any way shape or form.

Mr. Speaker, if you check the blues and see the kinds of questions that my colleagues and I asked of Mulroney and his team, they were not lob balls by any stretch of the imagination.

We had no preconceived favourites, as the member would like to indicate through his comments this evening. We were there to do a job. We did the job I think very professionally, no matter who the witness was, and we did not do any extra activity in terms of having dinner with Mr. Schreiber and getting involved with witnesses we were going to see or had seen and were going to see again.

As for Mr. Schreiber's extradition, his case was before the Supreme Court and he asked not to face his accusers in Germany. He got the extension to come before the committee. From my understanding, all those options have now been exercised and he will now have to face his accusers in Germany for about three or four different types of charges, including fraud. I am sure that process is happening.

The Prime Minister was clear from the very first day when the Leader of the Opposition in the House asked a question demanding a public inquiry on this matter. The answer came from the Prime Minister on the very first question in the House on that particular topic when he stood in his place and said yes, we will engage a public inquiry on this matter.

As for characterizing this side of the House and the leadership from the Prime Minister's Office on this topic as something that we were trying to avoid, and there then being public pressure on us to do something, that was not the case. The fact of the matter is that the Prime Minister, as he does on many important policy issues, uses the House of Commons as it should be used, to make those announcements, to tell Canadians and all parliamentarians the direction this government will be taking. He did it in this case and he did it on the very first question he got from the Liberal opposition leader at the time.

● (1925)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): There are two minutes left for questions and comments, so the hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe may take one minute to ask his question.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have heard my friends, the member for Peterborough and the other members on that committee, say that there were no findings of wrongdoing. The Canadian public may take from that comment that the Conservative government feels there was no wrongdoing and there are no questions that remain unanswered.

It was Dr. Johnston, in his report, which the member I guess agrees with, who says there are many questions that remain unanswered. What payments were made? When and how and why? The uncertainty surrounding the question remains. The tax treatment by Mr. Mulroney, who declared it five years later, remains. There is much public concern about the connection with respect to the services rendered and the meetings in various hotel rooms across the world. Questions remain. There is a public concern.

When will the member and his colleagues get out of the darkness of denial that was the culture of that committee and face the truth?

Routine Proceedings

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Burlington has equal time.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, the committee was not a culture of denial. That is absolutely a falsehood. The member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe needs to check *Hansard* for tonight's debate, because on numerous occasions I have said there are still unanswered questions and that is why we support having an inquiry. I have said a number of times that this is the purpose.

There were a number of unanswered questions. We are not denying that. We believe in what Dr. Johnston has done in terms of his analysis on that. We are moving forward. We are putting a public inquiry in place. We will get the answers that Canadians are looking for.

Also, I am looking forward to going to Moncton in a few weeks to watch my daughter play volleyball.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I regret to inform the House that the Canadiens have only two goals to Boston's one, but we know that it will only get better.

Second, I would like to inform you that it is my pleasure to be sharing my time with the member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe.

● (1930)

[*English*]

There is a lot that has been raised by the member opposite that I would like to deal with. We spent the last six months doing some of this I guess, but one of the questions was about my meeting with Karlheinz Schreiber.

Yes, I met with him a number of times, always in very public places and always to get information. I offered the same meeting with spokespeople for Mr. Mulroney because Mr. Mulroney is a very proud and important man. He does not meet with a member of Parliament; he has a staff that does that.

He had a Mr. Robin Sears who was to meet with me. He called three or four times to set up some meetings hoping that I would refuse I imagine. I accepted every time and he kept changing the time. On the fourth or fifth time, finally, he had to admit that he had no intention to meet with me, so we did not meet.

I spoke to many journalists who had done work on this. I spoke to many people who were named in the books that were written on these matters and got as much information as I could to prepare myself to ask relevant questions of witnesses. First, to see, and this is an important and sensitive question on this matter that spans 30 years, if we should be dredging the bottom again, should we be bringing that to the attention of Canadians, and should we be putting stress on a former prime minister and ministers that were named and some people who were still very active in the lobbying business in Ottawa whose names would be raised.

We had to find out whether it was worthwhile. One of the things that was of interest to me was how it had been set up going way back to the early 1980s and the people who were involved. The set up that was done put this person with the Prime Minister. There was a group that would decide who would do business and people would get rich

this way and that way, and that is how the money would move around.

We can look around today and we see many of the same players and many similar structures. We see them around the government.

One of the things that concerned me was that our current Prime Minister had embarked on a great project of rehabilitating Brian Mulroney. He went so far as to call him a valued adviser and mentor. He put many of the people who were surrounding Brian Mulroney into key positions. A partner at the law firm, he put in public works. A former speech writer is now chief of staff at transport. Those are departments that do a lot of contracting. We have the Minister of National Defence who was a very close associate. We have a number of people like that, a number of MPs. The Minister of Justice was a parliamentary secretary.

I remember reading a story in the paper where the former minister of justice, now President of the Treasury Board, when he heard about the \$300,000 cash payments to Mulroney, asked his department for a briefing. All of a sudden, no, he was not going to get a briefing.

I do not know if that happens very often in government. I had not seen any of that in my three years in cabinet. The minister could not get the briefing from his department. The minister was moved out and in comes a new one, the current minister who was a parliamentary secretary. All of a sudden there is no such desire to review these matters.

Therefore, I got very interested. I asked for a public inquiry in the House many times and the Prime Minister refused. Government members laughed at us across the way, laughed at us and reminded us of the \$2.1 million that had been paid to Brian Mulroney because of the errors at that time. They made a joke of it until finally a letter comes out. Karlheinz Schreiber puts out an affidavit. He raises the question of a meeting with the Prime Minister.

Then all of a sudden there is a meeting with the Prime Minister and Brian Mulroney carrying a letter written by Karlheinz Schreiber negotiated by Elmer MacKay. When that affidavit came out, that was hard on the Prime Minister. For the second week in a row he ran to the national press theatre where he had not been in two years. There were no press conferences before and now, all of a sudden, he had to have many.

He said, at that time, that he was going to name an independent third party to advise him on how he should handle this matter. Then on that weekend Brian Mulroney told the newspapers that we have to have an inquiry. Of course, that was done through Luc Lavoie at the time. That was before Mr. Sears came along. Luc Lavoie was still the spokesman at that time.

● (1935)

On the Monday or Tuesday after a week break we came to question period and our leader pressed the Prime Minister on it. He said that he would ask that person to give him the terms for an inquiry. That is the first time there was talk of an inquiry. Before that it was laughter, denial and delay. There was no way that there would be one.

Routine Proceedings

The person who was charged with doing the reference was Professor Johnston, a highly distinguished Canadian. I have no qualms with Professor Johnston. I do not wish to debate his recommendations. He did what he was asked to do. He did it to the best of ability and to what he believes is right.

We can pick apart everything he says but at the end of the day the Prime Minister of Canada has the responsibility to name a public inquiry. He can delegate any authority he wishes. He can get advice from anyone he chooses but the inquiry is the responsibility of the Prime Minister and he will have to answer for that.

If he now accepts these terms 100% as presented they are his and he must answer for those.

Some of the suggestions made I fully agree with but I have serious reservations when we are looking at a project such as Thyssen. We know the money paid to Brian Mulroney came from that project. Because of the signature of the federal government on the memorandum of understanding, \$2 million were generated for the construction of the Bear Head project. A quarter of that was set aside: \$500,000 in that account, \$300,000 in cash paid to Brian Mulroney by Karlheinz Schreiber and \$200,000 more available, exactly one-quarter of the commission.

A few weeks after leaving the prime minister's office, Fred Doucet received \$90,000 out of those same commissions, the exact same amount that was paid to Frank Moores, Gerry Doucet and Gary Ouellet, the partners in GCI who were set up to do the business of the federal government. We see an agent of the prime minister leaving and collecting very shortly thereafter. Those are serious allegations.

Now the government is saying that we cannot examine those four gentlemen at a public inquiry. Regrettably, two of them have died, but two of them are still here. Fred Doucet is very much here. He is on the record as lobbying on many of the most expensive files the federal government is dealing with. He has a hand on the back of the current Minister of National Defence. He runs that puppet. He ran it at his leadership. That is his game. When he was in front of the committee I said to him that he was a Cape Bretoner and that he knew about the Bear Head project. I said that he had a direct interest in that and that I was sure he was following it.

The member for Burlington will remember the reply. Mr. Doucet said that he knew of the project in passing but that he did not have a big interest because his job at the prime minister's office was to organize international conferences. He said that he was not too much involved on that. However, a few weeks after he leaves office he receives \$90,000 from that project.

Then we have Senator Lowell Murray, a distinguished gentleman and the minister for ACOA at the time. He tells us that in all that period that Fred Doucet was there that he approached him dealing with that many times when he was directly in the prime minister's office and when he was supposedly organizing these international meetings for the prime minister and working out of External Affairs.

We did not bring Senator Murray before the committee. All I know is what I read by Daniel Leblanc or by Greg McArthur but I believe it was LeBlanc who interviewed Senator Murray.

We need to go through a lot of information. We know Mulroney misled us at the committee and gave us misleading information, as he did when he did his examination for discovery for the \$2.1 million. We also know that Fred Doucet misled us. Today a high officer of this country was brought up on contempt of Parliament. These people did no less than that person did. Perhaps the proof is less detailed but I believe a public inquiry can do that.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member just went through a few names and talked about their ethics.

We are on the committee for access to information, privacy and ethics. I have a personal ethical issue when the member for West Nova talks about this issue as being a controversial, highly charged issue and meeting separately with witnesses. This, to me, is like the judge. The judge in a case does not, halfway through the case, have lunch or dinner with one of the witnesses he may see, has seen or who may get called back. That is not how it works. It is unethical to do so, in my view.

The member is questioning everybody's ethics on how they handle their business. Does he not feel that he has crossed any ethical lines by meeting people he is cross-examining, to use a legal word, at a committee meeting prior to any decisions or any conclusions being made by that committee?

● (1940)

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, as a member of a parliamentary committee, I am not in the role of a judge, a prosecutor or a defending attorney. I am not a lawyer. My job on that committee is to find out any information I can about the matter that is being studied. Between sessions of a committee, it is my responsibility to prepare myself in order to ask the relevant questions.

I am also on the health committee. I have been on the finance committee for a number of years. It is quite regular for me, on the very day that we are having sessions of those committees, to meet the people who will be appearing as witnesses. They may want to explain to me what it is they are doing on this subject, how they see this going or what they believe our recommendations should be. I agree to meet people who represent all sides at those committees and who want to bring me information. I think that is the road that most MPs take.

Because this is a charged issue, it does not change what we do as members of Parliament in our roles on those committees.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy the member's speech because he is always to the point and colourful. However, he missed the point of what Norman Spector said to us and what bearing it had on Bear Head and the prime minister's extremely unethical behaviour in allowing himself to meet with officials representing Bear Head after he knew the project was closed.

What does he think about that?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, yes, there were meetings of senior cabinet ministers with Fred Doucet and Karlheinz Schreiber. However, it is worse than that. If the member for Burlington thinks it was bad for me to meet with Karlheinz Schreiber, the current Prime Minister met at Harrington Lake with Brian Mulroney, the guy who accepted envelopes full of cash. If it is illegal and unethical to give cash, it is certainly illegal to receive it.

Why did the Prime Minister meet there? What were they discussing? Why was he meeting with a person who he knew had done that devious deed?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to take part in the debate on the Mulroney-Schreiber affair. I was a member of the committee, but only for meetings on this subject. I participated as a member of Parliament and as a lawyer.

[*English*]

I take a little exception to several authors, including William Kaplan, who is a lawyer, suggesting that none of the committee members could question their way out of a wet paper bag. As a lawyer for some 22 years, I at first took exception to that and then cooled off and realized that he was probably right.

It is because of the systemic nature of our committees where people only get five to seven minutes to ask questions and have them answered. Everybody in the legal profession knows that once a person gets a thread of questioning, it would be very nice to be able to finish. As our partisan setup goes around the table, we sometimes lose the thread of the questioning.

The only people at the hearings who had any constant thread of questioning, and this may start out sounding like a compliment, were the Conservative members who asked very simple questions like, "Was the Prime Minister at any of the meetings with Mr. Schreiber? Was the Conservative Party of Canada, formed in 2003, involved in any wrongdoing?" They had a very well prepared list denying any allegations that would touch them. It was very much self-preservation.

They were almost ready to throw out their hero from three months before, Mr. Mulroney, the most green prime minister of the century who they adored a couple of months before. They were almost ready to jettison him, except that as they saw the committee working they realized that maybe Mulroney had his ninth life and it was coming to bear in this very truncated way of questioning people.

Notwithstanding Mr. Kaplan's comments about the method of questioning and before I get into Mr. Johnston's terms of reference and the outcome of his final report, there were three nuggets that my friend from West Nova did not touch upon, so as to not overlap, that did come out of simple questioning from the members representing all parts of Canada.

The three nuggets are quite spectacular. They came out on the public record and were seen by tens of thousands of Canadians. The first is the Bear Head project. Norman Spector, a very credible witness, an esteemed Canadian and a very articulate journalist, gave testimony that as the chief of staff for the right hon. Brian Mulroney he was privy to a conversation where, in exchange for a view given

of the viability of the Bear Head project in 1990, the prime minister returned the decision to his chief of staff to kill the project.

Bear Head was dead in 1990. There were to be no more entreaties, no more meetings and no more lobbying by the Conservative government in 1990 onward. Mr. Spector was not challenged on his testimony with respect to that, and that came out as a result of questioning from simple committee members.

What is curious about that, and it is one of the grounds that Dr. Johnston thought was worth pursuing in the public interest, is that as the inquiry goes forward we will understand clearly that Mr. Doucet, having received his commission through the Thyssen-Bear Head-Britain account of money, met with Mr. Schreiber, through the agency of Mr. Doucet and the tacit approval of Mr. Mulroney who was then the prime minister.

During the year 1991, on numerous occasions Mr. Schreiber was escorted into meetings involving ministers, deputy ministers and even the prime minister of Canada after the prime minister of Canada had legitimately said, in a Privy Council sense, that the project was dead. That stinks and the inquiry will get to the bottom of that questioning.

The second aspect that came up during the hearings were the questions, simply asked, "Mr. Mulroney, if you received money, why did you take five years to declare it? And when you declared it, more importantly, did you file a special exemption form or request permission of Her Majesty, through the Receiver General, for permission to do a late filing of money received earlier?"

He said, "The only thing left that is sacred in Canada is the secrecy of our tax returns". That is in Dr. Johnston's report. Dr. Johnston is not satisfied with that and I will bet that the Minister of National Revenue is not satisfied with that. Mr. Mulroney further stated that a voluntary late disclosure of income form was not required.

● (1945)

It would be very interesting to see during the course of this inquiry whether that opinion holds up. My view from looking at all the evidence as an amateur in this realm, admittedly Mr. Kaplan, as an amateur but as a person who feels that the public has a right to know, and many of the people in my constituency feel the same way, is that Mr. Mulroney received money from Mr. Schreiber as a reward for Mr. Schreiber having had access to the Government of Canada during the time Mr. Mulroney was in office.

It was further in aid of the Bear Head project in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Let us not kid ourselves; I am a proud maritimer, and a project the size and economic impact of Bear Head would be a feather in any politician's cap. It would mean jobs. It would mean a viable product. It would be good for Canada and the economy.

Routine Proceedings

No one is saying that the Airbus planes we fly on frequently are bad planes and that Air Canada is not better served by the planes. That is not the issue. The issue is how did Bear Head advance as a project once it was killed and why was money paid to the prime minister of Canada for that advancement? The inquiry will get to the bottom of that.

With respect to tax treatment, clearly, when the proverbial was about to hit the fan, Mr. Mulroney was alarmed. He met with Mr. Schreiber in 1998 to figure out what was going to be disclosed and when, and decided he had better do something, so in his 1999 tax return he reported the \$225,000 to \$300,000. I am sure average Canadians would wonder whether they should late file five years later for the extra three installments of \$75,000 they got in a brown paper bag somewhere. I am sure it is a very common problem for the average Canadian. Of course, I am being sarcastic, Mr. Speaker. It is not a common problem, unless a person received money and thought no one would know about it and finally five years later the person then began to think someone would find out about it and the person had better file.

The final aspect that came out through the evidence and questioning was that there is no more of an admirable defender of a person, if one hired him, than Luc Lavoie. One could not think of a stronger knight to go to the wall on one's behalf and in one's interest if one hired him.

Yet, having spent \$2.1 million on his legal and PR team which included Mr. Lavoie, Mr. Mulroney through all of the interviews in preparing for a defence on the lawsuit and the discovery, did not tell Mr. Lavoie once about the amount of money he received from Mr. Schreiber.

I find that absolutely incredible. It means that Mr. Mulroney did not even trust his most trusted knight in shining armour, his most trusted, valuable, and very worthwhile in the marketplace by the way, defender of interests, Luc Lavoie. He of the deep voice, deep heart and the courageous defender of people, did not tell Luc Lavoie what the amount was, until the proverbial really hit the fan and Luc Lavoie, as we say in the House, was freelancing with the figure of \$300,000 because he heard it out there.

I started to question Mr. Lavoie, saying that did not sound very professional and that is when the seven minutes were up. We would have really had a melee that day and I am sure I would have been on the short end of the stick with a man like Luc Lavoie.

Finally, with respect to Dr. Johnston, he was hemmed in by the ineptitude of our committee. I hope that the Prime Minister can follow the words of his own people on the committee, that yes, the questioning was inept. There are so many other questions that need to be answered. We need a wide public broad inquiry.

The Prime Minister should not have his hands tied by having confidential interviews. Those might suffice in cases like Air-India and cases where the public security interests might overwhelm, where private security interests might be of relevance, but this is not a case where either is at play. I encourage the Prime Minister to have as wide open inquiry as he promised once during a campaign. On the very Air-India question, he promised a wide open inquiry on a subject which involved public security interests and private interests

under the PIPEDA. Yet, in this case which touches merely politics, frankly, only politics, he—

• (1950)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is with regret that I interrupt the hon. member, but now we will have questions and comments and we are going to have a question from the hon. member for Burlington.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have one point of clarification and then I will go and watch the hockey game.

The other three parties in the House put together supplementary reports. There is none from the Liberal Party, so I assume the members agree with what is in the report, including what we found:

As noted at the beginning of this report, the testimony received by the Committee in relation to the Mulroney Airbus settlement revealed many material inconsistencies and contradiction.

The Committee heard witness statements that could not be reconciled with other witness testimony, and in some cases, witness accounts of certain incidents were challenged by persons outside the Committee hearing process. Given the passage of time in relation to these events, the fact that some of the participants are deceased, and the vast array of documentation, much of which has yet to be obtained, let alone fully examined, it is difficult to completely resolve such inconsistencies.

My question for the member, who gave an excellent speech and of course completely unbiased, is this: Do you agree with what is in the report prepared by the researchers, which the committee supported, and do you agree with the statement that is part of the conclusions?

• (1955)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Burlington should know that when we address other members of the House, we do it in the third person, not in the second person. The only member who gets the second person is the chair occupant.

Mr. Mike Wallace: I am always learning from you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that clarification.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member quotes from the report. Our position was always that the evidence spoke for itself, as tattered as it was. So many questions were raised by our triaging of the evidence and Dr. Johnston picked up on most of them. Where I would say he has failed, because we probably failed in the way our testimony rolled out and our awkward questions, is on two very important aspects about which the Canadian public will never know.

The first, and I already spoke about in a question, was the settlement of the libel suit for \$2.1 million of taxpayer money. Allan Rock said that he would not have settled that case had he known the evidence Mr. Mulroney gave in Montreal was false.

The second aspect is we will never know where the money for Airbus and GCI went. It seems Dr. Johnston has closed that door. It seems the Prime Minister, with the door closed by the adviser who is only relying on our imperfect evidence, will not open that door again because he has something in his craw about his previous defence and glorification of Mr. Mulroney.

Adjournment Proceedings

I have always said this to my children and other people. The Prime Minister is a good person, but he is very sensitive to criticism and he is very sensitive when he makes mistakes. I am sure in that world over there the Prime Minister never makes mistakes, but he made a mistake in this case. He got too close to Brian Mulroney and he knew it, and he distanced himself after the proverbial started hitting the fan.

The Prime Minister is a very proud man. We should have a proud leader of this country. That is fine, but pride goeth before the fall. In this case the Prime Minister will not open the doors that Dr. Johnston has been forced to close on the libel suit, on tracing Airbus to GCI. He will tie the hands of the future commissioner of inquiry by suggesting that there be confidential interviews, that we do not open doors to subjects about which Canadians want to know.

Ultimately what happened in the 1980s is the Conservative Party of Canada had a party and the party lasted a long time. There were lobster tails, shrimps and scallops all across the country in every PC club 500 reception across Canada. Frank Moores was the chief piper at the party and a good part of that money came from corporate Canada and corporate Europe. Sadly, Mr. Schreiber represents an end, hopefully, of an epic period where foreign money influenced Canadian decisions.

I am not as conspiratorial as my friends in the NDP who see a conspiracy under every coaster on every table, but I do think that foreign money and what Mr. Schreiber symbolized in saying was involved in Conservative Party politics in the 1980s. We will never know now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): There being no further members rising, pursuant to order made earlier today the motion to concur in the third report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics is deemed adopted on division.

(Motion agreed to)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (2000)

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 29, I asked the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent why the Conservatives had abandoned the Acadian and French-Canadian communities and why this government is acting more and more like Preston Manning's Reform Party than like Joe Clark's Conservatives, the farther we get into its mandate. In this case, the question is rhetorical. The Conservatives in the party of the member for Calgary Southwest have no belief in the vitality of the French fact in Canada.

Let us imagine for a moment that this government had not put any figure under the National Defence heading in the March budget. Unimaginable, you say? Of course! But for the action plan for official languages, on page 256 of the budget: nyet, nothing. It says:

“to be determined”. That was on February 26, and here we are on April 10, 44 days later, and still there is nothing.

When it comes to making a mockery, the Conservative federal government, speaking from its incompetence, said it was waiting for the results from a consultant so that—obviously—it could drag it out and leave French-speaking minority groups in Canada twisting in the wind. We are talking about the Bernard Lord report. The document was released on March 20, and the Minister of Canadian Heritage, who is responsible for the second action plan for official languages, has said not a word.

The consultations held by the neo-Reform's mercenary brought forth a document that would embarrass a grade nine student. The Standing Committee on Official Languages had already submitted three excellent reports, in May 2007, December 2007 and March 2008, for the information of anyone who was even slightly interested in the Acadian and Canadian French-speaking minority, and so the person responsible for Canadian Heritage and Official Languages had more than was needed to prepare a new five-year plan.

We are talking about valuable reports: the first one on official language minority communities, produced after consultations held across Canada in all of the communities in the fall of 2006, a document 184 pages long; the second, on the Court Challenges Program, so shamefully eliminated by the neo-Reformers, at 44 pages; and the third, a report dealing with the federal public service and the language industry, in relation specifically to renewal of the action plan for official languages, at 49 pages. We have 277 pages of valuable ideas, produced over a 17-month period by some 20 members of Parliament, all united behind 58 recommendations, not to mention the 168 individuals and 108 organizations that appeared and the 56 briefs received. Stack them up beside the Lord report, with its 45 pages and 14 recommendations, and there is no comparison.

The public relations exercise by the neo-Reformers' little buddy was a shameful waste of public money that talks about things we already knew and is full, absolutely full, of holes. It must be recalled that in June 2007, at the Sommet de la francophonie in Ottawa, the announcement by the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent of what was to become the closed-door and pointless exercise by Bernard Lord was already being denounced by leaders of the francophone minority community in Canada.

The idea that the Conservatives, alias the neo-Reformers, could form a majority government puts me in mortal fear for the Acadian and franco—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member for Gatineau.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Status of Women has the floor.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition was asking about our government's commitment to the official language communities. I rise today to reiterate our firm commitment to these communities and to linguistic duality in Canada. We repeated this commitment in the last Speech from the Throne and the budget showed it as well. And yes, we do have two official languages in Canada and not just one in Quebec and the other outside Quebec.

Our government is currently working on the second phase of its action plan. In the first action plan, we provided \$30 million over two years, as announced in the last budget in 2007. In the recent Speech from the Throne, the Government of Canada stated that it was drafting the second phase of the action plan.

The government is therefore finalizing the process of developing a new strategy for the next phase of the action plan. Many sources of information have gone into the development of the new strategy, including an evaluation of the activities in the first phase of the action plan and discussions with key stakeholders in the area of the official languages, as well as with the provinces and territories, which are privileged partners. The new strategy will also take into account the results of the community meetings, including the Sommet des communautés francophones et acadienne and the Conference on Quebec's Anglophone Communities, reports of the standing parliamentary committees and of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, the results of the 2006 census, and the survey of community vitality.

A key element in this process were the consultations on the official languages and linguistic duality undertaken last December and chaired by Bernard Lord. I do hope that Mr. Lord managed to remember that there are still two official languages in Canada, in contrast to my colleague from the Bloc and his acolyte, the hon. member for Joliette, who claimed not two hours ago that French was the language of Quebec and English the only language of the rest of Canada. This was an insult to francophones all across the country, who are fighting for their language.

These consultations helped the government collect the views of representatives of the minority official language communities and of the public in general on its official languages strategies. The consultations were conducted in the spirit of the Official Languages Act and our government's determination to abide by it. The budget reflects the importance we attach to these consultations. The Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages has now received Mr. Lord's report.

The Action Plan for Official Languages includes initiatives in several federal departments and aims to provide horizontal coordination of government activity. The development of the new strategy is therefore a complex process that must be done very carefully. We are reviewing all the information gathered through these various processes. This will enable us to consolidate, renew, modify, modernize and expand government projects on the official languages, as well as to rely on key partnerships and raise Canadians' interest.

It is also entirely—

● (2005)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Gatineau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, the Lord tour, as orchestrated by the Conservatives, was a ploy to delay doing something about the already well-known needs of francophone communities, needs that have been growing as ethnolinguistic assimilation has been decimating their numbers at an ever-increasing rate for the past six censuses.

The mere fact of having eliminated the court challenges program is totally unacceptable. The fact that they have had almost two years to come up with a second official languages plan, but that there is less than nothing on the table speaks volumes.

The fact that the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages has not yet signed the second action plan proves that the anti-French-language and anti-French-culture neo-Reform ideology is alive and well in the federal government.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the Bloc claims to know the official languages. And he has lived in Saskatchewan. When we hear absurdities such as, "There are two official languages in Canada: in Quebec it is French and in the rest of the country, it is English," we wonder what has happened to the other francophones. What about the millions of others who speak French and who fight, day after day, to make Canada a country united by its two official languages?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 8:09 p.m.)

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