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Wednesday, April 20, 1994

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 20, 1994

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

ETHANOL INDUSTRY

Mr. Jerry Pickard (Essex—Kent): Mr. Speaker, job creation, economic growth and environmental improvement are the challenges that face the government.

The development of an ethanol industry in Canada will help us tackle these challenges. The proposed ethanol plant in Chatham, Ontario, will create 1,100 construction jobs, employ 90 people permanently, generate another 400 indirect jobs, contribute \$125 million annually to our economy, provide a market for Ontario corn, and manufacture a renewable fuel which will reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

I urge our government today to commit to this development. This industry is important for our future.

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[*Translation*]

THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE

Mr. Michel Daviault (Ahuntsic): Mr. Speaker, on April 24, Armenians will commemorate the 79th anniversary of the Armenian genocide in which 1.5 million people lost their lives. This is a people that, despite its ordeals, has always shown its determination to survive. Tragedy struck again in 1988, when nearly 25,000 Armenians died in an earthquake.

I wish to salute the Armenian community in North Montreal which is working to provide humanitarian support in Armenia.

The Quebec National Assembly recognized the Armenian genocide in 1980, but the Government of Canada has yet to do so. I therefore wish to ask the Canadian government to recognize the historic truth of this tragedy.

We wish to extend our sympathy to our fellow citizens of Armenian origin and wish them every hope for a better future.

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[*English*]

RICK FOLK

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Okanagan Centre): Mr. Speaker, over this past weekend in Oberstdorf, Germany, Rick Folk of Kelowna, British Columbia, led his rink to a second World Curling Championship.

There is also a decidedly human side to the story. Just days before Rick and his teammates left for Germany, Rick's father passed away. After his victory Rick told reporters:

Definitely I was thinking of my dad. When I finished throwing my last shot, and I knew I had it, that was the first thing that went through my mind. I wondered where he was watching. I promised I would do my best and for my dad my best is always the best.

Canadians appreciate Rick's victory all the more because he was able to demonstrate that quality of triumph through adversity that all Canadians find so inspiring.

I invite all members of this House to extend congratulations to our new men's world curling champion, Rick Folk, his team and his family.

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GUN CONTROL

Mr. Benoît Serré (Timiskaming—French River): Mr. Speaker, Timiskaming—French River is a rural, northern Ontario riding, and our way of life differs greatly from that of urban centres. Solutions that work in Toronto will not necessarily work in the north. The majority of gun owners in my riding are law abiding and safe users of firearms for hunting and sport. It is part of our way of life.

In the interests of public security it is important to maintain a certain level of gun control in Canada. However, since 70 per cent of all criminal acts involving guns are committed with smuggled, illegal firearms, we need to have and enforce stricter laws and penalties for criminal users of firearms. We do not need more complicated regulations for law-abiding citizens.

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I will forcefully oppose any new legislation that will impose further controls on law-abiding firearm owners.

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CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP

Mrs. Dianne Brushett (Cumberland—Colchester): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the hon. member for Don Valley North on his initiative in organizing the first citizenship day for members of Parliament and senators to publicly reaffirm their allegiance to Canada.

Yesterday the hon. member for Don Valley North brought us together in the Hall of Honour because of his appreciation as an immigrant to hold Canadian citizenship and because of his love and commitment to this great country.

It was a moving experience and for many of us it was the first time we experienced the joy of enunciating the words aloud, declaring our allegiance for Canada. At a time when many nations are being torn apart by civil insurrection and war, it is imperative that we Canadians show the world through our leadership and policy how people with many diversities live in harmony as one nation.

Let this ceremony be the beginning for all members in the House to publicly serve and pledge allegiance to one great country, one Canada, our beloved country.

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CANADA HEALTH AUXILIARY WEEK

Ms. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House that the Canadian Association of Health Care Auxiliaries has declared this week of April 17 to April 25 Canada Health Auxiliary Week.

This year's theme is the challenge of choices. Health care auxiliaries across the country will be celebrating this week with the goal of increasing public awareness of the tremendous contribution made by volunteers to the health care system in Canada.

Last year health auxiliaries across Canada worked to raise in excess of \$33 million for their respective health care facilities. One hundred and thirteen thousand volunteers gave 8.5 million hours to patient services, community health care, public relations and fund raising.

I am sure all members will join with me in congratulating the Canadian Association of Health Care Auxiliaries on its work and in urging Canadians to support their local auxiliaries.

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[*Translation*]

PREMIER OF QUEBEC

Mr. Gaston Péloquin (Brome—Missisquoi): Mr. Speaker, there will soon be an general election in Quebec, and the

federalist troops, terrified at the prospect of being swept from the Quebec political scene, are using underhanded tactics to convince Quebecers that their option is the right one.

(1405)

Premier Daniel Johnson, with the hounds of sovereignty nipping at his heels, went before foreign investors with a message of gloom and doom, predicting political instability in Quebec if the Parti Québécois came to power.

These desperate and highly irresponsible tactics are unworthy of someone who is supposed to defend Quebec's best interests, especially when he is in another country. Now that die-hard federalists can no longer scare Quebecers, they are trying to scare foreign investors.

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[*English*]

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt): Mr. Speaker, in Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt we are particularly proud of the efforts of our local volunteers. Lynn and John Bremmer of the town of Oliver in my riding recently returned from the Slovak republic where they worked with CESO on a development project, helping a producer of agricultural products with their expertise. Perhaps more than money their volunteer efforts will help those people stand proudly on their feet as their country emerges from the dark ages of communism.

Volunteers have made a personal choice to make all our communities better places to live, whether it be through working with a service club, organizing a community event, helping the disadvantaged or leading a youth group.

I call on all hon. members and all Canadians to join me in honouring volunteers during National Volunteer Week.

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ANTI-VIOLENCE CAMPAIGN

Ms. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Canadian Heritage launched "Speak out Against Violence", a campaign of public service announcements by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters.

The Government of Canada is a very committed partner in this initiative which is another fine example of what can be achieved on an important social issue through co-operation between the public and private sectors.

To accommodate our federal contribution, Canada's private broadcasters are committing \$10 million in free air time to broadcast these announcements.

[Translation]

The government is aware that the media heavily influence our attitudes, and we think this campaign is an excellent way to make all Canadians think about the questions raised by violence in our society.

[English]

I invite all Canadians to join us in this bold initiative to help build the Canada of the future, a Canada where men, women and children can be safe in their homes and can walk the streets without fear of harm.

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RYAN WHITE BILL

Mr. Glen McKinnon (Brandon—Souris): Mr. Speaker, today marks the day that the United States of America adopts the Ryan White bill, a bill that was endorsed by President Bush but is being enacted by President Clinton. It is a law that mandates hospitals to notify emergency response personnel about the infectious status of a patient who was treated by the emergency worker.

This law prohibits involuntary testing of patients and only requires the hospital to share any such information in its possession. The program is also structured in a way that protects the confidentiality of patients.

I would encourage all members of the House to co-operate in establishing such legislation in Canada.

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[Translation]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Patrick Gagnon (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine): Mr. Speaker, I would like to call the attention of the hon. members of this House to a recent initiative from our government to promote the economic development of Quebec.

On April 14, we announced, in conjunction with the Government of Quebec, a first set of projects to be implemented under the Canada-Quebec agreement on infrastructure projects. This program is being initiated a mere two months after the agreement was signed. This is palpable proof that we do meet the demands of the Canadian people. It also demonstrates clearly that we are intent on putting Canada back to work as soon as possible.

This first stage will see nearly \$35 million invested in 50 projects involving 43 municipalities in Quebec. These projects will result in the creation of 400 direct jobs over the weeks to come because, as you know, this government was elected last

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fall to put Canadians back to work, and this program is being put into place to do just that.

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PREMIER OF QUEBEC

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Terrebonne): Mr. Speaker, I would like to call the attention of this House to the statement Senator Kennedy made yesterday, within the context of the Quebec Premier's pre-election visit to the United States.

Senator Kennedy said that as far as the Americans were concerned, whatever the outcome of the decision, they respect the right of Quebecers' to self-determination.

(1410)

Now, Mr. Speaker, here at last is a level-headed statement reflecting profound respect for democratic values. Unfortunately, you are more likely to hear that kind of remark abroad than within this chamber.

The universal standard for democracy is respect for other people, respect for the decisions made by the people.

I urge the members from the other political parties represented in this House to follow the example of Senator Kennedy and show the same open-mindedness, the same democratic regard, the same respect for political diversity.

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[English]

GUN CONTROL

Mr. Allan Kerpan (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, last week in my constituency we held two townhall meetings to discuss gun control.

The message that I received from the people attending these two meetings was loud and clear: do not handcuff together what are two separate issues, gun control and criminal justice reform; do not attempt to control the criminal abuse of firearms by punishing the innocent, legitimate gun owners in the country.

This message has been supported by over 300 phone calls and faxes to our "let the people speak" lines here in Ottawa. These come from all across the country. The people of Moose Jaw—Lake Centre say we need to get tough with violence and violent criminals. We need to do it now, but let us leave law-abiding citizens alone.

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IRAQ

Mrs. Carolyn Parrish (Mississauga West): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to condemn the savage, inhumane and ruthless actions of dictator Saddam Hussein in the southern Iraq marshes perpetrated on the one million marsh Arabs who live there.

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As Canadians we advocate and uphold human rights and must protest both a human and an environmental catastrophe which has been well documented and recently aired on CBC.

Water is being diverted from the historic wetland where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers meet. The delicate ecostructure is being destroyed to provide a huge military base. The native marsh Arabs, Shia Muslims, are being harassed, arbitrarily arrested and detained, tortured, killed and systematically starved to death. Women, children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable.

We as Canadians of conscience must uphold the human rights of the Shia Muslims and express our outrage and indignation to the Iraqi government and to the United Nations, immediately addressing this matter of genocide and ecological disaster.

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NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough): Mr. Speaker, the other day I helped launch National Volunteer Week by attending a celebration breakfast of the Association of Managers of Volunteer Services in Peterborough.

During this week in Peterborough riding and across Canada recognition events are being held to honour volunteers who do so much to maintain our standard and quality of life.

Volunteerism is one of the unwritten secrets of democracy. Healthy democracy demands the full and free participation of all citizens. That is why during in this particular volunteer week, while remembering all Canadian volunteers, we should save a special thought for Canadians helping with the election in South Africa. These people, including members of the House, people from my riding and many others, are a special reminder to us all of the importance of volunteerism in 1994. They are an example to us all.

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INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona): Mr. Speaker, over the last few days many MPs have met with representatives of the International Association of Firefighters.

The firefighters are asking for a number of things, all of which I support, but today I would urge the government to act as soon as possible on a number of them.

There is no good reason for delay on setting up the system for tracking hazardous materials and right to know legislation. Likewise there is no good reason to delay on setting up a notification protocol for infectious diseases.

I call on the government to act swiftly on these two requests of the firefighters. They serve our communities well in an already dangerous job. It does not need to be made unnecessarily more dangerous by government failure on these two particularly responsible requests.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

(1415)

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Despite yesterday's ceasefire, Serb forces are continuing their assault on Gorazde. They have even shelled the hospital. The emergency room was hit this morning by rocket fire and 10 people were killed and 15 wounded. According to a wire report just in, even the wounded cannot be rescued because Serb fire is preventing would-be rescuers from reaching them. At noon, we learned that following a request from the UN, NATO countries agreed today in Brussels to proceed with new air strikes in retaliation for Serb atrocities.

Can the minister confirm to us if Canada has endorsed the NATO resolution to proceed with new air strikes and can he also confirm whether Canada has in fact expressed some reservations about the effectiveness of such strikes?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Mr. Speaker, we are extremely concerned about the deteriorating situation in Bosnia. The decision by the UN Secretary General to ask NATO to order offensive, rather than purely defensive, air strikes is obviously one fraught with implications.

In light of this change of policy, forces serving under the auspices of the UN will no longer be in the field solely to maintain peace and provide safe passage for humanitarian aid convoys. They could be called upon to take action to impose peace. Ambassadors to NATO are currently meeting to discuss this request and once a final decision has been made, I will be happy to convey it to the House.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the minister that the situation has reached a critical stage beyond which major decisions will have to be made. Must Canadian and other peacekeeping forces be content to stand by, powerless to stop a disaster of inhumane proportions, almost as if they were sanctioning what was happening by doing nothing, or should they take more concrete actions and intervene, as the minister said, to impose peace? The other option is withdrawal. I think that the conscience of the western world will lean more toward intervention. The fact that the

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Russian security council convened a meeting this morning is a sign that the conflict is getting worse.

My question to the Minister of Foreign Affairs is this: Can he tell us if Russia has agreed to back the UN resolution calling for more air strikes?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Mr. Speaker, all I can say to the House today is that talks are continuing between government leaders in an effort to thrash out a unified policy. A short while ago, the Prime Minister of Canada spoke with the President of the United States who himself was scheduled to speak with the Russian president. These talks will continue during the next few hours, the objective being to devise a plan of action, one that has the widest possible support, to bring an end to the conflict raging in the former Yugoslavia.

[English]

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we have learned that the Russians could decide to retire the kind of support, at least the sympathy they had for the Serb movement. Now we hear that the conflict might expand to Iran because the last dispatch is to the effect that the Ayatollah Khamenei has just ordered Iranian troops to intervene in Bosnia to defend the Muslims.

Does the Minister of Foreign Affairs agree that the situation could deteriorate very rapidly?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I think we should be very cautious about all these rumours. One thing is certain, and that is that members of NATO are trying to put forward a unanimous position and to bring along other important players in this area of the world to draft a common approach to the current situation.

(1420)

I can confirm that there have been discussions at the highest levels. It is quite clear that the involvement and the co-operation of Russia with the European Union, the United States and Canada could be very decisive in making sure we take steps that will stop this conflict in the ex-Yugoslavia.

Our purpose is to arrive at a united front and to ensure that all the parties in ex-Yugoslavia come to the table and respect a peace initiative.

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[Translation]

ACTION PLAN FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs claims that his government consulted the provinces before announcing its youth strategy.

Yesterday, Quebec's Minister of Education categorically denied having been consulted by Ottawa.

How can the minister continue to claim that the provinces were consulted, when Quebec's Minister of Education denies that he was consulted? Will the minister now withdraw his allegations and admit that Quebec's Minister of Education was not consulted?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, on February 28 I met with the ministers of education who compose the Council of Ministers of Education. The federal government was invited by the council to develop a co-operative approach to a broad range of matters affecting young people.

At that time we gave a full briefing to all the ministers of education concerning the various youth initiatives: the internship program, the youth services corps, the student loans and the learning initiatives which were discussed at the request of the provincial ministers themselves.

As the hon. member probably knows, they had issued a declaration over a year ago asking that there be full co-operation between the federal and the provincial governments to undertake a common approach to the problems facing education.

After the meeting, at which we outlined the approach we were taking, we offered to establish a number of meetings with officials to go over the specific parts of the program. There were a series of meetings on the student loans program.

Specifically last Friday a meeting was held in Quebec between federal and provincial officials to discuss the internship program.

That is a fair description of the kind of consultation, collaboration and co-operation we want to have with the provinces. We outlined the approach and certainly in response to any request by the provincial ministers we are very open to continuing the dialogue to look at the specific implementation of that program so we can once again work together to help young people.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval): How can the minister seriously say that he made every effort to avoid further duplication of responsibility between Quebec's programs and his youth action plan, since this plan has three components that directly overlap similar Quebec programs and are in no way complementary?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, I understand fully the inability of the hon. member to understand the notion of co-operation. That is probably not part of his vocabulary. It is certainly not part of his behaviour in the House.

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However, I want to emphasize that at the present time we are already—and I will just take one province as an example—in the province of Quebec, co-operating with the province on the development of the purchase of training courses. We are working with the provinces directly on looking at labour market needs. We work in a co-operative fashion with the SQDM. We have joint management of co-operative education with the province of Quebec. We have joint approval of stay in school initiatives. There is a substantial number of areas where we work in co-operation with the provinces and with the province of Quebec. It is too bad the hon. member is not interested in co-operation.

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(1425)

FEDERALISM

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister or any of the senior ministers from Quebec.

All of us in the House know that the people of Quebec will be making a fundamental choice later this year that will affect all Quebecers and all other Canadians. That choice will be between a federalist provincial government and a sovereignist provincial government committed to the separation of Quebec from Canada.

My question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. Because of the seriousness of this issue I hope that she will not regard this as a partisan question. What steps does the government believe Parliament should take in the next two months to ensure that the federalist option is chosen by a majority of Quebecers?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the admonition of the leader of the Reform Party to take this issue seriously.

The Liberal Party believes that the future of the country is a very serious matter. We do not consider it a family feud and we do not consider it simply a matter to be discussed by Quebecers. We think the issue of Canada staying together is an issue that touches every single one of us in every part of the country.

That being said, we think that the best way to convince Quebecers that Canada wants them as part of our country is by showing Quebecers and the rest of the country that we are capable of providing good, decent, honest government for all Canadians.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister's reply makes myself and other federalists uneasy because it suggests that status quo federal-

ism, simply "good government", is enough to rally support for federalism.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister and the government not acknowledge that what Parliament really needs to do is put a new and better face on federalism; the face of a balanced budget, the face of a more accountable Parliament, the face of economic and social renewal, in order to deepen the commitment of all Canadians, including Quebecers, to Canadian federalism?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, over the last six months the government has shown it is not the party of the status quo. We do not believe that by changing suits you are going to somehow show people that you have a better government.

What this party has shown over the last six months and what we will continue to show is balance in decision making. We will also continue to fight, as we fought yesterday, for the rights of every single minority wherever they live in our country. An important part of a country is understanding that in building for the future you also have to understand your history and that is what the Liberal Party represents.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Deputy Prime Minister's answer. However what is missing from it is any deep commitment or acknowledgement of the need for real reform of federalism itself.

If it can be demonstrated to the government that a majority of Quebecers want a balanced federal budget, that a majority of Quebecers want an overhaul of federal language legislation, that a majority of Quebecers want systemic change, like many other federalists in the country do, would that persuade the government to offer Quebecers and indeed all Canadians something more than status quo federalism?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, to understand what Quebec wants I think the member has to start by electing some members of Parliament from Quebec.

(1430)

The member's unfortunate ignorance of the situation in Quebec is reflected by the resolution put yesterday which basically tried to carve up the city of Montreal into east and west.

The reality is a nation is built by celebrating its differences, by making sure every part of the country feels it is part of the whole. Every single policy that passes through the government is going to be based on principles of equity and fairness. Therefore we say exactly the same thing in the city of Montreal as we do in the city of Vancouver. We do not wait for a telephone call to tell us what our policy should be.

[Translation]

TRANSFER PAYMENTS

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, in response to the federal finance minister's intention to slash transfers to the provinces in order to reduce his deficit, the Quebec minister of finance issued the following warning to his federal counterpart:

—we told the federal government that this reform should not be achieved on the backs of the provinces and that the issue of government debt in Canada will not be resolved by offloading the federal deficit onto the provinces.

Will the Minister of Finance ever understand—now that his Quebec counterpart has joined with the Official Opposition in trying to make him understand—that he must cut federal government waste and stop dumping his deficit problem on the provinces?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, we fully agree that we should not dump our problems on others. That is why we first settled the issue of equalization that has been of enormous benefit to Quebec and six other provinces. That is why we agreed with finance ministers, including the Quebec minister of finance, to impose a moratorium on social security reform. That is why, as I said in my speech, we clearly stated in the budget the objectives agreed on by the finance ministers in January.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot): Mr. Speaker, could the finance minister's insensitivity despite his Quebec colleague's appeal be explained by his urgent need to carve out for himself, at the expense of the provinces, enough fiscal leeway to finance his colleagues' repeated, brazen and appalling intrusions in areas of provincial jurisdiction?

[English]

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, let me simply read what I said. I will do this in English because it is part of the speech that was given in English.

—then we took a look at the absolute necessity of renewing fiscal federalism.

The provinces agree with that. The minister of finance for Quebec agrees with that.

—it is now crucial that we begin to take a look at what all levels of government do, not with some political aim in mind, but in terms of its affordability and efficiency.

The Government of Quebec agrees with that, as do all of the provinces who want to solve our problems. Then I went on to say that we have discussed that with the provinces.

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—they have two years in which to complete with us this process. At the end of that two years we will be taking massive amounts of money out of the federal-provincial structure, hopefully not at their expense nor at ours, but as a result of the more efficient programs between the two levels of government.

That is what the provincial finance ministers want. It is what the provincial governments want. It is what the federal government wants. It is what Canadians want. It is what we are going to deliver.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. I will give him a little hint on the answer: billions versus millions.

Today's *Financial Post* reports that the Deutsche Bank has recommended to its clients to reduce their Canadian bond exposure to zero from 3 per cent which could represent up to \$10 billion. One of the primary reasons given is that Canada's heavy budgetary risks will result in further underperformance. It is obvious the Deutsche Bank does not share the minister's optimism and opinion that the budget was a success.

Why would the Deutsche Bank recommend pulling out of the Canadian economy?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, the questioner being a businessman himself understands that what makes markets are obviously differences of opinion.

The fact is the analyst in the Deutsche Bank has expressed an opinion. I had breakfast with the president of the Deutsche Bank not long after that report and it certainly was not his. He wanted to give you his best.

(1435)

The fact is the majority of investment houses in the United States recommend a holding of Canadian bonds at 3 to 4 per cent. That is what makes markets and that is why we are very confident.

The member should have read the whole report because the Deutsche Bank talked about provincial deficits and about the very uncertain political situation in Quebec. Let me tell you, once the political situation in Quebec is cleared up with a victory to the provincial Liberals the Deutsche Bank will change its mind.

Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre): Mr. Speaker, further to the remarks of the finance minister I would like to add another possible reason the Deutsche Bank gave this recommendation despite the breakfast.

One of the reasons both foreign and domestic investors are uneasy about the Canadian economy is that mixed messages

Oral Questions

keep coming from the Prime Minister and the Finance minister. The billions versus millions controversy is only the latest contradiction by these two senior ministers.

Could the Minister of Finance clarify once and for all for the House and for foreign and domestic investors, whose comments on deficit reduction can be relied on, his or the Prime Minister's? And no double talk, please.

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member asked the same question yesterday. I will give him the same answer.

The fact is that in the red book, in the budget and in statements in the House the Prime Minister and I have made it very clear that the cuts have been made in the budget which are required to get us to 3 per cent of the GDP within three years. At the same time we have said a major review of every single program is being carried on by the Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal.

The Prime Minister has said it; I have said it; and you can keep asking us. I would really suggest to the hon. member that he come up with some new questions. Ask Canadians for some new questions. I think your research well is running dry.

The Speaker: I am sure all hon. members will continue to address the Chair.

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[Translation]

FISHERIES

Mr. Yvan Bernier (Gaspé): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans unveiled his new program regarding income support and labour adjustment for fishery workers adversely affected by the dwindling groundfish stocks in the Atlantic.

How can the minister be satisfied with a program which does not propose any measure to get the fishing industry going again through the development of new markets or new products, and how can he justify the reduced assistance, considering that compensation cheques will now drop by 6 per cent?

[English]

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, quite frankly I am surprised at the attitude of the hon. member, given his previous experience with the fishery.

The fact of the matter is the Government of Canada is not reducing the groundfish sector. The Government of Canada is not shutting down the groundfish sector. The hard truth rather than the easy rhetoric is that the groundfish sector today is closed. There are 14 moratoriums in place. People in the groundfish sector are not working today and a great many, the majority, have not worked for two years.

The issue is not whether or not we are going to shut the sector down, but how much of the sector we can reopen, how much of the capacity we can employ based on the ability of the resource to sustain that sector.

We are taking the hard and difficult choices but the honest choices to work with communities, fishermen and plant workers to restore as much of the industry as possible and, where that is not possible, to give them the truth so they can make the decisions to rebuild their lives.

Does the member want us to do something different? If he does, we will not.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Bernier (Gaspé): Mr. Speaker, this is all very nice; however, what fishery workers need is hope. Right now, the government is giving them false hopes; in fact, the package offered is 6 per cent smaller than last year's.

Nevertheless, I will give the minister a chance. How does he reconcile his will to help Atlantic economic diversification with the fact that his government just reduced by \$160 million ACOA's budget for the next three years, as well as FORD-Q's budget, an office whose role is precisely to promote regional economic diversification? Perhaps the minister could clarify this issue, because so far, rather than discussing he is cutting.

(1440)

[English]

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talks about empty hope. We are not talking about empty hope. We are talking about a \$1.9 billion program. It is the only new major expenditure in the February 22 budget. That expenditure represents the commitment of the Prime Minister and the government to the people of Quebec and Atlantic Canada affected by the fisheries crisis to stand by them in their time of crisis and to help them rebuild their lives. The member ought to recognize that.

We have said clearly there are three legs to this program. The first is assistance for individuals. That we have delivered on. The second is to restructure the industry. That process begins over the next six weeks through consultation. The third is to diversify the economy of Atlantic Canada and Quebec.

I have the greatest confidence the Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and the minister responsible for FORD-Q will work hand in glove with the Minister of Human Resources Development and me to see that commitment is delivered in spades.

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EDUCATION

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

Oral Questions

Yesterday the Reform Party suggested the concept of post-secondary education vouchers given to students and income contingent repayment plans for student loans.

Could the minister tell the House if education vouchers and income contingent loans are specifically on his agenda?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, on the matter of income contingency repayments, if the hon. member would look at the announcement we made on Friday he would know the legislation we propose to bring in the House very shortly will include the opportunity for us to undertake a series of pilot projects with the provinces to develop an ICR system.

That was based upon the meeting with the ministers of education I spoke about earlier. Several of them requested that we undertake that kind of approach. Others were not in agreement. Therefore rather than bringing it in on a national basis we thought we would work with those provinces that were interested to develop it and see how the methodology would work.

As for the question of a form of education voucher or education investment that idea has been presented to us through the work of the House of Commons committee by experts in the field. It is one of the considerations I would like to raise when we meet with the ministers of education and labour at the provincial level.

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt): Mr. Speaker, I hope the program the minister is talking about is not the band-aid type variety but is a true reform to a commitment to education.

One of the most appealing aspects of a voucher system is it allows individuals to choose what is best for themselves.

Could the minister tell the House if he has already discussed the idea with his provincial counterparts and, if so, what was their general reaction?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, I just told the hon. member but I am glad to repeat it.

When we met on February 28 with the Council of Ministers of Education we outlined the proposals we would want to undertake to substantially improve the student loans program.

As the hon. member knows we substantially increased the loan limit to bring it into reality with today's costs. We have undertaken a program of more direct support for students, particularly women going into graduate school, students with special needs, single mothers, so that they can get back into a higher education program.

What we did discuss with them is how we can provide a program that would enable all Canadians to be able to go into the educational system on a lifelong basis. We want to turn the

notion of lifelong learning from a cliché into a reality for people.

Members in the entire House would be interested that the co-chair of the Council of Ministers of Education who happens also to be the minister of education for Quebec said in a speech recently in Vancouver that it is a fact Canadians everywhere have common expectations.

(1445)

It is also a fact that we are faced with common problems. It is clear that we must adopt a common approach in dealing with them. That is our philosophy too.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FLU VACCINE

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Public Works. Yesterday, the minister used decisions of previous governments to justify awarding 50 per cent of the flu vaccine contract to Connaught. Need we remind him that in 1991, when Connaught was awarded this contract, the maritimes ran out of vaccine, and that last year, 100 per cent of the contract was awarded to BioVac?

On the substantive issue, does the minister know that Connaught is only a distributor of flu vaccine in Canada and imports this vaccine from the United States, while BioVac, the only manufacturer of this vaccine in Canada, made a bid that would have saved \$600,000 of public money if the minister had accepted it?

[*English*]

Hon. David Dingwall (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question.

The fact is that the Government of Canada, as I have said repeatedly in the House, purchases approximately 1 per cent of the total amount. Ninety-nine per cent of the vaccine is purchased by the provinces. This is done through the auspices of a co-operative committee by federal but primarily provincial governments across the country. They are the ones that purchase the vaccine.

As a result, there was an agreement reached by that committee where 50 per cent would be purchased from the province of Quebec, namely BioVac, and the other 50 per cent purchased from Connaught.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides): Mr. Speaker, does the minister not realize that the direct result of his Canadian solution is to export high-tech jobs from Quebec to the United States and that it jeopardizes the development of BioVac on international markets?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. David Dingwall (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Mr. Speaker, I will take the House into my confidence and respond to the hon. member very clearly, very directly.

This member and that party have been pushing this government to be involved in the process. The hon. member should know that BioVac's price to the Canadian taxpayers, primarily the provinces, was \$1.85. Connaught's was \$1.69. A compromise was reached whereby it would be \$1.77.

If that is not a measure of fairness reached by provincial governments across the country, I do not know what is. The real thing here is that member and that party wish to sabotage this deal in order that they can create political havoc in the province of Quebec.

The Speaker: I know that all hon. members, both in their questions and in their answers, will want to ensure that we never impute a motive to any hon. member.

* * *

ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY

Mr. Joe Comuzzi (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the parliamentary secretary for transport.

The Great Lakes—St. Lawrence seaway is a viable economic route. It is economic and it is friendly to the environment. Unfortunately there is predatory and very unfair pricing by the railroads of Canada when competing against commodities being shipped by the St. Lawrence seaway and into the St. Lawrence seaway system.

The railways in the country do that by and large by the almost one billion dollars a year they receive in subsidy.

When will the government stop this abuse of this transportation subsidy? When will it maximize the return to the farmer where it should be? When will it create a level playing field for all modes of transportation in the country in which to compete?

Mr. Joe Fontana (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, first let me congratulate the member for Thunder Bay—Nipigon on becoming chairman of the subcommittee that is reviewing and will bring forward recommendations on the seaway.

(1450)

I want to thank the people from the mid-Canada port survival task force that I met with yesterday. The National Transportation Agency did make a ruling last year, for the most part exonerating the railways but that decision has been appealed and will be reviewed by the government.

At the same time, my hon. friend will know that the whole question of western grain transportation reform is undergoing an intensive review.

The Minister of Transport and the government are determined to build a national, integrated, efficient transportation system, one that is affordable to the user and to the taxpayer of the country.

* * *

GUN CONTROL

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay East): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice.

There are many law-abiding, decent Canadians who choose to own guns. They comply with the letter of the law respecting handguns. Yet the government is considering taking away their choice of responsible ownership of those guns.

Does the minister respect Canadians who have acted responsibly? If so, why is he considering a ban on handgun ownership?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, time and again studies have demonstrated and our experience shows that guns inherently dangerous fall into the hands of criminals either because they are lost or they are stolen. There is a need for gun control in the country.

Bill C-17 recently adopted by this Parliament and now in place across the country constitutes an important measure toward achieving that safety. However, more steps must be taken. We campaigned for office on a platform that included specific proposals for increased and stricter gun control.

I do not quarrel at all with the assertion by the hon. member that there are honest and law-abiding people who are entitled to the use of rifles for the purpose of hunting or other legitimate purposes. However I say that we have an obligation to the public and its protection to ensure that these inherently dangerous weapons are under control so they do not fall into the hands of criminals.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay East): Mr. Speaker, with the greatest of respect to the Minister of Justice, I suggest that he is continuing to target those who choose to obey the law, the law-abiding gun owners.

The minister should be focusing his concerns on those who are breaking the law. The focus should not be on the gun owners but on the criminals who are misusing them.

Why does the minister not enforce the law, stop the illegal gun trade, get guns out of the hands of criminals and stop harassing legal gun owners?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has just read from the list of priorities in the Department of Justice to act effec-

tively to deal with those guns that are being smuggled illegally into the country.

I am meeting shortly with the Solicitor General and the Minister of National Revenue with that very objective in mind to ensure that the laws that are on the books at present providing penalties for those who possess firearms in the commission of offences are enforced and are effective and to take other steps to ensure that the use of firearms in criminal activity is properly punished.

However, the integrated approach to gun control and the enforcement of the criminal law must happen at the same time and that is precisely what we are going to do.

* * *

[Translation]

REFUGEES

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

The dramatic situation persisting in Rwanda could bring many refugees from that country to Canada. We know that 800 Rwandans from the Tutsi minority already live in Canada, most of them in Quebec.

Can the Deputy Prime Minister tell us what the Canadian government's policy on Rwandan refugee claims will be and can she promise that every case will be carefully examined so that the people responsible for the massacres cannot seek asylum in Canada to escape justice?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): I think that the hon. member shows a good knowledge of the very difficult situation in Rwanda.

Clearly, our government has always had a very open policy regarding the warm welcome extended to those who are forced to flee their country, but we will also have to be very efficient at turning away the people who contributed to terrorism.

I think we will take his suggestion and refer it to the minister of immigration who has already done some work on this very important issue for Canadians.

(1455)

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa): Mr. Speaker, given the terrible situation now prevailing in Rwanda, can the Deputy Prime Minister promise to put in place special family reunification measures, as was done in 1992 for nationals of Somalia and the former Yugoslavia?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of my colleague, the minister of immigration, I am happy to inform the House that one of the main points of the new immigration policy recently announced by the minister was an increase in the family class.

Oral Questions

Our red book recognizes that it is important for families to be reunited here in this country, both for their integration and for the good of Canada. I am sure that the minister will consider the suggestions of the hon. member opposite and act accordingly.

* * *

[English]

TOBACCO PRODUCTS

Ms. Margaret Bridgman (Surrey North): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

Recently, after having asked the House Standing Committee on Health to study the issue of plain packaging of tobacco products, the hon. minister publicly stated: "I would like to see us move on that as quickly as we possibly can" and "I feel that it would do a lot to discourage young people especially from taking up smoking".

Could the minister tell the House why she has requested both her department and the health committee to study this issue, at considerable expense to the taxpayer, when it is apparent from her statements that she has already decided to go ahead with the plain packaging?

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question.

In January 1994 the Canadian Cancer Society released a report "The Effects of Smoking on Young People". This report concluded that it would discourage young people from taking up this terrible habit of smoking.

In February 1994 when we released our anti-smuggling strategy, the Prime Minister announced in the House that we would look at the issue of plain packaging. The Standing Committee on Health is looking at that at this time. I await with great anxiety and I am anxious to hear the results of what the committee is doing. I am sure it will have some very valuable information to give to all of us.

In the meantime, I have asked the Department of Health to undertake a research project, a very specific marketing project, to look into allegations that it would discourage young people from smoking. As the member knows, if we can prevent just one death it is very worthwhile. In this case every year 38,000 Canadians die as a direct result of smoking.

Ms. Margaret Bridgman (Surrey North): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's answer. Considering that the Department of Health has publicly stated that its study would take until the end of the year and that the committee on health care was also looking at this, is it fair to assume that the government will not make a decision on this issue until those reports are in?

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that no legislation has been drafted at this time. I must add that when I met with provincial ministers of health there was a great deal of interest on their part to look into the matter of plain packaging. It is not just the federal jurisdiction that is interested in doing some work in that area. We will continue this as I truly believe that plain packaging will

Points of Order

have an effect in influencing young people not to take up this habit.

* * *

(1500)

TRANSPORT CANADA

Mr. Ron MacDonald (Dartmouth): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport.

Transport Canada has just issued a notice to airmen and the marine industry advising of the possibility of space debris re-entering the atmosphere and crashing off the east coast of Canada, specifically the east coast of Nova Scotia.

What information could the parliamentary secretary give the House concerning this matter, more particularly whether it is the view of the government that this re-entry poses any threat to the safety of Canadians on the east coast of Canada?

Mr. Joe Fontana (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for giving me this opportunity of advising the House that Transport Canada has been advised by Cape Canaveral that there is a possibility that some space debris may re-enter the atmosphere and crash into the ocean off Nova Scotia and Newfoundland on Thursday, April 21, 1994, between 1200 and 1500 hours, eastern daylight time.

This is a serious and important issue and Transport Canada is working with the departments of National Defence, Foreign Affairs and our respective American counterparts to monitor the path of this debris. As the member mentioned, notice has already gone out to the marine and aviation industries.

I also advise the House that it is intended that the departmental satellite re-entry contingency plan, which provides for Transport Canada emergency staff, will give the authority to take whatever action within its sphere of competence to—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: One would hope that contingency plans are also in place to protect us here in Ottawa.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

COMMENTS IN CHAMBER

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order under Standing Order 18 to bring to the attention of the House a very serious matter with

respect to statements made by the hon. member for Carleton—Gloucester both in and outside the Chamber.

Standing Order 18 states in part that no member shall use offensive words against either House or any member thereof.

I refer to *Hansard* of Monday, April 18, 1994, page 3175:

The Reform Party proposes a form of ethnic cleansing.

Also, in response to a question I had asked the hon. member, I refer to page 3176 of *Hansard*:

I think you are a bunch of bigots.

The hon. member later withdrew this but only after the Deputy Speaker insisted.

Also, in response to my colleague, the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, the hon. member for Carleton—Gloucester stated: “The Reform member should not have worn a dark suit to address the House today but rather a white sheet”.

Erskine May 21st edition of parliamentary practice also states that insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder is unparliamentary.

The only reason that these remarks did not create disorder which has been seen so often in the House is that the Reform Party has too much respect for Parliament and for the Canadians who elected us. However, the words spoken by the member for Carleton—Gloucester are offensive in the extreme. This type of language has no place in the parliamentary forum or anywhere else.

I would also like to draw to the attention of the House that today outside the House the member for Carleton—Gloucester once again—

The Speaker: As to the remarks outside the House, whatever is said outside the House as a general rule we do not deal with in here.

Does the member have something to add to the primary?

Mr. Hermanson: Mr. Speaker, I agree with what you said. What I was saying was that while these remarks were made outside the House they were similar to those remarks made in the House.

While I recognize, Mr. Speaker, that you cannot rule on comments made outside the House, the repetition of remarks made in the Chamber does nothing for the level of decorum that Canadians expect from their parliamentarians.

Finally I would ask that you make a ruling on this unacceptable language in the House.

The Speaker: Before I turn the floor over to the hon. member for Carleton—Gloucester, I did read over *Hansard* and I did see the tapes. It is my understanding that the hon. member has

withdrawn the word bigots categorically. He has withdrawn that and I turn the floor over to the hon. member for Carleton—Gloucester.

(1505)

[Translation]

Mr. Eugène Bellemare (Carleton—Gloucester): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to respond to the Reform Party's House leader, the one who had just thrown four sheets to the wind.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Bellemare: Mr. Speaker, we have here a prime example of what the Reform Party—

[English]

The Speaker: Order. I would encourage the hon. member, as he is directly involved, to please direct himself to the point of order on the floor.

Mr. Bellemare: Mr. Speaker, the House leader is offended by the fact that I talked about ethnic cleansing. He quoted some pages of *Hansard* to support his contentions a short while ago.

I would like to refer to page 3147. A member of the Reform Party stated yesterday that language fractures a country and he made reference to Bosnia and suggested that all the problems and wars in the world today are caused by ethnic problems. He then continued to speak about the problems that the French Canadians are creating in Canada by wanting to be recognized for their rights, minority—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. Of course we are engaged every day in very strenuous debate in the House. We all encourage one another to use language which is not offensive in any way to any hon. members. Sometimes in the heat of debate we use words which are not entirely appropriate.

The hon. member has raised a point of order and rather than get into a debate about perhaps what was said and what was not said, I wonder if he would give me the time to review, in total again, the specific words which were said. Then perhaps we could take this up tomorrow when I could make a ruling on the particular words that were put before us.

If we would agree to this, I would look into it and come back tomorrow.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Hermanson: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that my colleagues would be happy to drop this matter and not put you to the trouble if the member would withdraw those statements.

The Speaker: I hope there is agreement in the House to give your Speaker time to review all the words that were said and the context in which they were said.

I believe there is agreement and, if so, I will come back to the House tomorrow. Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

ENERGY EFFICIENCY ACT

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Natural Resources): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the 1992–93 annual report of the administration and enforcement of the Energy Efficiency Act, pursuant to section 36 of that act, chapter 36, Statutes of Canada, 1992.

* * *

(1510)

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to place before the House, in both official languages, draft amendments to the Criminal Code and the customs tariff dealing with crime cards and board games.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to four petitions.

* * *

[Translation]

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Natural Resources): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present the first annual report on the administration and application of the Energy Efficiency Act.

[English]

By promoting energy efficiency and alternate energy my department will help increase economic competitiveness by lowering energy bills and reducing the environmental impacts associated with energy use.

Routine Proceedings

This report notes a variety of important departmental activities which integrate economic and environmental objectives. Through my department's programs and initiatives the Government of Canada is working in partnership with business to promote energy efficiency.

I will use these initiatives as a base for a more co-ordinated program with higher visibility among Canadians. Energy efficiency is widely recognized as the best short term strategy to achieve our economic and environmental goals. I have encouraged an expansion of voluntary action programs within both government and the private sector.

We are working with the provinces and the Canadian Federation of Municipalities to reduce duplication and expand the scope of these programs, and we are participating in initiatives to encourage fuel efficiency in transportation fleets and residential energy retrofits.

[Translation]

I encourage all members of this House to support the gradual direction in which Canada is moving for the sake of greater energy efficiency.

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies): Mr. Speaker, the report which the Minister of Natural Resources has just tabled is another example of the form of centralizing federalism which Quebec chose to move away from on October 25 last. Whereas the Government of Quebec already has jurisdiction in this area, now the minister is announcing clearly today her plans to move further into this field.

Responsible energy management is a provincial matter. It is precisely this kind of jurisdictional overlap between levels of government that we must eliminate if we are to avoid these endless squabbles over jurisdiction which ultimately cost the taxpayers a pretty penny indeed.

Must we remind the minister once again that Quebec has already adopted a broad energy efficiency strategy, that it administers sizeable budgets for energy efficiency research and development and demonstration projects, and that it already has in place an important energy productivity program? Through its Department of Natural Resources, the Government of Quebec is already involved in this area, acting in co-operation with Hydro Quebec, the private sector and regional chambers of commerce.

If, as she claims, the minister really wants to reduce overlap between the provinces, then she should be setting an example and abolishing her department's own programs which only add to the confusion and distort the efforts undertaken by Quebec. If the minister cannot bring herself to do this, then she should at least have the decency to allow Quebec to oversee its own energy efficiency policy independently and turn over to the Quebec government the money she was planning to spend in the province under these nice Canada-wide programs.

(1515)

[English]

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster): Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the tabling of the document. We have no further comments at this time.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Joe Fontana (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association of the 21st annual meeting between the Canadian and European Parliaments held in Vancouver, British Columbia, from February 15 to 18, 1994.

Might I add that this is one of many examples of a parliamentary association doing positive work on behalf of Canadians on an issue that could potentially have been very damaging to the Canadian economy and thousands of jobs, namely the forestry industry.

I want to thank everyone who participated in this great forum because I think we did good work for Canada.

* * *

DECADE OF THE BRAIN ACT

Mrs. Sue Barnes (London West) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-239, an act respecting the decade of the brain.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I wish to introduce a bill to declare the 1990s the decade of the brain following an original initiative of the World Health Organization in the late 1980s.

It is the human brain which makes us unique among living creatures. Ailments of the brain carry with them heart rending disabilities that can rob us of the very essence of personhood. The real tragedy is not only the disease that may cause death but the disintegration of the mind, with devastating impact on family and on society.

A great threat to the independence of the elderly are diseases of the brain, some treatable, most preventable. A healthy mind is the greatest guarantee for continued independence.

A cognitive mental stability enhances the ability to heal and recuperate, to cope and overcome physical ailments. It is also important to note that diseases of the brain are among the costliest, both directly and indirectly.

It is my fond hope that the bill will raise the awareness of Canadians and will encourage further research and support to those in our communities who are forging advances of knowledge that will ultimately improve the lives of all of us.

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

* * *

NATIONAL CITIZENSHIP WEEK

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River): Mr. Speaker, as members know, music is one of the most effective ways of communicating our love for Canada. In this week of national citizenship some of us participated in the Hall of Honour yesterday reaffirming our oath.

We sang "O Canada" like it has never been sung before, I am sure, in these halls. In every one of our constituencies there are gifted individuals, choirs, et cetera. Unfortunately music is conspicuously absent from the daily proceedings here in Parliament. After having given notice to the other two official parties in the House I am seeking unanimous consent for the following motion:

That Standing Order 30 be amended by adding the following words: "and shall cause Canada's National Anthem to be played or sung in the House every Wednesday immediately preceding oral questions".

(1520)

I think you would find unanimous consent in the House for that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the substance of what the member is trying to propose.

However, there are errors in the drafting of the text. Perhaps the member would be willing to move that the item in question be referred to the parliamentary committee on procedure. I am acting chairman and I commit to her to deal with it forthwith. As a matter of fact, we have a meeting as early as tomorrow morning. There are errors in the text. It does not refer to what subsection of section 30 the item should be addressed to.

It is traditional for amendments to the standing orders to be made pursuant to a recommendation of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

If the member is willing to make that small modification, on behalf of my colleagues I am willing to give consent to have the matter referred immediately to the parliamentary committee in question.

Miss Grey: Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that when we asked the Table and the clerks about this, it was in order. It was given back to me saying that it was in order and we could proceed with it. I appreciate the generosity of the member and, barring unanimous consent in the Chamber now when we are on national TV, that the secondary way we could proceed is as he suggested.

Routine Proceedings

As an individual member I believe I have every right and privilege to ask if there is unanimous consent for the motion so I would like the Chair to put the motion to see if there is unanimous consent for it.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, it is not a matter of whether this issue is dealt with on or off television. I would like to think that we stand for a bit more substance than that.

The issue is whether the wording is proper. I am acting chairman of the committee this week. I have given my undertaking to the member. If this is as serious as she claims it is and I believe it is, then surely a commitment to deal with it at 10 or 10.30 tomorrow morning in committee would not seem like undue delay in anyone's mind and in any reasonable Canadian's mind, listening to the proceedings on or off TV.

The Deputy Speaker: As an alternative the hon. member for Beaver River might wish to wait until tomorrow.

She has already indicated she wants me to ask if there is unanimous consent now. We have not heard from the Official Opposition. Perhaps she could put it off for 24 hours and bring it back tomorrow, having discussed it with the deputy whip for the Liberal Party.

It is entirely her right if she wants me to ask for unanimous consent. I will do it as soon as she sits down.

Miss Grey: I did ask once, Mr. Speaker. That was my request.

Let me then put an amendment because the hon. member is upset about the technicalities of it. I would move an amendment:

That Standing Order 30, subsection (1), be amended.

And everything further to that. Yes, we would like unanimous consent but barring that we would be willing to send the matter to committee.

This is a very large thing, but in fact a very small thing for the House to deal with. There is no shame to it, and surely this is the place for us all to say: "Yes, we love this country". Maybe we should sing it right now. Who knows?

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion as indicated a moment ago?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. There is not unanimous consent.

* * *

PETITIONS

SERIAL KILLER CARDS

Ms. Paddy Torsney (Burlington): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to table some 2,000 signatures that are supporting the efforts of Mrs. Debbie Mahaffy, my constituent, in her quest to have serial killer cards banned in Canada.

Routine Proceedings

These cards are published by a number of publishers including Eclipse Comic Books, Rigamor Press and others.

Canadians do not want these trading cards in their communities. We abhor crimes of violence against persons and we believe that killer trading cards offer nothing positive for children or adults to admire or emulate, but rather contribute to violence.

(1525)

It is my great pleasure to support this endeavour and the minister's motion today.

NATIONAL WITNESS AND INFORMANT PROTECTION PROGRAM

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough West): Mr. Speaker, I have petitions on two subjects. The first petition contains 800 signatures ranging from such diverse places as Alberta, Ontario and the maritimes. It concerns the subject of a unified national witness and informant protection program. The petitioners ask the House to enact such a program as quickly as possible.

I have another petition from my riding and the constituents reiterate what the previous petitioners have said. It also asks that the House enact Bill C-206 which is the bill I have put forward to provide for the relocation and protection of witnesses.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough West): Mr. Speaker, I have a final petition from my constituents of Scarborough West. It reads: "Therefore, your petitioners pray that, first, Parliament ensure that the present provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada prohibiting assisted suicide be enforced vigorously, and second, Parliament make no changes in the law which would sanction or allow the aiding or abetting of suicide or active or passive euthanasia".

I want to go on record as saying I completely agree with my constituents.

SUNSHINE VILLAGE

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am presenting a petition on behalf of slightly over 750 constituents of Wild Rose. They feel that the stop work order imposed on Sunshine Village that calls for yet another environmental study is an unnecessary cost to the taxpayers.

Numerous studies and public forums have already been held and expansion was approved by Liberal and Conservative governments during the past 16 years.

The petitioners therefore have called on Parliament to allow the expansion at Sunshine Village to go ahead as previously agreed to and without further costs to the taxpayers for repetitive environmental studies.

PORCUPINE CARIBOU HERD

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present petitions signed by residents of the Northwest Territories and Yukon regarding the protection of the Porcupine caribou herd.

The petitioners call on Parliament to formally reaffirm the position stated in 1987 of the best way to ensure the future of the many shared wildlife populations of the coastal plain. Canada's preference would be for the United States to follow the example already set in both the adjacent Arctic national wildlife refuge lands and on the Canadian side of the border by designating the 1002 area as wilderness.

This was the position taken by the previous Parliament. I agree with my constituents and those of the Northwest Territories that the Porcupine caribou herd is a national treasure. I would urge the government and Parliament reaffirm that position as these petitioners request.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Philip Mayfield (Cariboo—Chilcotin): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition from constituents of the city of Quesnel, British Columbia.

My constituents are unhappy that Canadians were not consulted before the Official Languages Act was entrenched in the Constitution.

They call on Parliament to enact legislation providing for a referendum of the people binding on Parliament to accept or reject two official languages, English and French, for the government and the people of Canada.

SERIAL KILLER BOARD GAME

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I have petitions signed by 4,460 people asking the government to ban the product known as the serial killer board game.

These petitions are in addition to the 105,000 signatures I have tabled already for a grand total of 109,460 signatures thus far.

With the indulgence of the House, I would like to take a moment to thank a senior citizen by the name of Liana Cl  roux of Rockland, Ontario, who arranged that most of these petitions throughout Canada were accumulated during the last two years.

I also want to thank the Minister of Justice for having tabled today legislation which in my opinion proved that Mrs. Cl  roux is right.

(1530)

PENSIONS

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from more than 100 residents of Peterborough and surrounding areas. It is on behalf of long service employees who lose their jobs and have locked in pensions.

These petitioners request changes to the Pension Benefits Act, 1985, which was revised in 1990 to bring that act they say in line with the economy of the 1990s and to improve the situation of displaced long term employees.

The petitioners suggest that consideration be given to releasing such pension funds in cases such as financial hardship, the loss of a job, where someone is starting a new business, or where there is no job available. They also suggest that the eligibility age should be reviewed and lowered. I have signed these petitions.

SERIAL KILLER CARDS AND GAMES

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I have several petitions with several hundred signatures of citizens who want to ban the importing of serial killer cards.

Canadians who are offended by these killer cards will be pleased that the minister has acted so quickly. Today draft amendments to the Criminal Code have been tabled which "would restrict or prohibit the sale or distribution of materials such as serial killer cards and serial killer board games to children under the age of 18". He has suggested that this would go to the justice committee which will be studying it starting next week.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition to present on behalf of the constituents of Calgary North, several hundred of whom have signed this petition. They request that the serial killer board game be banned from sale in Canada.

They will welcome the speedy passage of the legislation that has been introduced today. It is clear these concerned citizens and many others firmly support this legislation demanding the banning of this alleged game from Canada.

ETHANOL

Mr. Rex Crawford (Kent): Mr. Speaker, I am always honoured to rise in the House on behalf of the constituents of my riding of Kent.

I have several hundred signatures pursuant to Standing Order 36 concerning the ethanol plant they hope to have in the city of Chatham through the help of the federal government.

They say: "Your petitioners humbly pray and call upon Parliament to maintain the present exemption on the excise portion of ethanol for a decade, allowing for a strong and self-sufficient ethanol industry in Canada".

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I am pleased to note the Minister of Natural Resources in tabling her report was stressing energy conservation and clean fuels.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Shall all questions stand?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I ask that the notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Shall the Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers be allowed to stand?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of a ministerial statement, Government Orders will be extended by five minutes, pursuant to Standing Order 33(3)(b).

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

EXCISE TAX ACT

Hon. Jon Gerrard (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-13, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act and a related act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

(1535)

Mr. Harbance Singh Dhaliwal (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity today to reaffirm the government's commitment to a fair and simpler sales tax system.

Our goal is to make it fair for consumers and business, especially small business, and to have a tax structure that promotes federal-provincial co-operation and harmonization.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance has already begun to explore alternatives to the current GST. The committee is focusing on the objectives of administrative ease for registrants, enhanced competitiveness for Canadian business and fairness for all taxpayers. It will also be mindful of the transitional impact on taxpayers of any proposed changes.

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In addition the committee will have to be sensitive to the impact on revenue, for we need a sales tax system that can be relied upon as a stable source of revenue for the government.

The committee is consulting with Canadians. By June 1 it will report back to the House on ways in which we might achieve these goals.

The committee's report will help to set the agenda for consultations with provincial governments. We will invite the provinces to work with us to achieve a greater sales tax co-ordination. The lack of co-ordination in the tax system, particularly in the area of sales tax, increases the complexity for businesses and creates many extra costs for governments, both federal and provincial.

Through this process of consultation we will do our best to ensure that improvements to the tax system rest on a broad public and intergovernmental consensus. It will take time to build this consensus. It will take time to reform the sales tax system, to do it once and to do it properly.

It is therefore necessary for this government to take steps to make the GST easier to comply with in the interim. Bill C-13 proposes amendments that will accomplish this.

In several areas the GST legislation needs to be brought into line with what is practical on an administrative level both for the government and the GST registrants. The bill contains measures that have been developed and refined in consultation with representatives from the business community and other sectors affected by the changes. These measures will make the GST easier for businesses and other entities to comply with in their day to day operations.

Even though the GST will be replaced during the government's mandate, we will do what we can in the meantime to make the existing rules easier to understand for businesses, taxpayers and their professional advisers. The bill contains provisions that will ease the administrative burden on seasonal and part time businesses.

Bill C-13 is beneficial for charities as well. In fact it will allow some of the smaller charities to be excluded from the GST rules altogether. For charities that do remain in the system there are measures that would make the rules easier to follow.

This bill will also clarify and broaden the scope of the special treatment in the agricultural sector and certain exempt sectors.

I would now like to take a few minutes to tell my hon. friends about some of the specific measures in Bill C-13. I would like to begin with the changes we are proposing for the business community, especially small businesses, for it is in this sector that the need for change is particularly critical.

The bill contains provisions related to a simplified method for registrants to claim input tax credits, that is to recover the GST they pay on their business expenses.

This simplified method will be available to businesses with annual taxable sales of \$500,000 or less. It will eliminate the need for them to identify the amount of tax payable on each and every purchase they make. Effectively this special approach will allow them to calculate input tax credits by using the same information they need for income tax purposes.

(1540)

Other amendments in this bill will ensure that seasonal and part time businesses will no longer have to file GST returns during the off season.

Taken together, these small business measures will make the current sales tax system easier to comply with for many registrants in Canada.

There are other sectors of society that have special needs and practices to which the tax system must adapt. Bill C-13 contains provisions that respond to the concerns of the health, charitable and non-profit sectors.

For example, the legislation will guarantee the tax free status of adapting privately owned vehicles to the needs of the individuals who use wheelchairs. Another measure will broaden the GST exemption for homemaker services that are rendered to people who require special assistance due to age, infirmity or disability.

The bill will help charities by entitling them to rebates or input tax credits on allowances and reimbursements they pay to volunteers who have incurred expenses on the charity's behalf. It will also make it easier for them to calculate input tax credits on their meals and entertainment expenses. Another amendment will make it simpler for charities to determine whether or not they are required to register for GST purposes.

In the agricultural sector Bill C-13 guarantees the tax free treatment of rabbits produced for food.

For suppliers of exempt services particularly in the financial sector, the bill clarifies the extent to which they may claim input tax credits in respect of expenses they incur in support of both their exempt and taxable activities.

The measures contained in Bill C-13 will lessen the administrative burden of the GST. They will resolve some of its technical shortcomings until we, together with our provincial counterparts, have an opportunity to forge a solid consensus for a fundamental reform of the sales tax system.

I therefore urge the hon. members to give their full support to the bill.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Maurice Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, the House will consider three bills, including one which concerns the Department of National Revenue and, more specifically, the merger of customs and excise. The other two bills deal, respectively, with legislative provisions concerning the GST, Bill C-13 and Bill C-15 which deal with certain Income Tax amendments.

The Official Opposition will support the government on the adoption of Bill C-13. As the hon. member for Vancouver South just pointed out, this bill, whose purpose is to revise or adjust certain provisions of the GST legislation, will affect small and seasonal businesses, charities, health care services, agriculture, financial institutions and other exempt suppliers, and also sets requirements for payments and remittances of \$50,000 or more.

I would like to take this opportunity to discuss why the government has to revise these bills from time to time. In the case of Bill C-13, the bill before the House today, I must admit this is an admirable attempt by the government to make our taxation system more straightforward and more equitable.

(1545)

The Official Opposition certainly welcomes this initiative, especially since it also aims to correct some technical deficiencies in legislation adopted previously. However, I think this would be a good time to explain how important it is for us, as legislators, to produce legislation that is clear, concise and consistent. The trouble with most of the legislation being passed today, especially when the government is trying to move a large number of bills through Parliament, is that the implementation of all this legislation often creates problems that are even worse than those it was supposed to resolve, which are often quite simple. The result is that today, we have hundreds of laws that merely complicate the lives of most citizens.

I think we should realize, as legislators, that there is the federal government, the House of Commons, which passes bill after bill, and the provincial legislatures which also produce a considerable number of bills and regulations every year. There are also municipal governments across Canada and Quebec which adopt by-laws to be observed by all members of the community. There are also school boards, each with their own by-laws.

My point is that the well-known principle that ignorance of the law is no excuse is often difficult to maintain in the maze of legislation we find at all levels of government. Often the only people who can be sure of enjoying the benefits of these laws are the experts in the field, including lawyers, notaries and accountants, for whom I have tremendous respect; but the fact remains that more often than not, they are the real beneficiaries of this maze of legislation at all levels of government.

How do you expect ordinary people whom we are supposed to represent in this House to find their way through the incredible labyrinth of legislation in this country? A law is never perfect, but we should at least ensure it is worded as simply as possible. Legislation that is not clear will inevitably be misinterpreted or misused, sooner or later. As I said before, there are hundreds of laws in Canada that would gain by being simplified or at least clarified.

Bill C-13 fills that need to some extent, and that is why the members of the Bloc Québécois support it. We, on this side, are able to recognize it when the government does it right and we will never hesitate to support any measure or bill such as Bill C-13 that makes it possible to simplify the Canadian legislative system. Unfortunately, such is not the case with all Canadian legislation. In some cases, it is almost ridiculous and Canadians get the impression, in fact the conviction, that the legislator does not know where he is going, that he has no vision and that all we are asking of our fellow citizens is that they trust their government and obey the many laws passed just about everywhere.

(1550)

Survey after survey shows that current Canadian public opinion on the confidence of the people in their governments and elected representatives in general—and Quebecers agree with their fellow citizens in English Canada on that—is lower than the interest rates set by the Bank of Canada, although these are relatively low.

All this to say that neither increasing the number of laws nor enforcing them will improve the public's perception.

I will come back to that later, but we will also be debating Bill C-15, which is a good example of the kind of legislation that should be put before this House to make some sense of the legislative and administrative jumble created by previous legislation.

Bill C-13 clarifies the legislation that governs us. While a step in the right direction, such efforts remain very modest in the face of the masses of legislation which continues to make the lives of people and corporations miserable in this country because of their lack of clarity and transparency.

Let us not forget that each time a flawed piece of legislation is passed in this chamber, that a statutory regulation providing for the execution of a law is misinterpreted or applied incorrectly, and that this has an impact on the everyday lives of our fellow citizens. As legislators, we often acquire the annoying habit of forgetting that the various bills we pass impact on the daily lives of our fellow citizens.

Those were the main comments I wanted to make as the Official Opposition critic concerning Bill C-13. In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the opposition will support this bill because, as I pointed out, it improves several legislative provisions on the GST. We hope that, under the GST review initiative referred to by the hon. member for Vancouver South—we know that public hearings and consultations are being held on a new

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act, perhaps, or an in-depth review of the GST—the government will take the time needed to table before Parliament a bill that will make sense to Canadians, that will be equitable and that will, in the end, benefit our society.

[English]

Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre): Mr. Speaker, I will be the only caucus member for the Reform Party addressing the bill today.

I rise today to address Bill C-13, an act to amend the Excise Tax and a related act. The bulk of the bill offers relief to small business, charities, health care users and rabbit growers in paying their GST. Yes, that is right, they now get back the money they paid in taxes on rabbit food.

The bill makes life easier for them or permits them to pay less. It makes permanent administrative practices already in place. One section, however, prevents people who owe over \$50,000 GST to pay by cheque on Friday afternoon and get a weekend of extra interest credit because the cheque does not clear until Monday.

(1555)

The only contentious section concerns financial institutions that have been trying to get their GST bill lowered by claiming that a section of the act is ambiguous. The ambiguity was discovered by tax lawyers, which justifies their high pay. It would take several paragraphs to explain the highly technical nature of the ambiguity. However the weak position of the banks is revealed by the fact that for four years they paid between \$150 million and \$300 million under protest. The new bill removes the ambiguity and the money stays with the government. This is a very good and sound decision under the current economic circumstances.

It is particularly refreshing to note that Bill C-13 offers relief to rabbit growers in the country. Now all the Minister of Finance has to do is magically pull out one of these rabbits from a hat and balance his budget.

My party supports Bill C-13 but it would like to point out that it represents yet another example of a federal government tinkering with an old idea that does not work.

Since its inception the GST has been a burden for business to collect on behalf of the government the moneys owed and also for the government to administer. With its countless exemptions and high rate, the GST has become symbolic of the country's chaotic tax system causing confusion and resentment among Canadians.

I have said this before and I will say it again. Canadians pay too much in taxes and want the current system overhauled, not just tinkered with.

The problem is that governments have been spending in ways that ignore both the need for a strong economy and the dangers of continued deficit spending. The government, like those before it, relies on the revenues generated by taxes like the GST and the new tax sources to fund their programs and make interest payments on the debt.

If the federal government were to truly attack the debt and not just nibble around the edges as is currently the case, tinkering with rabbits, interest payments to service it would be lower and leave it with more revenue to fund other programs.

This would give the federal government the ability to reduce its current tax hauls from hard working Canadians and give them back their disposable income which will then be spent more efficiently and effectively. They know how to spend their money on their needs better than the government knows how to spend it on their behalf on what it perceives to be their needs.

With more disposable income in the hands of taxpayers, people in the private sector will stimulate the economy creating jobs using at risk money that motivates and not government money which wastes.

Continued government overspending of debt capital, not equity capital, on rehashed programs from the 1960s and 1970s has further encouraged taxpayer resentment, unemployment, high deficits and debts. In today's world, real sustained growth depends on trade, investment and strong industry.

Over the past two decades, the country has lost the competitive edge that it once held in the world marketplace because of poor government policies combined with overspending and high taxation.

As Mr. David McLean from the Vancouver Board of Trade has said:

Foreign investors do not just look at the costs of the goods and services tax and provincial sales taxes, they add them all up. If the cost is too high then capital will not come to Canada.

This is why we must re-examine all taxation, stop tinkering and put in place a simple, comprehensible system that will take the country into the future, leaving the old policies behind.

Enough reruns. Let us create an entirely new program. Canada needs a proportional system of taxation. The Liberal member who spoke first to this bill today mentioned that the finance committee is looking for a replacement for the GST as promised by its leader. One alternative it should consider is a proportional system of taxation or, as is sometimes otherwise referred to, a flat tax.

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The present system of taxation is too complicated, too high and too unfair. These factors in combination with consistent government overspending are stifling our economy. I recommend the implementation of a proportional tax on individual and corporate income.

A proportional tax is the only way to increase the revenue side of the budget, remove the incentives for the underground economy, restore fairness and, most important, stimulate economic growth, which is a priority of all of us here.

(1600)

While we are fighting with our high annual deficits, the high debt and the interest on that debt, we could increase the disposable income both for corporations and individuals through a completely new taxation system. This would help speed up the process of reducing the deficit to zero and starting to supply some surplus funds to the debt. This is the kind of signal, the kind of message that will really inspire and encourage this country to be a haven for investment as it used to be.

This concept is not new to the House or the government. It was the member for Broadview—Greenwood who sits opposite me who initially, I understand, supported a single or flat tax. He wrote in his book *The Single Tax*: “Lower marginal rates and more take home pay would be an incentive to work harder and smarter. The new incentives plus elimination of avoidance and evasion would lead to this tax taking in more revenue”.

I unequivocally agree with the member for Broadview—Greenwood. I am very impressed by his intelligence and insight on this subject.

The objective of this tax would be threefold. First, it would simplify current complicated tax forms so that all Canadians could understand them. I challenge the 295 members of the House for this taxation year to fill out their own income tax forms by themselves and with no help go through the form. Whatever they come up with then send it in to the Minister of National Revenue and have two independent people within that bureaucracy figure out their tax return. I would not be surprised if over half the returns had two different answers with a lot of mistakes which would prove that is very difficult and complicated. Nobody understands the 2,300 and some pages of the Income Tax Act.

This would also increase savings for the Department of National Revenue in the collection of taxes and the monitoring of all personal and corporate tax exemptions.

Second, it would restore equity in the tax system, eliminating the perception that one group of taxpayers is favoured over another by setting a lower fixed rate of tax over a certain threshold for individuals. Corporations would also pay a low fixed rate of taxation under this reform system.

Equity is when people who make relatively the same amount of income pay relatively the same amount of tax. By eliminating yesterday's incentives, which we refer to today as loopholes for the rich people, we can ensure that we capture 15 per cent or 20 per cent, whatever the flat rate would be of that income. That is what would increase the revenue for the government. We could give a high enough tax deduction for the first \$12,000 or \$15,000 of earned income so that nobody has to pay tax on that. That would also relieve a lot of the pressure on our social programs.

It would restore integrity and bring effectiveness to the system by eliminating the need for so many tax concessions and loopholes like those that the government is trying to close with Bill C-13. We waste our time on old laws and old rules that are not working.

The Liberal government must stop following the same path as its predecessors and show some initiative. Stop just talking the talk and walking the walk. Take some tough action and act instead of talking about acting by setting up 15 new committees. It will take six months before they come back with a recommendation which the House will then have to review for a further six months or a year. Let us take some action.

By maintaining the status quo with taxation and programs like infrastructure and the Katimavik II youth job program, Canadians are seeing nothing new from this government. When will this government wake up and realize that you cannot keep taking from Canadians higher and higher taxes and borrow indefinitely in the bond market. One of these days and soon somebody will not buy the bonds.

My hon. colleague for Beaver River said in the House yesterday something which I believe is worth repeating: “Old songs by new singers are still old songs”.

The Liberal red book for example is now becoming an old song book which offers a two-track policy of growth which will, and I quote from the book, “make possible a monetary policy that produces lower real interest rates and keeps inflation low”. The Liberals promise that their policies, measures, budget and all the necessary budgets made to date will get the deficit to 3.5 per cent of the GDP, will keep the interest rates low and we will have low inflation. Since the budget was released the Bank of Canada rate has jumped to a two-year high of 6.26 per cent, an increase of 2.16 per cent. Interest payments on our debt will now increase which will likely force businesses and consumer rates to follow as well in the marketplace.

(1605)

As a former professional football player, I would like to point out that the current Liberal government playbook is not working. It is time to write a new one.

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I finally have the attention of somebody from the government side. He finally put down the trivia that he was reading and is now listening to me. I got his attention.

The playbook is not working. It is time to write a new one, a dynamic one. Let us create a new system of taxation which is fair and simple for all Canadians, that will put to rest the need for band-aid bills like Bill C-13. It is our collective responsibility to develop new ideas and move the country toward a future based on prosperity and away from the old school ideas that just do not work.

I hope that in the Standing Committee on Finance where new ideas are being presented by witnesses from all across the country that the new proposals being suggested for a replacement for the GST are really and truly listened to and that the committee will not be just a job for backbenchers to keep them out of the way while cabinet occupies itself on the greater issues of the country.

There have been some worthwhile suggestions put forth in that committee. Some good solutions have been put forward in that committee. It comes from non-politicians, the intelligent people in this society. They have put forth some good ideas and we should be listening to them. If they do and it is on a non-partisan basis, I look forward to a report in the House that comes to you, Mr. Speaker, and says "the replacement for the GST is—" and that it has the unanimous consent of all members of the three parties in the House who are on that committee. I look forward to that and I hope it will be that conclusion.

In conclusion, easing the GST burden on the public is highly desirable and we should support all such legislation. I encourage the federal government to examine the benefits of a completely new system of taxation, a proportional tax which would remove the need for undesirable taxes like the GST and put money back into the pockets of hard-working Canadians.

The Reform Party will offer any assistance it can to move this country toward a proportional system of taxation and eliminate the need for debate and talk by the bureaucracy and politicians on useless bills like Bill C-13 when there are much better solutions to the problems, new solutions to new problems.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

Mr. Boudria: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think you would find unanimous consent for the bill to be dealt with immediately at committee of the whole.

Also, you would probably find unanimous consent to have the bill immediately dealt with at third reading after the bill is completed at committee of the whole.

(1610)

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and, by unanimous consent, the House went into committee thereon, Mr. Kilgour in the chair.)

The Chairman: Order. House in committee of the whole on Bill C-13, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act and a related act.

Shall clause 1 carry?

On clause 1:

Mr. Harbance Singh Dhaliwal (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, there is an amendment to clause 1 that I would like to put forward.

I move:

That clause 1 of Bill C-13 be amended by striking out line 11 on page 1 and substituting the following:

"come into force on December 17, 1990 and any regulations made for the purposes of the definition estimated federal sales tax in subsection 121(1) of the Excise Tax Act as enacted by subsection (1) may have effect from that date".

The Chairman: Shall the amendment carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Amendment agreed to.)

The Chairman: Shall Clause 1, as amended, carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Clause, as amended, agreed to.)

The Chairman: Shall clause 2 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Clause 2 agreed to.)

The Chairman: Shall clause 3 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Clause 3 agreed to.)

The Chairman: Shall clause 4 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Clause 4 agreed to.)

The Chairman: Shall clause 5 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Clause 5 agreed to.)

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The Chairman: Shall clause 6 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Clause 6 agreed to.)

The Chairman: Shall clause 7 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Clause 7 agreed to.)

The Chairman: Shall clause 8 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Clause 8 agreed to.)

The Chairman: Shall clause 9 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Clause 9 agreed to.)

The Chairman: Shall clause 10 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Clause 10 agreed to.)

The Chairman: Shall clause 11 carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Clause 11 agreed to.)

The Chairman: Shall clause 12 carry?

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Chairman, in order to assist the committee of the whole, you might want to ask if clauses 12 to 36 could carry if there are no questions. Perhaps there are. In order to expedite the proceedings, Mr. Chairman, you might want to refer to it that way.

The Chairman: Is that acceptable to the Bloc Quebecois and the Reform Party?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chairman: Shall clauses 12 to 36 inclusive carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed

Some hon. members: On division.

(Clauses 12 to 36 inclusive agreed to.)

The Chairman: Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Title agreed to.)

(Bill reported.)

(1615)

[*Translation*]

Hon Jon Gerrard (for the Minister of Finance) moved that the bill as amended be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to.)

The Deputy Speaker: When will the bill be read the third time? Now, with the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Gerrard (for the Minister of Finance) moved that the bill now be read the third time and passed.

[*English*]

Mr. Harbance Singh Dhaliwal (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank hon. members of the Reform Party and the Bloc Quebecois for supporting the bill.

I think the bill is an important bill because often we have had in the House both the Reform and the Bloc talking about duplication in government, talking about paper burden on small businesses and the administrative difficulty of managing the GST.

I think the government recognizes some of those concerns and this bill shows that we want to ensure that the government is aware of the concerns of small business in terms of the difficulties of the GST.

As someone who has been a small businessman, I think that doing things as simply as possible, as the hon. member said very well, we can help small businesses to be more competitive. We can help to ensure it is efficient and productive.

I want to thank the members for that and for the excellent comments that were made by the hon. member on how we as a government can work toward improving the environment for small business so it can be more productive, efficient, create more jobs and get this economy moving.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Tremblay (Rosemont): Mr. Speaker, I would agree with what the parliamentary secretary just told us, but the co-operation he received from the Bloc Quebecois shows that we are always ready to co-operate on sensible and useful bills. It is a very small step in the right direction and I think he could use what we just did as a model to tackle real problems such as the

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overall review of government spending and the entire federal bureaucracy. We would be more than willing to co-operate.

[English]

Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre): Mr. Speaker, as a point of protocol, I guess, I rise to indicate that we do support the bill in third reading. I hope that all the points we have exchanged here today do flow back to the Standing Committee on Finance and from the Standing Committee on Finance back to the House and that the government some day in the near future, perhaps in time for the next budget, can come up with comprehensive reforms in taxation that would improve the system that we have.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed.)

* * *

(1620)

[English]

INCOME TAX ACT

Hon. David Dingwall (for the Minister of Justice) moved that Bill C-15, an act to revise certain income tax law amendments in terms of the revised Income Tax Act and Income Tax Application Rules, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-15 contains in its schedules a rewrite of the nine income tax amending acts passed between November 30, 1991 and July 1, 1993; that is to make them consistent with the revised Income Tax Act.

Amending acts passed prior to December 1, 1991 were incorporated in the revision of the Income Tax Act and the income tax application rules in the context of the statute revision exercise which forms the fifth and last supplement to the revised Statutes of Canada, 1985, which came into force on March 1, 1994.

Between November 30, 1991 and July 1, 1993 nine acts amending the Income Tax Act were passed. These acts amended the old version of the Income Tax Act, which was in force at that time.

In Bill C-15 the nine amending acts are being rewritten to read as they would have read if the revised version of the Income Tax Act had been enforced when they were passed. Each schedule of Bill C-15 revises one of these nine amending acts.

What needed to be done to bring the form of the amendments in line with the revised version is under question. In English, for instance, where the Income Tax Act once contained a large number of gender related terms, these have now been removed or replaced.

In the French version terminology and style have been improved and standardized to correspond as much as possible to the improvements in the language of the general statute revision of 1985.

The enactment of the bill will bring the revision of Canada's income tax law to a close. It will provide the citizen and the tax community with a uniformly revised, up to date version of the current income tax legislation.

I wish to stress the point that this bill does not amend the substance of the Income Tax Act. Indeed, Bill C-15 specifically provides that this bill shall not be held to operate as new law when it provides that the Revised Statutes of Canada 1985 Act will apply to these schedules.

This is a technical bill that does not create new law and I am seeking the co-operation of the House for its speedy passage.

[Translation]

Mr. Maurice Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead): Mr. Speaker, as I said in my speech on Bill C-13, Bill C-15, as was just noted again in this House, is intended to clarify several provisions of the Income Tax Act and does not make any new law. Accordingly, the Bloc Québécois supports this bill.

My speech will be short. I want to come back to the point that I raised earlier, and I think that this bill shows it even more clearly than the previous one.

(1625)

We have before us a bill that is over 650 pages long, with some 150 clauses that, I repeat, are intended to amend some previous legislative provisions in accordance with the legislator's desires or with amendments made to other laws so that all these amendments are in the Income Tax Act.

The point I want to make is as follows: although it is good occasionally to have bills that clarify previous provisions or do some housekeeping, this shows that legislators must act wisely in passing these laws the first time. Of course, I am not saying that once passed, a law must never be revised, but it should be changed for substantive reasons, to adapt it to new circumstances and to situations that prevail when the need for change arises.

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This bill is meant to correct errors, if you like, that were made or adopted in some other legislative provisions. Especially at this time of year when everyone lucky enough to have a job must file an income tax return, it is easy to understand how hard it is for the ordinary citizen to make sense of all this mountain of legislation. We add to that complexity when we have to pass this kind of legislation.

Although it will be more understandable for specialists, ordinary citizens will still have difficulty making their way through it. That is what we want to emphasize to the government. When you present a bill, you should ensure that it is as easy to understand as possible for the citizens who will have to comply with it.

That said, I repeat that the Official Opposition will support the amendments contained in Bill C-15.

[*English*]

Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner (Lisgar—Marquette): Mr. Speaker, if I am informed correctly I am the only speaker on this subject.

Today I rise in the House to comment on Bill C-15. This bill is intended to revise certain amendments of the Income Tax Act. I think the Reform Party generally supports the bill except for a few minor suggestions that I would like to throw over to the other side of the House. The bill does, however, provide this opportunity to criticize somewhat what the hon. members on the other side are doing with our tax money.

I was very surprised this afternoon in oral question period when we were criticized for using the telephone to gather information and opinion. I would like to suggest to the hon. members on the other side of the House that it is probably a lot more efficient than using Challenger jets to go and see individuals or small groups of people, and I think we get better information on certain subjects.

The Reform Party position on income tax includes a single rate tax, with larger personal and family exemptions so that families earning below a certain income would pay less tax or no tax. We would also eliminate most of the tax deductions and loopholes which are not general in application for most Canadians. As a party we are opposed to any increases in general income tax burden imposed on Canadians by the federal government.

The flat rate system would be simpler, more sensitive and fairer than the current system.

(1630)

It helps to look at a few facts and figures since 1984. The Canadian tax burden has been the largest among the G-7 countries. In the fiscal year 1991-92 the personal income tax yielded \$61.5 billion which accounts for 49.6 per cent of federal revenues.

The root cause of this serious overtaxation is the problem of government overspending. It seems incredible that government after government refuses to recognize this.

In 1984 the Liberal government was defeated by Brian Mulroney and the Conservatives on a platform of deficit reduction and political patronage. The same thing happened in 1993 when the Liberals defeated the Conservatives on deficit reduction and overspending.

Thank heavens there are 52 Reformers on this side of the House now to watch the spending, even if they cannot do anything on the revenue side. Therefore we have a little more balance which I hope will be positive in this House.

I wonder sometimes why the governments have tried in vain to get the government spending problem fixed by increasing taxes. The notion that a deficit can be reduced from government revenue increases alone is a misguided one.

Federally higher taxes have failed to reduce the deficit. They have in fact stalled the economy by cutting the spending power of the consumer, by dampening new investment and diverting growth into a flourishing underground economy.

In my riding of Lisgar—Marquette agriculture producers have seen along with the rest of Canadians a reduction in our country's international competitiveness. Our income taxes to our producers and businessmen have got to the rate that the Americans are a lot more competitive just on that one simple tax.

I urge the government not just for the farmers, but for the businessmen, private enterprise, entrepreneurs and constituents, to start thinking of lowering taxes and not raising them.

The evidence is across this country. University educated professionals leave Canada for nations where the income taxes and cost of living are lower. This is after we have paid to educate them.

The government should be looking at a tax break that would help our farmers, businessmen and consumers to increase their buying power, their productivity and our competitiveness.

I was shocked to learn recently that since 1961 Canada's tax freedom day has advanced 73 days. In 1961 the ordinary Canadian paid his taxes by May 5. Today that same taxpayer has to use his wages or productivity until July 15. This type of taxation whether it is corporate tax or income tax is unforgivable.

We are rapidly approaching a point where we will be working for governments full time just to pay for their debt-creating policies and bad spending habits. If we do not break this cycle soon and allow ourselves to implement useful, carefully considered tax breaks, Canadians will see their incomes taxed out of existence.

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What direction should the Government of Canada take in its tax policy?

A good example is happening right now in Alberta. Since the election, the premier of Alberta has been on a crusade to eliminate his province's \$2.5 billion deficit. He is on track to achieve a zero deficit within three years. This has been done with a commitment not to raise taxes. The message has gone out that he will not raise taxes.

(1635)

It surprises me that where we live in our global economy technology and freer trade will reduce the importance of political boundaries. Investments and jobs will go to places with highly skilled workforces, good public services and competitive tax rates.

I can tell you what this means to my own province of Manitoba. Recently I have seen two companies move their Winnipeg operations to Calgary. A number of small businesses have moved their production facilities from the Morden-Winkler area to North Dakota. Why? One of the big reasons is income tax, sales tax. Alberta has no sales tax. Alberta has a lower corporate tax. The income tax in North Dakota is about two-thirds of what we pay.

The blunt fact is that Canada's political establishments have overspent and are on the verge of bankruptcy. Governments take 50 per cent of the average Canadian family's earnings. Multiple layers of government drain off the highest personal income tax burden in the G-7 countries and it seems not to be enough.

Reckless borrowing by government still continues as bond rating agencies prepare to downgrade our government credit ratings. Ridiculous tax levels are transferring people's spending power to unaccountable governments. That means retail sales and job growth shrinks and investment falls. It is a simple message that government should heed, or beware.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Prior to your putting the question, I wonder if we could again seek unanimous consent after the question is put to proceed immediately to committee of the whole, followed immediately after committee of the whole stage by the third reading of the same bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to do that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and, by unanimous consent, the House went into committee thereon, Mr. Kilgour in the chair.)

The Chairman: Order. House in committee of the whole on Bill C-15, an act to revise certain income tax law amendments in terms of the revised Income Tax Act and the income tax application rules.

The parliamentary secretary would like to make the motion that all the clauses be done on division by unanimous consent.

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Chairman, I move that all the clauses be approved and adopted by unanimous consent and give an undertaking that there is nothing here untoward and that is not obvious or has not been disclosed to all members of the House.

The Chairman: By unanimous consent shall all clauses, schedules and the title be passed on division at one time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(1640)

(Clauses 1 to 6 inclusive agreed to.)

(Schedules I to VIII inclusive agreed to.)

(Title agreed to.)

(Bill reported.)

Mr. Dingwall (for the Minister of Justice) moved that the bill be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to.)

The Deputy Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Dingwall (for the Minister of Justice) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all members of the House for their co-operation. It is a very worthwhile way in which we are proceeding with the bill in the interests of achieving this, saving a lot of time and getting this consolidation finished.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Tremblay (Rosemont): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform our colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, that if his minister wants to move quickly to bring in a bill on firearms, he would find as much co-operation on this side as there was today. He may have some trouble with his own

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party, but as far as we are concerned, we would be happy to co-operate fully.

[*English*]

Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner (Lisgar—Marquette): Mr. Speaker, I like this co-operation. It is something I can really appreciate. I have been in the House for only about six months. I have a feeling we have accomplished something already and I hope we will accomplish a lot more.

I plead with government members to listen to us carefully when we admonish them on overspending. That input can be used very wisely for the benefit of this whole nation.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed.)

* * *

(1645)

[*English*]

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL REVENUE ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-2, an act to amend the Department of National Revenue Act and to amend certain other acts in consequence thereof, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

Hon. David Dingwall (for the Minister of National Revenue) moved that the bill be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to.)

The Deputy Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Dingwall (for the Minister of National Revenue) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Harbance Singh Dhaliwal (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I rise today

to begin third reading of Bill C-2. This is an act to amend the Department of National Revenue.

While the amendments are administrative in nature they go to the heart of one of the fundamental concerns of the government and the country. That concept is to reshape the instruments of government and to provide both better service and better value to the taxpayer.

Bill C-2 does that in terms of the services provided by the department most involved with the concerns of the taxpayers, the Department of National Revenue.

Since 1926 the Minister of National Revenue has had responsibility for two separate functions: customs and excise on the one hand and taxation on the other. Over this time these two components of the department have operated as virtually autonomous organizations. Yet the daily reality with which taxpayers live has never been so easily compartmentalized. Increasingly through technology, trade and travel Canadians find their lives becoming more complex, more frustrating to manage and more difficult to understand in terms of the burdens government places on them.

All of us see this daily in terms of the complaints received from our constituents of overlap and duplication, of paper burden and red tape. The distinction between taxation on the one side and customs and excise on the other has become more and more an artificial distinction.

Increasingly the distinction denies rather than reflects the way Canadians live their lives. The distinction renders Canadians' lives more complicated than they need be. Reversing that trend must be and is our first priority.

However, increasingly this artificial separation also impedes rather than improves administration, making it more difficult to redeploy resources and to employ new technologies as tools to improve services on the one side and compliance on the other.

It is long past time that we brought the department in its structure and operation into line with the reality with which ordinary Canadians live. It is time we free the quality people who work within Revenue Canada to do a better job. It is time we eliminate overlap and duplication within the department for the sake of the department's clients and the Canadian taxpayer. It is time that we do this in law.

We have already demonstrated what consolidation can achieve within the existing legislative framework. The savings have been substantial. We have also demonstrated that we are at the limits of what we can do within that framework. We require Bill C-2 to remove those limits, to create new possibilities for improvements, to continue our momentum toward the goals of better service and better value and to free the department to work to its full potential. By doing that we can better align what we do with what Canadians want.

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(1650)

During the minister's appearance before the Standing Committee on Finance on February 15 members asked him for specific information on the benefits inherent in the administrative consolidation of Revenue Canada and he has responded to them.

I would like to share with all members of the House some of the benefits administrative consolidation will bring to Canadians and governments in terms of efficiency, productivity, effectiveness in generating revenue, and finally lightening the burden of the Canadian taxpayer.

First, let me speak to efficiency and productivity. Revenue Canada has a solid record of providing Canadians with good value for money. It administers more than 185 acts, regulations, incentives, credits, surtaxes and international tax treaties, and does so with its eye on the bottom line. Through ongoing improvements to its operations and efficiency gains realized through technological advancements, the department has achieved productivity gains equal to adding more than 2,000 full time staff in the last ten years.

These savings have permitted the department to carry out its legislative mandate while also investing in better service, enhanced enforcement and staff training and development.

At the same time, Revenue Canada has made a significant contribution to deficit reduction through both enhanced revenue collection and reduced spending. This will continue in the future.

Bill C-2 will allow the department to go even further in streamlining administration and generating savings for reinvestment. Already the consolidation of corporate activities and administration, which we have been able to pursue within the existing legislative framework, has saved \$30 million.

Some \$13 million of this saving has been reinvested in critical customs programs that are essential in protecting Canadian law and sovereignty at the border.

These include \$2.3 million for the primary automated lookout system. This system provides a primary inspection line officer with access to data base of local and national information to determine the admissibility of travellers and their goods. The cost includes the acquisition of a licence plate reader system to streamline and speed the examination of travellers.

Also included is \$1.2 million for the personal alarm security system. Seventy-four isolated border posts will be connected to ultra high frequency radio communications networks to enable customs inspectors to summon help in case they face threats to their health or safety.

Also included is \$1.1 million for X-ray equipment. Four X-ray vans will be purchased to enhance examination and

enforcement capabilities in Halifax, Toronto, Montreal and the Pacific region for providing a less intrusive and more time saving examination technique.

Also included is \$1 million for the integrated customs enforcement system. This project will integrate and replace a number of customs systems to reduce overlap and improve enforcement. The integrated customs enforcement system is a comprehensive information repository and analytical tool that ensures front line customs personnel have the most reliable information to more effectively manage risk at the border.

Also included is \$3.5 million for the new business relationship. Significant funds have been allocated to re-engineer processes such as electronic data interchange and to develop profile based release, accounting, self-assessment and audit processes. The benefits translate into real savings for business.

Also included is \$1.3 million for the Peace Arch crossing entry. This initiative, which has been successfully piloted in Douglas, B.C., enables frequent pre-approved travellers to use an express lane at border crossing points. Duties and taxes are billed electronically to the travellers credit card based on personalized declaration forms. Additional funds will expand the service to other locations.

(1655)

Also included is \$2.6 million for specialized customs enforcement tools and systems.

Funds have been allocated to purchase a number of devices such as contraband detection kits to detect commonly smuggled goods and to improve compliance.

The full consolidation of Revenue Canada which Bill C-2 enables will permit even further savings. We anticipate that consolidation could generate a further savings of \$30 million for the year 1995-96.

Let me turn to the second area, our enhanced revenue generating capability. As the Minister of Finance declared in his budget speech on February 22, our government is committed to take decisive action on tax compliance and to strengthen enforcement.

Through administrative consolidation Revenue Canada will have a stronger combined enforcement capacity and thus be able to follow through on this commitment. Our experience has shown that non-compliance in one area such as under reporting income tax is often matched in other areas such as under reporting on GST.

As a single unified department we will improve our penetration into the underground economy and thus increase the fairness of our tax system. It will do this by allowing us to build bridges between our tax system, trade system and border operations to improve the effectiveness of them all.

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We want to apply the benefits of such collective efforts to target those who do not comply with the law and to level the playing field for those who do. Efforts to date in co-ordinating the administration of the two existing departments have enhanced revenue generation by enabling increased co-ordination and enhanced sharing of data bases as shown by the following illustrative examples.

First, we have established a pilot in 15 district offices to identify areas of major non-compliance through joint GST and tax audit activities. As at December 31, 1993, \$8.4 million in additional federal tax has been assessed and 4,343 non-filers and non-registrants have been identified.

Second, in November we enhanced our effort to identify GST non-filers. It utilizes a combination of overtime, casual staff and facilities from both taxation and excise. Results to date include \$417 million having been identified as additional accounts receivable, of which \$220 million has already been collected.

Third, we have undertaken the cross-referencing of excise, GST and taxation data base to identify non-filers and non-registrants. The estimated recovery for 1993-94 is \$240 million.

As members will see, the return in terms of revenue far outweigh the cost. This will be enhanced by departmental consolidation. The best examples of this is the initiative to offset GST credit payments against income tax liabilities and family court orders.

For 1992-93, \$59 million was offset from GST credit payments. Results for the first three quarters of 1993-94 show that \$56 million has already been offset. In similar fashion we have made efforts to use better co-ordination to provide more convenient and fair services in particular areas. As well, we expect enhanced revenues from our recent efforts to clamp down on smuggling.

The recent announcements concerning 42 additional customs officers in the Windsor area and 350 customs personnel for the government action plan on smuggling are examples of the government's commitment to improve border protection.

Finally, let me turn to our efforts to reduce the burden on Canadians of compliance with tax laws.

(1700)

By eliminating the unnecessary barriers between the different components of Revenue Canada, Bill C-2 will have a positive impact on those who must deal with Revenue Canada whether small and large businesses, professionals, importers or the taxpaying public.

The following are but a few examples of the opportunity presented by administrative consolidation to reduce burden and increase service: an integrated collection program so that clients and their representatives need deal with only one Revenue Canada official; the provision of a convenient, one stop shop-

ping service whereby clients can obtain information, acquire forms and make payments at any of about 130 customs, excise and taxation offices across the country; a single business registration number to replace the various identification numbers that business is currently required to use in its dealings with Revenue Canada.

The plan is to develop one single and common registration process, a single registration form, an integrated approach to payments, inquiries and account maintenance as regard corporate tax, source deductions, GST and customs; a simplified combined business return enabling small business with gross sales of less than \$500,000 to file a net payment in a single annual return; simultaneous GST, income tax and source deduction audits when necessary and where possible.

Revenue Canada has been entrusted with a significant mandate that involves the lives and the livelihood of Canadians. This is indeed a challenging mandate affected by national and international elements. This consolidation will give Revenue Canada an unprecedented opportunity to enhance its ability to respond to these challenges without imposing any further burden on taxpayers.

As I said at the outset, this legislation provides concrete evidence of our commitment to reshape government to the needs of Canadians. The unanimous report of members of the Standing Committee on Finance is testament to the recognition of this imperative.

I now seek the support of all members in the passage of Bill C-2.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Once again, the hon. member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead has the floor.

Mr. Maurice Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead): Mr. Speaker, do you mean you are tired of listening to me? This will be my last speech for the day, Mr. Speaker.

Today, April 20, 1994, we are witnessing an event of almost historical proportions in the House of Commons. If I am not mistaken, within a matter of hours the government and the opposition parties will have agreed to adopt three bills which, we hope, will have a positive impact on the lives of our fellow citizens.

Bill C-2, whose purpose is the consolidation of the taxation and customs and excise sectors in the portfolio of National Revenue, seems very appropriate because it brings about a reduction of current spending and overlap within one and the same department.

In his speech, the hon. member for Vancouver South described the savings that will result from this initiative. The proof of the pudding is of course, in the eating, but we are prepared to approach what was said by the hon. member for Vancouver South with a very open mind. At the same time, we as members of the Official Opposition will make a point of ensuring that

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these commitments are met and that potential savings become a reality in the months to come.

However, aside from this particular aspect, as you know, Mr. Speaker, members of the Official Opposition have for months asked for a reduction in all forms of administrative duplication and even, I would say, of constitutional duplication.

(1705)

The Bloc Québécois will support such initiatives in this House, provided, of course, that the proposed changes do not adversely affect Quebec interests. In other words, we remain prudent but nevertheless very open to this type of proposal.

Bill C-2 is in itself a good bill, but I hope that when the time comes to implement this legislation, the government will consider all aspects of the question. In this respect, perhaps I may remind hon. members of apprehensions expressed by the president of the Customs and Excise Union, for instance.

In fact, the president of the union appeared last February before the Standing Committee on Finance, when the committee was considering Bill C-2, and he stressed the main concerns his union had about this bill. One of the union's concerns arises from the fact that as a result of consolidation, many employees trained to collect income tax will turn up as managers in Customs and Excise. However, the Free Trade Agreement, or should I say the Free Trade agreements between Canada and the United States and, more recently, between the United States, Canada and Mexico, as well as the trend towards the globalization of world markets, will mean that in the years to come, there will be fewer and fewer tariff items to enforce at our borders. Customs and Excise does not need more tax collectors. As I see it, Customs and Excise should be more concerned about the lack of protection at our borders.

A prime example is the smuggling problem we see today. While the lowering of taxes on tobacco products had a definite impact on smuggling, it would be naive to think that the whole smuggling problem has therefore been resolved. Canadian borders are said to leak like sieves in many places. Only last week, a U.S. government report put Canada on the list of the countries where it is the easiest to smuggle drugs in because of the length of our borders, but that stands to reason considering how few resources are allocated in that area by the government, although some remedial action was taken recently.

The fact that Canadian borders are poorly guarded has certainly given a boost to the black market phenomenon which is now spreading, as we know, to alcohol. It has been spreading for a long time, but loads of spirits keep flowing through our borders. It has even spread to such things as clothing, drugs, as I said earlier, but more dramatically to illicit arms dealing and pornog-

raphy, which goes to show how urgently action is required in that area.

One of the purposes of Bill C-2 is to reduce the operating costs of the Department of National Revenue.

(1710)

But if the government does not also step up our border security—I repeat, action has been taken, but it must really do more along those lines—it is likely to have much more serious problems than those it now faces. It will have a rude awakening, judging by what the president of the Custom and Excise Union said when he appeared before the Standing Committee on Finance.

Here verbatim is one of the warnings he served on the government concerning the actual savings that might be realized from this merger:

Decreased border protection will ultimately translate into more weapons in our schools, more fraud and smuggling, and more expense in enforcing the laws of Canada when the criminal element ends up a step closer to our daily lives. This will cause the need for increased policing within Canadian communities. For example, one missed cocaine seizure at the Canadian border could require several hundred policing actions within the communities.

The government must deal with this problem before implementing this bill.

It is also important to question the motives behind the government's decision to merge the two departments in question, namely National Revenue and Customs and Excise. Why does the government now find it necessary to consolidate these two administrative entities? The answer to this question was given to us in this House on February 4 by the hon. member for Essex—Windsor, who is also Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Revenue, who said unusual things for a member of the government now in office.

She said: "This bill would enable the Minister of National Revenue to consolidate two distinct departments that have been under his responsibility since 1926 into one"—which was confirmed by the hon. member for Vancouver South a few moments ago—"and thus eliminate unnecessary duplication and overlap within government. It will also bring distinct benefits to taxpayers and it will enhance the Department of National Revenue's ability to provide more efficient and effective services and programs".

I recognized in this short quote several terms and expressions often used by members of the Official Opposition in this House. When the Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Revenue talks about eliminating unnecessary duplication and overlap to provide more efficient and effective services and programs, I get the impression that her speech was inspired by remarks made by members on this side of the House, and especially by members of the Official Opposition. In fact the comments made by the hon. member for Essex—Windsor seem

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to come straight from the mouth of a member of the Official Opposition.

The Bloc Québécois cannot logically oppose Bill C-2, as it is perfectly consistent with the philosophy we are advocating with respect not only to administrative management, but also to constitutional issues. The fact of the matter is that the bill incorporates principles which we hold dear: implementation of efficient and effective government programs, and the elimination of duplication and overlap; in other words, good administrative and political common sense. The problem, for the Liberal government, is that it is starting to sound a lot like what Quebec is demanding in terms of job training.

(1715)

Why does the government not apply the same principle of sound management when comes the time to negotiate with its provincial partners, and Quebec in particular, to reach an agreement on manpower training? All the stakeholders—they are mentioned day after day in this House and several times each day—all those involved, whether federalists or sovereigntists, all agree to say that by repatriating all these powers in Quebec, hundreds of millions of dollars could be saved in the area of manpower, perhaps as much as \$300 million a year. Yet, year after year, the federal government keeps systematically preventing any development. It does not even get along with the ultra-federalist, if there ever was one, Liberal government of Daniel Johnson.

Just last week, the Prime Minister used the word “whim” to describe Quebec’s demands in that area. Why is the Liberal government forgetting the virtues and advantages of effectiveness and efficiency, in so far as Quebec’s demands are concerned? How is it that overlap within the Department of National Revenue is a more pressing problem to be resolved than duplication in the administration of manpower training? This is but one example.

By tabling Bill C-2 in this House, the present government is unwittingly showing the inequities in the federal system and laying bare for all to see the problem it is having setting serious, credible priorities when it comes to managing its affairs. We applaud the federal government—and I want to stress this point—for taking the initiative to merge these two departments which in any event had been the responsibility of a single minister since 1926.

What worries me is that if the federal government needed 68 years to realize the damage created by overlapping authority at the Department of National Revenue, how long will Quebecers have to wait to see the same results, that is an end to duplication, in the area of manpower training?

Therefore, the Official Opposition applauds the federal government for recognizing the absurdity of administrative overlap. If the merger of these two departments indeed results in real savings and benefits, and I have no doubt that it will, then we urge the government to be innovative and to explore other similar initiatives, such as negotiating with the Government of Quebec on the issue of manpower training.

However, the federal government, in keeping with its reputation, apparently feels that the duplication hampering Quebec’s development is a necessary thing and should be stepped up.

As we all know, Canada’s political history is full of examples of federal intrusion in provincial areas of jurisdiction. The current Liberal government seems not only intent on staying this historical course, but also bent on increasing the number of areas in which it feels free to encroach, such as health, post-secondary education and, as I mentioned, manpower training.

Quebec taxpayers will not be satisfied with the simple internal merger of the Department of National Revenue. Of course they will reap the benefits of this merger and, like the Official Opposition, they will applaud the government’s action. However, the majority of Quebecers are awaiting the day when they will be answerable to only one national revenue department, namely that of a sovereign Quebec which is master of its own economic decisions. Perhaps when that day comes, the expressions “administrative overlap”, “duplication” and “government inefficiency” will become obsolete.

(1720)

In conclusion, despite some reservations, the Official Opposition wishes to express its support for Bill C-2 which calls for a merger of the two departments in question.

[English]

Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support Bill C-2 at third reading. I addressed the bill previously and have spoken favourably about it.

According to the Department of National Revenue, the approval of Bill C-2 will “enable it to be more responsive to changing needs, to streamline operations, to reduce the administrative burden on taxpayers, to reduce costs and duplication and to improve the quality of its services and programs”. That is a pretty tall order and we hope it can be pulled off.

The Reform Party position on an objective like this is very much supportive. The steps taken by the Liberal government in an attempt to streamline departmental activities is a worthwhile effort. Combining immigration and citizenship, customs, excise and taxation and eliminating altogether the Department of Public Security will help reduce duplication and overlap.

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I hope the current treatment of the overseas tax credit is not an example of this new and improved department's modus operandi in the future. The overseas tax credit is predicated on the assumption that people who work outside the country for extended periods ought not to pay full taxes since they do not consume their full share of government services.

This virtually eliminates tax on 80 per cent of total income for workers logging at least six months of the year abroad. I want to go into this to show members an example of what this super efficiency ought not to do.

By regulation, the tax credit cannot be claimed by employees of foreign parent companies but for years Revenue Canada permitted such workers to claim it anyway. They were taxed at the same level as employees of domestic firms working abroad.

Last fall, however, during a routine audit of the Calgary arm of Texas based Nabors Drilling, tax assessors said they would disallow the overseas tax credit not only for 1994, which seems legitimate, but retroactively for 1993, 1992 and 1991. The decision would nail up to 600 workers with additional tax bills of up to \$48,000 each. Nabors' lawyers are currently disputing Revenue Canada's attempt to disallow the tax credit for the earlier two years, and so they should.

How can the Minister of National Revenue and the Department of National Revenue change the rules four years, three years after the fact? Once the department has set a precedent—it always deals on precedent—it should stick to it or change the law and give people warning so that they know what to expect.

If U.S. parent companies move their overseas operations centres back to the United States, that will kill office jobs in Canada and deprive Revenue Canada of far more money than allowing the overseas tax credit. It is not efficient. It is not effective. It does not serve the purpose for what this amalgamation is supposed to do. It gives the impression that we are creating a tax collection police force that is going to squeeze every penny, every dollar it can out of honest working Canadian companies and individuals. The Minister of National Revenue refused to be interviewed on this subject, so I plan to bring this up during question period in the very near future.

(1725)

We need increased financial reviews and reforms for all government departments to ensure that taxpayers' money is being spent efficiently and effectively. The reduction of costs associated with departmental consolidation and the removal of a few individuals at the executive level are just the tip of the iceberg when one considers the amount of government waste that has existed over the years.

The ivory towers of the Conservative years have to come to an end and I hope the government is serious in its attempt to do so. The new super deputy minister of National Revenue Taxation,

Customs and Excise through this amalgamation told us in the Standing Committee on Finance that he will save money. But I have a concern. He also told us that the department employs 44,000 people at a cost of \$2.2 billion. When asked what the short term savings of this bill are, meaning within the next 12 months, his answer after much fumbling was \$36 million.

He then pointed out in another part of the bill that through amalgamation and the changes that had to take place due to the smuggling problem that existed three or four months ago, the department would be spending more money on customs officials, et cetera, and there would be \$50 million of new spending. The net saving is not a saving. It is a \$16 million increase to the already high \$2.2 billion cost of running the department. Let us hope that is not something of which he is proud.

Thirty-six million dollars is a lot of money and a savings of that amount is very much appreciated. It would do well in a lot of our pocketbooks and the pocketbooks of the taxpayers. It is very important that those people should have that money back.

If that is all the deputy minister is promising to save out of \$2.2 billion, at the end of the current fiscal year I would hope the Minister of National Revenue would look for a replacement. There has to be a better objective than that. If that is all he can save he is unfit for the job.

Our party would encourage the minister and the government to initiate a line by line, item by item review of all departments to find out where the money is going. If we took the time to find the savings in the estimates, through the estimates of every committee and if the backbenchers of the government were allowed to point out where those savings are and if the cabinet had the courage and the confidence in its backbenchers to listen to their input, it would find a lot of further savings. If all the millions of dollars that the Prime Minister is talking about in savings and cuts are added together, it will come to the billions that the finance minister is talking about in cuts and savings. Therefore the two stories would go together and we could restore some confidence in the economy and in the government itself. It would then be speaking from the same song book whether it is old or new.

We have some concerns about Bill C-2. Although we support it, it is feared that the combination of Revenue Canada Taxation and Customs Canada is designed to place more of an emphasis on revenue collection, controlling the underground economy and smuggling rather than designed to save overhead and this ivory tower bureaucratic structure we talked about earlier.

Customs officials must not be hindered in any way by legislation from performing the important duty of protecting Canadians from illegal drugs, weapons and criminal elements by reducing their ranks. By making administrative cuts at the top, the minister must not reduce the number of customs

personnel in the field which would hinder their ability to function effectively.

Other concerns have also been raised by the customs union, several municipalities and the media—I am sure the media is doing it on behalf of the Canadian public—with the consolidation of the two departments, customs officers' resources to effectively defend the border will be strained. The customs union is under the impression that increased emphasis on these activities will lead to a reduction in resources for other activities such as controlling illegal immigrants, firearms, pornography and stopping child abduction.

(1730)

The Minister of National Revenue has said—

Mr. Gagliano: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Just a clarification, there has been discussion and there is agreement that we should pass this bill before we move to Private Members' Hour. I do not know how long the member has left but if the House agrees not to see the clock so he can finish his speech, then you could put the question.

The Deputy Speaker: In fairness to all members, the member has not had long. We should go to private member's in five minutes. Is there unanimous agreement not to see the clock so that we might pass this bill?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Silye: Mr. Speaker, I have good news for the government Whip. I will be under that time limit so we will watch the clock closely and make sure we follow the schedule as pre-arranged by the three party whips. I am sorry, we have a party co-ordinator.

The Minister of National Revenue has said in relation to Bill C-2: "I believe a unified Department of National Revenue will build on the strength of our existing customs, excise and taxation administrations. It will better serve Canadians and strengthen their confidence in Canada's revenue administration".

I hope so, but I hope my example about the overseas tax credit is taken to heart and taken seriously because that is not the way to treat Canadian corporations or individual taxpayers.

In conclusion, we believe that improved efficiency and effectiveness can result from this bill provided that reorganization and government cost savings will be done with the security and the best interests of Canadians in mind, versus empire building within the bureaucracy or a heavy handed tax police force auditing and demanding tax dollars in a totalitarian fashion.

We support the bill but we will be watching and I will be watching as it is my duty to monitor the actions of this particular bill and the effect that it has on government over the next year. The Minister of National Revenue promises lower costs. The new super deputy minister of this cabinet minister in the

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Standing Committee on Finance promised lower costs. Therefore we will expect substantial lower costs.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed.)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5.35 p.m., the House will now proceed to consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

WITNESS PROTECTION ACT

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough West) moved that Bill C-206, an act to provide for the relocation and protection of witnesses, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I begin by thanking my seconder for seconding the bill. In the 20 minutes that I have allotted to me under Private Members' Business I would like to deal with six specifics of my bill, an act to provide for the relocation and protection of witnesses in Canada.

The first point I would like to deal with is the genesis of my interest in the subject.

In the previous Parliament I was the Official Opposition critic for the Solicitor General. In that capacity I was approached by someone who had difficulty with the existing witness relocation protection program run by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. I, like many Canadians, had assumed that such a witness relocation program was a national program with rules and regulations pursuant and subject to the laws of Canada. I was shocked to find out that is not the case. In my capacity as the Official Opposition critic I began to investigate to see what I could find out about witness protection in Canada.

It came to my attention that we in this country do not have a national witness protection program which would cover potentially all witnesses to serious crimes in Canada. What we have is ad hoc witness protection programs across the nation with various police forces.

We know, for example, that there is an ultra secret witness protection program for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. We know that there is a witness protection program of some nature run by the Ontario Provincial Police. There may be one for the Quebec provincial police. We know that some but not all municipal police forces such as the metropolitan Toronto police

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force and the Calgary police force have witness protection programs.

What is the common characteristic of these various witness protection programs? I think there are really a couple. First, there is really no legislative provision for any of them. There is no accountability to the public for any of them and they are all shrouded in complete secrecy. When I attempted to find out about these witness protection programs I found that this cloud of secrecy descended and became a fog of secrecy and we simply were not able to find out any information.

This would come as a surprise to Canadians, to potential victims of crime, to witnesses to crime and to the taxpayers of Canada.

That is what got me interested. Am I alone in thinking this way? Am I alone in feeling that there is a need for a national witness protection program? Of course I would suggest not. In fact I have presented in the last year or so numerous petitions with thousands of constituents and Canadians across the country asking that there be a national witness protection program enacted.

In response to one of those petitions the Solicitor General of the day, the Hon. Doug Lewis, said: "Witness protection is indeed a very important function of law enforcement and equally a crucial service to witnesses who are at risk of retribution as a result of giving testimony in court. It is accurate to say that presently there is not a national legislated program as exists in the United States, for example. My officials are currently examining the state of witness protection in Canada". This was March 16, 1993. Over a year ago the officials were examining the situation.

That was a different government at a different time. Thankfully I note that the current Solicitor General of Canada, when he appeared before the justice and legal affairs committee on April 13, 1994, had this to say about the subject: "An effective witness protection program is critical to the successful prosecution of serious drug and organized crime cases". He has also undertaken to report back.

The problem is that there have been studies and studies going on and we do not seem to be getting anywhere. Therefore, I brought forward my private member's bill. Is there some experience in some other jurisdiction that might help us? Indeed there is. In the United States, for example, a national witness protection program has been in existence since 1970. We can at least look at that to see whether it has served a useful purpose.

(1740)

That particular program was enshrined in the 1970 omnibus crime control act and is currently in force in all 50 states.

Bill Dempsey of the U.S. marshall service in Washington said: "It is the most successful tool that U.S. attorneys have in their daily work". It merely buttresses what our own Solicitor General has so eloquently said before the committee.

Are Canadians, those who are at least aware that we do not have any rules and regulations pertaining to the protection of witnesses, behind this program?

I received a letter from "Canadians Taking Action Against Violence". The founder and president is Deborah Mahaffy. Her daughter was violently murdered and the alleged perpetrator is currently before the courts.

I think it expresses a lot of the intention I have in bringing this bill forward: "Dear Mr. Wappel, I am writing to commend your action and offer our support of Bill C-206, a national witness act. As we in Canada are guided by a national criminal code it is logical and economically apparent that we should also have a national witness protection act.

It is also very clear that there are a great number of people who have not been afforded proper protection for their valuable testimony in our criminal courts of law across the country. Unfortunately witnesses have found themselves victims, always looking over their shoulders for fear of reprisals from those they helped convict or someone associated with them.

Agreements between witnesses to crimes and police should not be left to chance. Written contracts would provide effective protection rather than add further insult to injury. We are paying far too great a price when witnesses and informants do not come forward as they fear exposing personal safety or that of their families.

When the general public becomes aware that Canada has an effective and efficient national witness and police informant program which would be accountable to the House of Commons with respect to budgeting concerns, only then will we see the desired reductions in delayed investigations and unsolved crimes.

My husband and I continue to support a national witness act, and in the memory of our daughter, murder victim Leslie Mahaffy, and all victims of violence in Canada. All families of victims of violence in crime need to see that justice is served in an expeditious manner based on accurate and forthcoming testimony and to achieve that it is imperative that Bill C-206 is votable", which thankfully it is, "and that it becomes the legislative framework of one national witness act which will aid

in the prosecution of violent crime and show that our government is willing to make public safety a priority”.

The Canadian Police Association as well as Victims of Violence of Canada is also supportive of this particular bill and the principle behind it which is the protection of witnesses.

There are approximately 1,400 unsolved murders in this country, some of them clearly because witnesses are afraid to come forward for fear of reprisal.

What is the subject matter of this bill? It is a relatively short bill. I would like to discuss briefly some of its provisions and then talk about what would happen if this House were to give its agreement to this bill.

The underlying philosophy is in section 3. The minister may, where the minister considers it appropriate in the interests of justice, take action to relocate and protect the witness or any member of their family where the minister believes that there is a substantial risk of violence being directed toward that person in an attempt to interfere with the course of justice.

Is that somehow different than what we have now? Of course not. Any of these police forces using their current witness protection programs can do precisely what I have put into this bill. The difference is that they do it without legislative authority and without a minister responsible to this House and the Canadian people to answer for situations in which either a witness has been refused or a mistake has been made. There is nothing new except it is actually in an act giving the minister some direction.

(1745)

The minister must consider certain factors. One is to determine whether there is any other alternative to providing relocation and protection. It is not mandatory. Every person who is going to be seeking relocation is not going to get it. It will depend on the minister's judgment whether the interests of justice and the safety of the witness are dealt with and that there is no other reasonable alternative.

One of the important features is in clause 5 because if the minister feels that it is necessary to relocate it may also be necessary to give a new identity. The bill provides that the minister would have the power to provide suitable documents to assist the person in establishing a new identity or to otherwise assist in protecting the person. This would mean a new name, a new social insurance number, new documents of all kinds.

It is my understanding, and I may be wrong, that the RCMP currently does this. They currently provide in certain circumstances a new name, new passport, new documents. Under what legal authority? There is no legal authority yet they are doing it.

However if someone happens to be a witness to a crime that the RCMP is not investigating, if it happens to be a municipal police force or if it happens to be a province, the province has no

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power to provide a new identity. Arguably the RCMP has no power, but at least they are doing it because they are a federal agency. Certainly there should be even treatment of all witnesses across Canada, just as there is even treatment of all people who are accused of a crime across Canada.

Another aspect of the bill I would like to highlight for the House concerns the responsibilities of the parties. I have set out in clause 7 that there must be a written memorandum of understanding. The memorandum of understanding would set out the rights and obligations of the parties. The federal government is currently being sued by a number of people who are in the witness protection program. Disputes arise as to whether or not the RCMP agreed to something or did not comply with some promise that was made. Why? The answer is because often there is no document to which to refer and to see whether or not the parties met their obligations.

I have set out there should be a memorandum of understanding and of course, because of confidentiality and protection, there should be a mechanism short of a court of law, short of requiring a witness to go public, if you will when they are trying to hide from criminal retribution, a method whereby those breaches or alleged breaches could be dealt with in a private way.

To protect the minister, to protect society I have provided that no decision made by the minister would be subject to review in any court in Canada. This would prevent all sorts of frivolous lawsuits by people who feel they were unfairly denied an opportunity. However it would not allow the minister to escape responsibility from certain decisions that were made and from questioning about those decisions in the House of Commons.

Finally, we have no idea how much money is currently spent on witness protection. We do know that money is spent, but there is no way of finding out how much. There is no way of budgeting. There is no way of suggesting that there should be another allocation. My bill provides that no payments shall be made out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund to defray the expenses necessary for the implementation of this bill without the authority of an appropriation made by Parliament for such purpose.

We need a witness protection act. Everybody seems to be in agreement. This provides some legislative framework for it. It provides some legal authority for the act to proceed and it provides also an opportunity for the aggrieved witness or the aggrieved crown to deal with problems of interpretation.

(1750)

In drafting the bill I tried my best, but by no means do I pretend that it is absolutely perfect. I know that the minister has a department and I know the justice minister has a department that spend its days looking at legislation. I am not adverse to amendments to the bill. I am not adverse to any suggestions that would keep the spirit and the intent but make the bill better. I

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have no desire to pretend that the bill as drafted is necessarily perfect, although I would like to think that it is pretty good.

However, it is important to realize that what I am asking, and those people who have petitioned the House over a course of 16 months or so are asking, is that we accept the principle of witness protection and relocation across Canada so that all people are treated the same way under law pursuant to legislation.

If the House is favourable to voting in favour of the bill, it would then be referred to the justice and legal affairs committee for intensive study. At that time the department, witnesses, everybody could come forward and put suggested amendments. The committee could deal with the bill on a clause by clause basis, accept those amendments which are thought appropriate and needed and then refer the bill back to the House for final passage.

What I am saying is very simple, an affirmative vote would not mean that the bill is cast in stone. It would mean that the principle, which is the protection of witnesses, would be espoused by the House. The fine tuning, the drafting, the repair, if any is needed to some of the drafting that was done by me and by the counsel who help us in doing these things, would then be done at the committee level.

In a nutshell then, I ask the House to very seriously consider this bill over the course of the time that it has to debate it, to look at the principle, look at the forest not the trees, examine the principle and remember that currently it has no legislative foundation. We are operating in a vacuum. We are operating under a cloud of secrecy. We are operating under a system that is not fair because it does not apply equally to all people across Canada and is not accountable to the House of Commons.

I would ask my colleagues to vote in favour of Bill C-206 at the appropriate time so we could take the matter to committee, get it addressed and protect witnesses as soon as possible.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity today to speak to Bill C-206, an act to provide for the relocation and protection of witnesses, standing in the name of the hon. member for Scarborough West. I would like to comment first on the principle of the bill and then on its substance or content.

As far as the principle is concerned, I am glad to see that some government members think about the issues. We have at least one member who just showed us he had examined a situation that was deplorable and who has now introduced a bill on his own initiative, and he is to be commended for that. I agree it is intolerable that today we have no legislation to protect these

people. Canada is a society that provides a lot of protection for the rights of offenders and the rights of defendants, but very little for the rights of people who go to court to testify so that the accused will answer for the crime they committed.

(1755)

Yes, we have the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I checked the Charter, because I thought there might be something in it to provide for this. The only section is section 7, which says: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person—" Other than that, there is nothing in the Criminal Code or any other item of criminal or penal legislation that deals directly with the subject the member has approached through his private members' bill.

Today, there are certain ways, and certain funds are used, to protect these witnesses, but that is not enough, and the trouble is that it is at the discretion of the police. I think that a program of this kind, when we are talking about taxpayers' money, should be organized so that everyone is treated equally, and I think this bill takes that approach.

On what basis do people make a decision, when we say these decisions are discretionary? How do they decide whether or not funds will be allocated in a given case? Does it depend on whether one criminal is more dangerous than another criminal? Does it depend on the fact that some crimes are more repugnant than others? I think it is intolerable to talk about "discretionary" in this respect.

The police force that makes the assessment can also make a wrong decision without being made to account for that decision. Sometimes these mistakes are covered up. It is very difficult, and I will give you an example of what I mean.

Since being appointed Official Opposition critic for the Solicitor General of Canada on October 25, I have had two cases that fit in very well with the bill of the hon. member for Scarborough. I will ask this House a question.

What do Lucille Leblanc from New Brunswick, Sue Smith from Alberta and Mireille Martin from Quebec have in common? What they have in common is that they are the same person. In five years this person changed names three times. I am giving them because the last time she called me, she told me she would be changing her name for the fourth time since her husband, a criminal famous across Canada, had discovered her new identity. How did he do it? The people dealing with her case had made every conceivable change to her passport, driver's licence, social insurance number and other pieces of ID but made a mistake in registering the car she was provided with under the name of Mireille Martin from Quebec. She had been living in fear for a few months, not knowing exactly where to go, how to proceed, or where to find money. She asked me to approach the

Solicitor General of Canada to have her case dealt with expeditiously because she was living in a terrible situation.

I too came up against a brick wall. I could not get information or find anyone accountable in this case. However, she told me herself that after a few calls her case was finally dealt with, but only after a member of Parliament intervened.

If the mistake is very serious, the person who did not enforce the law properly, who made the mistake, should be held accountable and asked where the money went to.

I am not saying the mistake was intentional; honest mistakes can be made but they can have serious consequences for the individuals who are given money to protect them from potential harm.

With all due respect to the hon. member, it is not a matter of reinventing the wheel. I think this is a good bill but, as he said, we must look at what is done elsewhere. There is a similar program in the United States. I also looked at Italy where, given what is happening with justice in that country, legislation was passed to protect witnesses. Great Britain also has a similar program.

(1800)

This means that all great societies concerned with the protection of victims and offenders, whether accused or charged, are also concerned with the protection of witnesses, because I think it is all tied together in the system.

This kind of bill, if passed—I will address contents later—will send a clear message to the criminal element as well as to witnesses and the public, the message that this House takes this matter seriously, that we will not let the people who testify in court down.

I think that any legislation that supports, not informers because I do not like that word, but let us say witnesses who come forward, is good for the system we live in. If we encourage people to come forward and testify, I think that it will show in rulings, sentencing and the entire system. I think the judicial system stands to benefit greatly.

In my legal practice, I have noticed that it is one thing for a witness to testify, but quite another to give convincing evidence. I may comply when served a subpoena, yet be extremely reluctant to answer questions, knowing that my life could be in danger as soon as I step out of the court. Perhaps I would feel safer and my evidence would be more convincing if I knew that, when I walk out of court, there will be people there to protect me.

I am not saying that such a measure should be applied in all criminal courts. The mere fact of witnessing a murder near my home does not automatically endanger my life. However, my

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life could be in danger if I testified in a case involving organized crime or a major case of fraud. I think that work could be done on this bill to amend it so that it could become very useful to Canada and Quebec.

I knew from Quebec statistics that many crimes went unpunished because no one was actually found guilty. I was surprised to see Canadian statistics for the period 1980–1992. Over this 12-year period, for murders alone, there were 1,455 unsolved murder cases. One can wonder how many cases of fraud, robbery, assault and well-planned crimes also went unsolved. We could then ask ourselves the same question about smuggling. I think that it is a very important subject and that this deficiency must be corrected as soon as possible.

So I think that this bill could encourage witnesses to come forward and say what they know in order to clear up some crimes and some cases for which the criminals go unpunished.

As for the principle, there is no problem, we agree 100 per cent. The Official Opposition, the Bloc Québécois, will support you on this bill. I think that we have always shown that we co-operate when presented with a good bill, and I think that is a way to show it to you again and to tell you again that we will co-operate with you on this bill.

I do not have much to say about the form and content. Of course, some small adjustments could be made, including the following. I would immediately take the matter to the Solicitor General. I would say that he is responsible for applying this bill once it is adopted, not a member of the Privy Council. In the Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, among colleagues and people working on that committee, we will easily be able to come to an understanding; I say “easily” because everyone around the table will be on the same wavelength, so we will be able to agree.

But on the whole—and I conclude with that—regarding this bill, I would ask the whole House to be unanimous and I would ask the government to pay very careful attention to this private member's bill, and perhaps we will have something to show that private members' bills can go somewhere, for the good of society in general that will benefit from it.

(1805)

Mr. Patrick Gagnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I consider it both an honour and a privilege to rise today to open debate on Bill C-206, an Act to provide for the relocation and protection of witnesses.

I would first like to commend the Member for Scarborough West, the sponsor of this private member's bill, for bringing this important issue before the House.

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His months of dedication and hard work to improve this particular aspect of our criminal justice system are reflected in the pages of this bill. The basic intent of Bill C-206 is very clear: The government must ensure the safety and security of persons who assist police and prosecutors in their efforts to crack down on crime, particularly organized crime.

This makes sense not only from a moral standpoint but from a practical standpoint as well. Past experience shows that witnesses who provide evidence or assist in police and prosecutors' investigations at the risk of harm to themselves or to their families, are often one of the most effective tools our justice system has against organized crime.

And we need that tool, today more than ever. Organized crime, and especially transnational and international organized crime, are growing concerns for Canada, and indeed for many nations.

Organized crime threatens basic social, political and economic institutions in countries around the world. And it is seldom easy, given the power and influence of many criminal organizations, for the authorities to obtain the information and assistance they need to move effectively against organized crime.

That is why we, as legislators, must take every step within our power to ensure our criminal justice system is as well-equipped as possible to respond to the threat posed by organized crime. For these reasons alone, I believe that this bill is both timely and well directed. However, having said that, I believe there are a number of fundamental issues that need to be considered before approval of the bill is given at second reading.

First, we must consider very carefully the scope of application of a protection program. Under Bill C-206, any witness appearing in a case prosecuted under a federal act could be eligible for protection or relocation.

My concern is that this broad, umbrella approach could be unwieldy and difficult to administer efficiently. Our experience regarding the RCMP Source and Witness Protection Program indicates that such a program should focus on very serious offences and cases involving organized crime.

A related issue here is the question of cost. The provision of protective services and relocation of witnesses or sources is a very expensive proposition.

The Prime Minister has said to this House and to Canadians on many occasions that fiscal responsibility is one of the basic principles of this government.

[English]

Accordingly we want to make sure that any witness protection program is not so broad that administrative overheads become unacceptable. All members will agree I am sure that we owe it to Canadians to make the best possible use of taxpayers' dollars.

Still on the subject of administration there is the question of who will manage and administer the program. It would appear that Bill C-206 seeks to provide a legislative base to the witness protection services provided by the RCMP. However it may be desirable to review other administrative options.

For instance in the United States an independent body, the Office of Enforcement Operations within the Department of Justice, decides who will be accepted into the U.S. marshal's service witness security program. The decision is made after this office has considered the recommendations for admission from the responsible enforcement agencies such as the FBI and the U.S. attorney's office.

(1810)

The point I wish to make is that in the United States it is not the law enforcement body that makes the decision whether or not to give witness protection.

As well, once the witness is accepted into the program the protection is administered by the U.S. marshal's service. Again it is not the originating law enforcement agency that provides the protection but an independent agency, the U.S. marshal's service.

I raise these administrative issues as points that warrant further consideration and review before determining and legislating our own arrangements for witness protection in this country.

A second issue we need to carefully consider is the legislative basis for a witness protection program. It may be appropriate for example to link a program to provisions in the Criminal Code or other legislation.

Protection of people who assist in criminal investigations or prosecutions may involve changes in identity. This requires the active participation of federal authorities outside of law enforcement agencies.

[Translation]

It would seem to me to be appropriate to indicate that the responsibilities of these authorities also be captured in any legislation. The same rationale applies to the roles and functions of provincial authorities involved in the provision of protective services. Provincial interests in this area are a very important consideration given the constitutional responsibilities of provincial government for the administration of justice. At a minimum, I believe that legislation should permit provinces to opt in to a federal program. All of this is to say that we would want to work closely with the provinces in all respects.

There is also the question of cost sharing between the federal government and provinces desiring to participate jointly in a protection program. This could be addressed directly in legislation, or perhaps indirectly through the establishment of a statutory instrument or specific ministerial approval.

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A last concern I would like to raise deals with the limitation of Bill C-206 to witness protection alone. Witnesses are not the only persons who provide information to the authorities in criminal cases and who may require protection for having done so. Many police investigations would never lead to arrests without the assistance of sources or informants, most of whom are paid for their services. Source information is just as vital to police investigations as witness testimony is to court proceedings.

I note that the RCMP source witness and protection program, which I referred to a few moments ago, protects both police sources and Crown witnesses.

These are the type of factors that must be examined before this government can, in good conscience, proceed further with legislation for a witness protection program. However, I do not want these concerns to overshadow the basic accomplishment of this bill. With this proposed act to provide for the relocation and protection of witnesses, the hon. member for Scarborough West has focussed the attention of this House on an important component of our criminal justice system. For that he deserves a vote of thanks from all members of the House, and indeed, from all Canadians.

I understand that other members will now take the opportunity to touch, in more depth, on the points I have raised, as well as discuss other key considerations.

[*English*]

Mr. Lee Morrison (Swift Current—Maple Creek—Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, I rise to offer my support for Bill C-206. To me it is self-evident that anyone who risks his or her personal or family safety to testify for the crown is entitled to protection. This is especially true if protection has been promised as an inducement to take the stand.

In general, formal witness protection and relocations are needed for serious prosecutions involving drugs or organized crime. The people needing protection are often pretty unsavoury folks, criminals motivated by fear, vengeance or greed to turn against their fellows and act as police informers. Nevertheless, if they help us, for whatever motive, they have the right not to be hung out to dry by law enforcement agencies which use them to make their case. There must be national, predictable and enforceable mechanisms to deal with such people and this is what Bill C-206 is all about.

(1815)

Without informants who can testify without fear, investigations and prosecutions of people involved in organized crime sometimes lead nowhere. The cost in wasted effort by police officers and courts is enormous. It must be incredibly frustrating for police to have the goods but be unable to secure a conviction because the safety of a witness cannot be guaranteed.

The type of protection envisaged through this bill is complex and expensive, and it might be required for several years for individuals. Nevertheless, if it helps to put dangerous criminals out of business it will be a sound public investment. When convictions are obtained, society wins.

Not all beneficiaries would be paid informants. In Canada the most famous protected person, federally protected because of his high profile, was Igor Gouzenko. He was given a false identity. If my memory serves me correctly he was kept out of sight for 40 years. I doubt that many Canadians begrudged him his new life.

Although I support this bill I do wish that it was a little broader in scope with provisions for increased penalties for threatening witnesses and with more emphasis on in situ protection for those witnesses who are not paid informers and who do not want to have their lives disrupted by relocation. I am referring to ordinary citizens who just happen to witness a crime and who hesitate to get involved because of the possible retaliation against them or their families.

I most especially wish that this bill would provide better and longer term protection for victims who risk being victimized again if they agree to testify against a dangerous individual, an individual who might very well be out on bail awaiting trial or who, if convicted, probably will be paroled after serving a fraction of his sentence.

Consider this. Women who cause their husbands or lovers to be jailed for assault face early confrontation with their attackers. Some of them live in fear of the man they sent to prison. The released criminals can walk around freely. If they are vindictive and vengeful, their victims have to cower at home, protected only by court orders which are scraps of paper or by anti-stalking laws which are useful only if the abuser tries to extract vengeance over an extended period of time.

A woman in such a situation cannot even keep a shotgun handy to protect herself because in Canada the victim has less rights than the brute who might want to kick her door down. She can live in fear. She can run. She can hide. That is not fair.

In summary, I compliment my colleague on the other side of the House for his initiative in this regard. Canada's witness protection system is at best patchwork. We need national guidelines and criteria so that from coast to coast the same protection is available for all Canadians.

It is high time that informers are given the guaranteed protection warranted for their assistance in bringing offenders to justice and this bill is a short step in the right direction. It merits our support.

Ms. Shaughnessy Cohen (Windsor—St. Clair): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak as well on Bill C-206, an act to provide for the relocation and protection of witnesses.

Private Members' Business

As we have already learned law enforcement agencies provide protection to their sources and to witnesses where there is a threat of retribution as a result of either the source informing on the criminal activity or a witness providing crucial testimony in a criminal proceeding. Generally witness protection requirements arise out of cases involving the most serious charges and by that I mean charges which upon conviction attract the heaviest penalties. Probably we are most familiar in this area with charges such as trafficking in large quantities of drugs, murder, armed robbery, and other conspiratorial crimes involving elements of organized crime.

(1820)

It is obvious that the more serious the offence and the stiffer the penalty upon conviction, the greater risk to an informant or witness. As the threat becomes more serious to the witness of course, the more comprehensive must be the protection of that witness.

Witness protection programs are a valuable tool in law enforcement and in some areas an invaluable tool. They have been developed in varying degrees across the country by different police forces and services. The types of services available under a witness protection plan also vary according to the individual case. They vary as well according to the resources that an individual police department may have.

Examples of these services which are currently available in Canada include psychological counselling, escorts to and from the court house or the prosecutor's office, guarding a witness' residence at crucial times or on a full time basis if need be during a trial, documents in a witness' name, housing upon relocating a witness to a new location, transportation of the witness' private property to a new home, payment of basic living expenses to a witness for a period of time or assistance in obtaining employment.

In Canada, depending upon the capabilities of the individual police force, these services have provided some degree of protection to informants and witnesses but again administered individually through different police services.

Of all of these programs however the most comprehensive is the RCMP source witness protection program. It was originally established in the early 1980s for the RCMP to use, but now it is increasingly used by other police forces and services across the country.

The need for RCMP assistance would arise primarily when an informant or witness must be relocated to another province and where that police force needs to obtain some form of federal assistance, such as federal documentation in a new name for the witness or source. The RCMP has offices in every province and every territory. They have an extensive witness protection

capability. It is easy to see why other agencies seek the assistance of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

There is no other department and no other agency in Canada that can facilitate and co-ordinate the various aspects of assistance and protection that are involved in a witness protection relocation.

These considerations of witness protection are not just going on in Canada. In fact, world wide there is a growing interest in the criminal justice community in the enhancement of witness protection services and the creation of national witness protection programs. This is in part most likely a result of the global growth in organized criminal activity and increased reliance on the use of informants to obtain convictions.

Here in Canada we too are examining existing witness protection services in light of increased organized crime and shrinking law enforcement budgets. To that end in 1992 a survey was undertaken of all police forces in Canada. This survey had a twofold aim. First, the government wanted to obtain information on police witness protection capabilities in general. Second, the government wanted to know to what extent provincial and municipal police services seek and obtain assistance from the mounted police source witness protection program.

Questionnaires were sent to 393 police services across the country and responses were received from 284. Only data for three years prior to 1992 was requested.

The great majority of police services, in fact 88 per cent of them, said that they had not used the RCMP witness protection program over the three years preceding the date of the survey. They had not done so primarily because they just did not have cases in which protection was necessary. This comes as no great surprise to the government because most cases involving witness protection occur in large urban areas.

(1825)

The survey also shows that a very small number of provinces either have or are considering developing a standardized provincial witness protection program within their province.

We have to bear in mind that regardless of individual provincial programs, there will always be a need for an agency such as the RCMP to arrange out of province relocations. For example, should Nova Scotia wish to relocate a witness to British Columbia, it is probable that the provincial program would not have the reach and would not be able to provide for witnesses' various needs in British Columbia. As it stands, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police source witness protection program can and does accommodate relocated witnesses from one end of the country to the other.

The survey also revealed that 15 police services can provide some degree of witness protection. Again, this protection does

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not include out of province relocation and is limited according to the availability of personnel and other resources.

Twenty-three police forces indicated that they had used the RCMP program in the past three years, primarily to facilitate name change and relocation. Of these, over 50 per cent were satisfied with existing witness protection arrangements including their own arrangements and those within the RCMP program.

The greatest concern of those expressing dissatisfaction with existing witness protection arrangements was lack of resources, in particular personnel. Another concern was the need for standardized witness protection procedures that are clearly understood by all local police services.

Finally, the survey pointed out that mainly due to a lack of resources, witness protection is not equally available to all police services.

Based on this preliminary survey it is clear that an effective witness protection program is a crucial part of the law enforcement community's response to growing incidents of organized crime and other types of serious crime. Further, this is a matter that requires close attention to the various needs of the general police community who are the potential users of this service and we have to pay special attention to their financial capabilities.

I believe that particularly in these times there is a requirement on the part of the government to further only the most cost-efficient and effective programs in co-operation with all the relevant players. I would submit that there is yet some work to be done before the government proceeds with legislation on this issue. I am thinking here of further consultations with the relevant players to define the parameters of an effective witness protection program.

Once these issues have been explored and decided on, the government will be in a much better position to bring forward legislation on witness protection services.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this particular issue and I am thankful to my colleague for having drafted this bill. I hope it succeeds.

Many areas of Canada's justice system need to be revamped. I believe here too regarding witnesses there is a need to restructure some of the existing programs. I believe a bill of this nature would certainly help do that.

As a former police officer who served for 22 years, I have seen more than my fair share of trials and certainly my share of witnesses. Unfortunately I have run into some situations where the safety of witnesses and informants and potential witnesses has been threatened, compromised by organized and ruthless thugs who know very well how to exploit fear to their advantage.

As a result of this experience I support this bill. I am confident that witness protection will be improved by uniformity of practice across the country. I hope in the future that my colleague and I will be able to work together to write more legislation that will help make Canada a much safer place.

I am quite frankly getting a little more discouraged at the fact that it is taking private members' bills as opposed to unified government action to cause changes to be made in the criminal justice system. Too often it is a private member along with our party, the Reform Party, that is interested in protecting the victims, the defence of witnesses and informants, the preservation of our peaceful way of life and swift justice for those who deserve it.

The last time I rose to speak to a bill dealing with a justice issue was on Bill C-8. It is a bill that will have the probable effect of taking power away from police officers. This government promises to regulate guns to such a degree that even lawful ownership by responsible people will be threatened.

(1830)

The justice minister intends to regulate special rights for homosexuals. The chairman of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs wants to get soft on murderers. There you have it: Disarm the people; take power away from the police; disrupt the family by giving all the privileges that are now accorded to married couples to homosexuals; and tap murderers on the wrist. If that is not a recipe for disaster, I do not know what is.

This government wants to make us totally incapable of self defence. It wants to limit the power of our police officers to defend us. It wants to contribute to the raising of a generation of dysfunctional youth by undermining the best system of justice preservation any society can have, the family.

It is no wonder we need witness protection legislation. The need for witness protection legislation begs the addressing of another issue. That is tough anti-gang and tough anti-organized crime legislation. As yet, and it is no real surprise, I have not seen any sign this government will be addressing those issues either.

One of the main threats to witnesses comes from gangs and organized crime. Fortunately this country has not been ravaged by gangs and crime rings to the degree our neighbour to the south has. However, with time and a vacuum of political will to get tough on crime, gangs will very well extract the same sort of toll on us as they have for years on the United States.

Incidents of witnesses who have been harassed either by an accused or by friends or family of an accused are not that frequent. Far more common is the terrorism people who come forward either as citizens or as repentant members of crime rings have to face before, during and after trial. This bill will help to make it easier to protect threatened witnesses.

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There is so much more that could be and should be done. For instance we should be legislating harsher penalties for people who commit crimes as part of an organized crime ring. We should be cracking down on gangs before they get into our communities. We should be proactive in these areas.

While the legislation we are discussing today is a good piece of work, it is nonetheless a reaction to the symptom of a problem and not to the disease.

There is a disease in Canada. That disease is a growing lack of regard for the law and for public order. That disease has been allowed to spread and to contaminate more and more segments of our society. There are reasons for increased crime. There are reasons for a disregard of the law.

Canada has gone soft on crime. We are no longer doling out justice where it is deserved. We have become a nation of people claiming victim status. There has to come with that a subsequent decline of individual responsibility.

This government has been an accomplice in spreading the myth that somehow poverty or discrimination causes crime, that if Statistics Canada raises its arbitrary poverty rate then we will suddenly see a corresponding increase in the crime rate. That is nonsense.

Canada has become a nation committed to protected symbolic rights, arbitrary rights instead of basic common sense rights that everyone can relate to. Rather than protecting a person's right to have an income, a family, and a community that is unfettered by government taxation and regulation, we are protecting the rights of those who least deserve them.

We are attacking the family. We are burdening it with taxes so that parents cannot take care of their own. We are regulating how a family can raise its children. We are attacking its very definition by enlarging it so much that the word family becomes meaningless.

These things are leading to an increase in crime, an increase in lawlessness and a decline in the morality that has built this nation and has kept it so relatively free from crime over the generations.

It is tragic how we have mixed up our priorities. I think it is very tragic.

This government has a great opportunity to reverse the trend. Instead, the rhetoric of the government indicates that more of the same is coming. We can safely predict that rather than cutting crime and making Canada a safer place to live, the government's misguided and out of touch stand on justice issues will lead Canada further and further down the path of becoming the sort of society that none of us will want our children to live in.

It is a shame that only private members are producing legislation that makes sense. It is a shame that new and better witness protection legislation is necessary. The fact that my hon. colleague has felt the need to write this bill is a subtle sign of what is going wrong with Canada and our system. I only hope that his colleagues on the other side of the House will have the perceptiveness to pick up on this issue, listen to the common sense of the common people and take the correct steps to put Canada back on the right track.

I urge the support of the House for this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has expired. Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the matter goes to the bottom of the list for two more hours of debate.

It being 6.35 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6.35 p.m.)

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