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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 21, 2002

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 21, 2002

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

CANADA'S PERFORMANCE 2002

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to provide an overview of government activities to Canadians and parliamentarians on the government's performance, I have the honour to table in the House, in both official languages, the report entitled "Canada's Performance 2002".

* * *

• (1005)

[*English*]

CLIMATE CHANGE PLAN

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Government of Canada's "Climate Change Plan for Canada".

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 34 petitions.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of the legislative committee on Bill C-17, an act to amend certain acts of Canada, and to enact measures for implementing the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, in order to enhance public safety. This report is deemed adopted on presentation.

By way of explanation, this is simply the list of committee members, which has been submitted by all parties.

* * *

FINAL OFFER ARBITRATION IN RESPECT OF WEST COAST PORTS OPERATIONS ACT

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-312, an act to provide for the settlement of labour disputes affecting west coast ports by final offer arbitration.

He said: Mr. Speaker, for quite some time now, since August 25 to be exact, 650 grain workers have been locked out of the port of Vancouver. Grain handlers have been working without a contract since January 1, 2001, nearly two years. Therefore, the bill would do something to alleviate that situation.

At a time when western Canadian farmers have suffered through one of the worst droughts in Canadian history and one of the poorest harvesting seasons when what they have managed to grow they have not been able to harvest, now they are trying to market some of their tough and damp grain through the Port of Vancouver but are unable to get it there and it is rotting in their bins. It is time something was done about this and my bill seeks to rectify that problem.

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

* * *

AN ACT FOR THE RECOGNITION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-313, an act to amend an act for the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and to amend the Constitution Act, 1867.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is the fifth time I have introduced my property rights bill in the House. The government has such disdain for any legislative protection for property rights that thus far it has refused to make my previous attempts votable and it has refused all attempts even to have my bill reviewed by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

Individual property rights need strengthening because they were intentionally left out of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Court cases have proven that Canadians have no protection whatsoever to the arbitrary taking of property by the federal government.

S. O. 52

My bill would make up for this mind-boggling omission from the charter by strengthening the property rights provisions in the Canadian Bill of Rights.

My bill would also require a two-thirds majority vote of the House whenever the government passes laws that override fundamental property rights, like it did when it passed the Species at Risk Act, the cruelty to animals amendments in the Criminal Code, the Firearms Act and the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

I am hoping now that the bill will be much more successful.

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

* * *

• (1010)

[Translation]

PETITIONS

PATENTING OF LIFE FORMS

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table a petition calling on the government to ban the patenting of life forms, especially seeds. The international development agency Development and Peace organized a campaign and collected 180,000 signatures across Canada.

The Minister for International Trade will therefore be receiving today 63 boxes containing signed petitions urging him to ban the patenting of life forms. I am tabling a few of these petitions in the House.

[English]

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three different petitions to present this morning pursuant to Standing Order 36. The first one is from people in my riding in the Thompson area.

The petitioners call upon the government to act on the issue of child pornography, to do whatever it can to ensure that laws are in place to protect our children by taking all necessary steps to ensure that all materials which promote or glorify pedophilia or sado-masochistic activities involving children are not allowed.

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from people in Flin Flon, Manitoba, and Denare Beach and Creighton in Saskatchewan, who call upon Parliament to act on the issue of spinal cord injuries, muscular dystrophy, diabetes and cancer.

They believe that non-embryonic stem cells, also known as adult stem cells, have shown significant research progress without the immune rejection of ethical problems associated with embryonic stem cells.

Therefore the petitioners call upon Parliament to focus its legislative support on adult stem cell research to find the cures and therapies necessary to treat the illnesses and diseases of suffering Canadians.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is from first nations residents of Split Lake, Manitoba, who are concerned that claims for residential school survivors have been outstanding for an extremely lengthy period of time and call upon Parliament to act immediately to ensure the claims are addressed.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from approximately 100 people from the St. John's area who are asking Parliament to protect our children by taking all necessary steps to ensure that all materials which promote or glorify pedophilia or sado-masochistic activities involving children are outlawed.

Mr. Shawn Murphy (Hillsborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to present a petition to this Chamber today from the citizens of my riding of Hillsborough, Prince Edward Island, who believe that the courts of Canada have not applied the current child pornography law in such a way that makes it clear that such exploitation of children will always be met with swift punishment.

They call upon Parliament to protect our children by outlawing all materials which promote or glorify pedophilia or sado-masochistic activities involving children.

* * *

[Translation]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[English]

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

ATLANTIC FISHERY

The Speaker: The chair has notice of a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Churchill.

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I seek leave this morning, on behalf of the New Democratic Party caucus, for an emergency debate on the Atlantic fishery, specifically with respect to the disturbing news that came to light this morning, that the federal government may close most of the remaining Atlantic cod fishery.

This is of crucial importance to the four Atlantic provinces and Quebec. The consequences of closures for individuals and certain areas could be devastating.

The minister just left a press conference. He should come to the House at the earliest opportunity and share the information with members of the House.

This federal document apparently reads as follows:

Government Orders

Fisheries are at low levels, and while overall impact of possible closures will be less than in 1992, consequences for individuals and certain areas will be significant.

Other fishing opportunities do not exist in the most affected areas where cod is still being caught, provincial officials have indicated they have been told.

Nearly 900 licensed fishermen are considered cod dependent, earning between \$3,000 and \$200,000 a year from that species.

Almost 18,000 tonnes of cod are processed annually in Atlantic Canada and Quebec and are worth about \$26.6 million.

We need to know how many plant workers could be affected by potential closures. About 30 processors in Quebec's Gaspé region and parts of Newfoundland are heavily reliant, at least 25%, on cod.

Mr. Speaker, if you should grant my request, I or the member for Acadie—Bathurst would be pleased to move the appropriate adjournment motion tonight.

•(1015)

The Speaker: The hon. member for South Shore has also made an application for an emergency debate. I will hear him at the moment.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to comment on what my colleague from Churchill had to say. She has outlined a number of important issues and I would be pleased to support her bid or to have my own bid for an emergency debate accepted.

The one thing I might add to the comments of my colleague from Churchill is that I believe the NAFO meetings will be in January. Another supply day motion will not be available prior to that. Therefore, I think it falls under the point of an emergency debate.

The other issue is that this announcement again was made in secret to a select group of Liberal members of Parliament when the announcement had all the opportunity to be made in the House or directly to the people affected. More important, the ministers of fisheries in Quebec, New Brunswick, P.E.I., Newfoundland and Nova Scotia were not called ahead of time. This decision has just come down and now we are hearing that it may be put off until spring.

This issue needs to be debated in the House. It is timely and of the utmost importance to the fishers of Atlantic Canada. It needs to be dealt with in a timely manner.

The Speaker: I am not of course familiar with the announcement this morning. It would be prudent if the Chair had some idea of what was in that and looked at the situation in general before making a decision on this matter. I will take the matter under advisement and get back to the House later this day. I thank the hon. members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM

The House resumed from November 20 consideration of the motion.

Mr. John Herron (Fundy—Royal, PC): Mr. Speaker, I will pick up from where I left off last evening with respect to the report on democratic reform that the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada voted on and adopted at a convention in Edmonton this past August.

I would like to raise a very important issue. We had a situation a few moments ago where the Government of Canada exhibited a complete and unfettered disrespect for parliamentarians and Parliament itself. An announcement was made, with respect to a very significant aspect of business of the Government of Canada, on the closure of the cod fishery. Parliamentarians were not given the courtesy of the minister explaining to us first in this place as to why the Government of Canada was taking that action. The members of Parliament who represent those areas affected should have had an opportunity to hear it directly from the minister in this chamber.

The Speaker just made a comment that he did not know the details of the announcement by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. The reason for that, Mr. Speaker, is that you, as well as fellow parliamentarians, as a colleague, were not provided the opportunity to hear that information firsthand so that you could make a learned decision about whether an emergency debate was required.

On this day above all days it is a shameful disregard for Parliament, given the fact that today's business before the House is designed to empower Parliament, to have parliamentary reform which will make the work of parliamentarians even that much more meaningful.

Also today the Government of Canada tabled a document with respect to the implementation of the Kyoto protocol. I would not call it a plan because it is not very comprehensive. Again, the minister met with government members and provided a briefing. Opposition members were provided a briefing with officials, and we commend those officials for their due diligence.

Regarding accountability to parliamentarians, whether government members or opposition members, the minimum the members should have, on the most pressing domestic issues from a pan-Canadian basis, is the courtesy of having ministerial contact, and I would say that an announcement of that nature should be done in this place.

I would like to comment on a couple of the issues which I spoke to last evening.

•(1020)

With respect to the relationship between Parliament and the courts themselves, in recent years some Canadians have become concerned about the appearance that courts have encroached upon the supremacy of the Canadian Parliament by reading into our laws interpretations that appear to be inconsistent with or outside the intended laws when passed by Parliament. This appears to many to be a violation of the basic constitutional principle that Parliament makes the laws, the executive implements them and the courts interpret them. The roots of this perception of judicial activism is that the 1982 Constitutional Act included, for the first time in Canada, a constitutional entrenchment guarantee of civil rights through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Government Orders

We arbitrarily bash the courts because we do not like some decisions they have taken. We think there is a responsibility on behalf of Parliament that if an interpretation has been made, which is outside of the will of what Parliament had intended, there has to be a method to rectify that situation. Therefore we have three proposals that would address that aspect and I will read them into the record as follows.

First is that we should have pre-legislation review to ensure that Parliament clearly specifies within each statute the intent of that statute and obtains independent legal advice on the charter compatibility of the bills before they leave Parliament in the first place. It is almost like a pre-emptive strike that we do not have these constitutional challenges.

Second, we should establish a judicial review committee of Parliament to prepare an appropriate response to those court decisions which Parliament believes should be addressed through legislation.

Third, the name and qualifications of any person proposed for appointment by the Prime Minister to the Supreme Court shall be presented to Parliament which shall after debate make a recommendation on the suitability of the nominee's candidacy. This vote shall be conducted and communicated to the governor in council prior to any such appointment being made.

I believe these three initiatives would help enhance the rights between Parliament and the courts. If we look at the issue pertaining to child pornography, it might be a very solid example. Obviously one aspect of the Sharpe decision by the Supreme Court, in the view of most parliamentarians, is an unacceptable loophole that could expose our most vulnerable population, our children, to heinous acts related to child pornography. If we had a judicial committee of Parliament set in place that would provide us with the opportunity to address that court decision with legislation, we could fast track it to remedy that problem.

[*Translation*]

Our report is also to restore the confidence of Canadians in their political institution and to involve our fellow citizens more closely in the functioning of their Parliament.

• (1025)

We are convinced that the initiatives we are proposing in this context will strengthen parliamentary democracy.

[*English*]

To conclude, there is a myriad of initiatives that Parliament could undertake. We believe the Government of Canada is not taking steps forward that would empower parliamentarians, empower committees and make a stronger parliamentary process.

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague and I am sorry I missed the first part of his address because it was the previous day.

Could I ask for his comments on some aspects of committee work? I know the report on the modernization of parliament recommended, for example, a second television room. However he knows that the rules have already been changed and it is now possible until the end of this parliamentary year for any committee to

be televised by the commercial channels with appropriate notice. For example, if the night before the committee chair is advised that a TV company wants to put its camera in the committee room, that is now possible.

That has not been taken up as actively as I and the people involved with this report had expected. I honestly believe that the televising of committees, as well as the televising of the House, is an important way of empowering members and committees.

The second aspect has to do with committee travel. I also believe that committees are empowered when they travel. Essentially what happens is they go to the Maritimes, the west or to the north and when they come back, they then have the genuine evidence, or a feel, for the regions in which they have been.

One difficulty, since I was elected, is that for a committee to travel, unanimous consent in the House of Commons is required. That is often not given by the opposition parties. My colleague is in a small party. I understand what a travelling committee means to a small party like his own because it takes away a member.

Would the hon. member support the idea that: (a) committees should travel more and that it be easier for them to do so; and (b) it be possible for them to use the existing quorum for receiving witnesses, which is a small part of the committee, so they can travel and then come back and report to their main committee? I think that would empower members.

Mr. John Herron: Mr. Speaker, I would like to state for the record that I know the member for Peterborough generally wants to be a steward for increasing the parliamentary process. I would be comfortable with both of the suggestions he made.

The point with respect to televising committee meetings indeed has merit as does the capacity to define a more flexible situation so that those committees can travel to get a perspective from a regional basis on proposed Government of Canada legislation.

I listened to the hon. House leader's so-called parliamentary reform initiatives. The initiatives would essentially make it easier to apply votes, reinstate government bills and institute electronic voting. They would make it easier for the executive branch and not empower Parliament. To raise the threshold from 20 to 25 members to block a consent vote would make it again easier for the executive branch and not easier for parliamentarians themselves.

Programming stages of bills was mentioned. Is that fast-tracking legislation? It would take away parliamentary debate making it easier for the executive branch and not for Parliament. Having time allocation with respect to amendments at the committee level would make it easier for the executive branch and not for Parliament.

The two initiatives that the member for Peterborough spoke about would move the yardstick. He is trying to help the parliamentary process, but the initiatives encapsulated in the House leader's speech have nothing to do with parliamentary reform and empowering Parliament as opposed to just giving additional powers to the executive branch.

Government Orders

● (1030)

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would like the hon. member's comments on the whole procedure. When there is so much of importance going on in the country we are into a two day debate on a modernization issue that nobody understands because what is entailed has not been clarified. It was introduced by a government that for the past nine years has taken away every parliamentary right of the opposition, committees and of individual members.

A week ago the government fought a motion put on the floor by the Canadian Alliance dealing with the election of chairs. The established government, the cabinet and the Prime Minister fought against it. Right out of the blue we had a former finance minister, who was probably the worst perpetrator in taking away individual and committee rights, preaching the gospel.

Now the government comes in with a two day debate on modernization because it wants to modernize the whole show. It is completely and utterly mystifying and I would like the hon. member's comments on that.

Mr. John Herron: Mr. Speaker, it is true that a lot of this debate, for individuals who are not involved in the parliamentary process on a day to day basis, may be seen to be very much inside baseball. They do not necessarily know what we are concerned about.

If there is one issue of parliamentary reform that needs to be addressed it is restoring the power of the purse. That is what we are here to do to a large degree, to keep the government to account. It is up to the parliamentarians to keep the government in check with respect to the power of the purse.

Last spring, with only one single vote, without even a debate, we deemed nearly \$160 billion of supply. That is incredibly shameful. We need to ensure that ministers know what is going on in their own departments. We have a proposal that would address that particular issue. House of Commons rules regarding supply must be changed. For example, in the period between March and June of each year, a fixed number of hours, say 160 hours, 40 sittings at 4 hours, Monday to Thursday, mainly in the evenings, would be spent in committee of the whole. The estimates of four departments and agencies, to be determined by the opposition, would be examined with no time limit and in any one case the response of the ministers would be required to defend or explain their spending estimates.

This would remove any incentive for the government to pressure committees not to meet on estimates. It would leave in place the provision for committees to examine estimates should they wish. It would require all ministers to prepare for examination because they would not know until the last minute if they were being summoned to the committee of the whole. It would provide for televised viewing, as was mentioned by the member for Peterborough.

The role of parliamentarians needs to be enhanced and the first place to do that is here, not in this democracy by press conference that is done outside the chamber. All ministers in the executive branch are responsible to Parliament. This is where all new initiatives should begin and be disseminated. We have a moral obligation to be informed on actions of the Government of Canada. Without that firsthand interaction with the ministers it simply cannot take place.

● (1035)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Hamilton West.

I am pleased to participate in this debate on the modernization of Parliament, a process that we have gone through once before. With the collaboration and cooperation of all parties some important changes were made to the rules of this place. Most members, if not all, would agree that the results of those consultations and discussions changed this House for the better. We are now coming to phase two.

This issue is all about the whole concept of restoring the public's confidence in Parliament. That is what we are here for. Part of any solution is to recognize that there is a problem.

I would like to give the House an example of a comment that people might have when they see us in the House having a vote. When they see us in the House voting, they see us voting along party lines. They say we always vote with our parties. It is true that a party runs on a platform and the candidates for that party run on the same platform. Since we run on the party platform and make representations on that platform, when we get to this place we are expected to support the platform and policy of our particular party. However we also have other issues that come up. They are mostly issues of detail or underlying detail where the vote of a particular member of Parliament is relevant.

We come to this place and we have some difficulties. Sometimes I am flabbergasted that the solutions we have to some of the problems tend to mask the problem. We are not dealing with the source of the problem but trying to get around it. I will give the House an example.

We have a situation now where, if the House agrees, a vote is applied to a previous vote with, for instance, Liberal members voting yea. What impression does that give to the public when the whip of a party stands up and says we are all voting yea? That is not a vote. The premise is that each and every vote should be valued. If we were to look for ways to get around the voting process simply to save time, the premise would be that we would save time so that we could do more good in other places. The premise that good things are happening outside of votes is a flawed argument. What happens in this chamber is not necessarily productive and constructive.

I would like to look at the U.K. experience as an example. Its debating time on government bills and motions, et cetera, is substantially less than we spend in this place debating each stage of bills and motions. Why is that? The U.K. works out the various party positions, the parties get their best orators, and they make their points once and only once. The U.K. does not stream in piles of members of a caucus, many of whom do not know what a specific bill is about. They have never been on a committee, the issue is of no relevance to their constituency, and they have no knowledge of the issue, but somebody puts a speech in their hand and tells them to give the speech.

Government Orders

A great proportion of time in this place is taken up by members giving speeches on matters that they have absolutely no knowledge of and it comes out clearly during the period for questions and comments. That is why many of these members will speak when there are no questions and comments because they cannot sustain their arguments.

Let us be honest about the reality. We must ensure that the time we spend debating here is spent on making substantive points on bills, motions, et cetera, so we do not repeat them 20 times and have members come in here who have absolutely no knowledge of a subject, and simply read a speech because they want to emphasize a point. That is an abuse of this place. If we want to be productive and constructive in this place we should look at our whole process of speaking here. We should ensure that when we speak, we speak once and only once and make our points, but not engineer, as all parties do, streams of speakers simply for the value of speaking.

We all know there are members here who will speak as often as they can on every issue because they want the television time. I am sorry. Everybody loves to have a little exposure. However when it gets down to someone speaking for the sake of speaking, I do not think this place is done any service. The parties must show more discipline.

• (1040)

My point at this juncture is that all parties have to reconsider their strategies on their speaking and representations on bills and motions in this place. When a member comes here to speak, by knowing what committees the member is on and the member's constituency, what work the member has done, the member's history and reputation, we know that the member is credible and can speak to the issue before the House.

It is important that we consider how we do this, rather than try to gobble up time and then be forced into a situation of calling for closure simply because we are not making any progress and we have been saying the same thing 20 different ways. The maturity of the House would be demonstrated by acknowledging the fact that we are gobbling up the time for the wrong reasons.

I will move on to private members' business. We have gone through more scenarios than anyone could ever imagine on how to deal with private members' business.

The reality is that only 15 private members' bills have passed in this place since 1993. Private members' business has not been a very productive area of legislative success for members.

We all want to champion a cause. We have talked about making everything votable and sending it to a committee, et cetera. There are some realities to consider. One of them is that when it is a person's bill, it often becomes a popularity contest. For a member who has been less than popular in the House, is very unlikely that the bill will go very far.

The House will have to have some sort of a selection process to determine which bills go first. I think all members have to accept that they will put their best efforts forward to come up with a bill and let their reputation stand on its own merit by bringing the bill to this place. There could be a one hour period where the member presented

the bill, the rationale and then there would be questions and comments.

We never have questions and comments on private members' bills and I think we should. Instead of going to some committee that is set up for private members' bills or a standing committee, the members should come before the House and make their case. They should let their peers ask the questions and then vote on whether or not the members of this chamber as a group want the bill to go forward through the full process.

If a member has a good bill and has earned the respect and support of this place, that bill should be afforded the same status as a government bill. There should be no limitations on the amount of debate, always questions and comment and full stages. A good private member's bill should get the same status as a government bill.

I had an opportunity to talk with the Hon. Elmer MacKay when he was here for a function. We talked about how this place has changed since 1993, when most of the present members came here. I do not know how other members feel about this because I have not surveyed too many, but I think this place has changed substantially. It has really changed in terms of the level of oratory and the quality of the speeches in this place. There were more games put into it. It was a culture that evolved and reduced us down to the lowest common denominator. I do not think this place does itself any good by having the quality of oratory reduced down to the lowest common denominator.

We should give consideration to exercising an established parliamentary rule that members who speak in the House should not be permitted to read their speeches. I am sorry to say that we cannot have members come here and simply read a speech. If members know the subject and have something to say, let them read quotes and details, but when they state their position, I believe members have to work harder on their speeches.

Members should have the opportunity, subject to certain criteria, to table a speech. I have often found myself in a position where I cannot get on the speaker's list or I am shut out for one reason or another, but it is important to me and I want to be on the public record. I would like to be able to table my speech and represent my views on an important matter. We should give consideration to that.

• (1045)

Finally, with regard to the estimates, 80% of committees do not report the estimates back to this place. That is an abdication of responsibility. We have to look at that whole process and determine whether or not our committees have the tools and the direction to do a good job on the estimates of the government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have heard what our colleague has had to say about modernizing the House of Commons. I would like to make some comments and ask a question, specifically on private members' motions or bills .

We have already worked on bills introduced in the House of Commons where members have the opportunity to express opinions on them.

Government Orders

Approximately 200 members can introduce bills or motions. Instead of debating in each instance as to whether a bill or motion will or will not be votable, as he has just explained, we are proposing a system whereby, when a member has introduced an important bill or motion, the members will hold a democratic vote in the House.

If we have to vote on whether or not it can be tabled in the House, we will be doing nothing but that. I know the government does not have a lot to do. We are having take note debates virtually every day and there are no bills before the House. I do think, however, that it ought to give this some thought, because it would double the time spent in the House. It is already difficult enough letting each member introduce a motion or bill.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, there are many ways to handle this. The reality is that all members of Parliament will not get to put through a private member's bill in a Parliament. It is physically impossible.

It has to start somewhere, but the importance of having questions and comments and having the chamber as a whole address private members' issues would be a better opportunity for members with good bills to garner support. If it is done in a small committee, a subcommittee of procedure and House affairs or in a standing committee, personalities come into play. If the member has not been a good boy, chances are he will not get an ear.

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite did what he said should be done in the House. He did not read his speech and I give him credit for that. He talks from the heart. In talking from the heart, he did say that members should be voting on things that they ran on, in other words, in an election platform, significant issues.

I am certain there must be a reason and I would like to have him give that reason. The red book promise back in 1993 was for an independent ethics counsellor. The member had an opportunity to vote for that principle in the House not so long ago. He voted against it. I would like him to explain why he would campaign on one thing, have an opportunity to vote on it and vote against it.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, that is quite true. The obvious response is that members should vote in favour of everything they ran on unless it can be demonstrated there is a reason that has come up and they have determined that it is not the right way to go.

In regard specifically to that one, I was advised at the time when we were considering the vote that the ethics counsellor himself advised that he could not report to Parliament and still be able to protect cabinet confidentiality. As the member well knows, we are now wrestling with how we deal with a member of Parliament versus those matters to do with cabinet confidentiality.

On the basis of Mr. Wilson's representations, the Prime Minister had to take a decision. Yes, the commitment was not made but I believe the commitment was made for a valid reason.

•(1050)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, although I have the greatest respect for my colleague across the way, I wonder how the House could vote to authorize making bills votable items

when we are all, each of us, specialists on certain issues. We are not necessarily familiar with all of everyone else's areas of expertise.

It would take an incredible amount of very detailed work before we could determine whether a bill should be votable according to our criteria and beliefs. This is virtually impossible.

Second, I believe that if a member has drafted a bill and done everything required to get it this far, his or her bill should be voted on during a given parliamentary session. If the member has gone to the trouble of preparing it, the bill should automatically be votable. There ought to be at least one per session.

Does the hon. member not think that this would be logical? There would be time for it. Not all members introduce bills. I would like to have his opinion on this.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, on the first question the member's point is that there are so many bills and so many diverse subjects it would be very difficult for a member of Parliament to make an informed judgment for voting purposes. I understand the point. However the member well knows that we are all asked to vote on a wide variety of bills and motions in this place of which we have very little knowledge and we still cast a vote. If she can figure out the response to one, she can get the other.

Her second question is about votability. I agree they should be votable, but the vote after the presentation and the questions and comments would be whether the members in the chamber wanted the matter to go forward. That is votability.

Mr. Stan Keyes (Hamilton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, permit me to begin my remarks by saying that four elections and 14 years ago today, on November 21, 1988, I was first elected member of Parliament for Hamilton West. I want to thank my hometown and my constituents for this honour and privilege and I want to thank my family and friends for their love and support. Happy anniversary, including you, Mr. Speaker, who were elected in 1988, to all my colleagues in the school of 1988.

Now on to today's take note debate on the modernization and improvement of the procedures of the House of Commons. Quite frankly, more needs to be done to modernize and meet the needs of parliamentarians and all Canadians. Some of the ideas we will hear in this take note debate will challenge the status quo and that is a good thing.

I want to present to the House just a few of the simple yet significant ways we can reform the Standing Orders of this place and the procedures that we can follow.

Before I do that, let me thank the House leaders of all parties for including the caucus chairs on the 2002 modernization committee. I was privileged to be elected by my colleagues as the national caucus chair for the Liberal caucus, the government caucus. I very much look forward to participating with my fellow members of Parliament, but also ensuring that my colleagues and those members in the opposition have unfettered access to the committee to put forward their ideas to be heard. I will have more to say about that more specifically in just a moment.

Government Orders

Page 800 of Marleau's and Montpetit's *House of Commons Procedures and Practice* portrays the development of the rules respecting committees as "the perpetual struggle to alter the balance of power between the legislature and the executive".

Since the Liberal Party of Canada came to power in 1993, some steps have been taken to enhance the profile and effectiveness of committees for backbenchers. As indicated on page 804 of M and M let us call it, in 1994 the Standing Orders were amended to allow bills to be referred to committee before second reading in order to permit members greater flexibility to propose amendments to bills since the House had not yet voted on the principle of the bill, at second reading as we call it. Some members feel however the government has not used this mechanism often enough. Members do feel restricted in the scope of amendments or improvements that they do propose.

Let us move to party discipline. Party discipline needs to be relaxed to allow members of Parliament to have greater leeway to exercise their own judgment on legislative matters. Today's practice of whipped votes on almost every issue is not a standard of the parliamentary system.

In British practice, whips inform their members about forthcoming House business, indicating when their attendance is requested, a one-line whip; when it is expected as there is to be a vote, a two-line whip; and when their attendance is required on vital business, especially those issues of confidence in the government, a three-line whip. That reference is in footnote 281 on page 489 of Marleau and Montpetit, *House of Commons Procedures and Practice*.

When it comes to membership of committees, footnote 177 on page 820 of M and M explains that prior to 1991 parliamentary secretaries were prohibited from being members of standing committees in the area of their responsibility.

I had some taste of that when I was elected in 1988 to serve on the Standing Committee on Transport. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport was often at the committee to guide the committee, to inform the government members on the then Conservative side of the committee of exactly what was the government policy on a particular issue or where the understandings of the Minister of Transport were on any given issue. Maybe we should look again at whether or not parliamentary secretaries to ministers should be permitted to sit as a voting member of a particular committee.

• (1055)

When it comes to the conduct of committee meetings, on page 855 of Marleau and Montpetit it states:

As there is no limit in committee to the number of times of speaking or the length of speeches, committees may, if they choose, place limits on their own deliberations.

According to some members, I being one, this allows one member of a committee to filibuster a meeting without restriction against the wishes of all the other members of the committee.

It is true that the committee can place limits on deliberations, something that is not usually addressed when the rules of the committee are first formulated before we begin meeting as a committee, and are permitted more flexibility in deliberations in order to study issues and bills in greater depth. However, some

members believe that if we can impose time limits on speeches here in the House at second reading, report stage and third reading of a bill, then why can we not impose such a limit at committee stage. I think this would be a positive opportunity for the committee.

I can remember when the transport committee brought forward legislation back in the early 1990s. I happened to be privileged to be chair of the committee at that time. The issue was either the privatization of CN, the air navigation system or whatever, but the point is that a single member of the committee, a member of the Bloc, decided that the Bloc was not getting exactly what it wanted when it came to consideration of amendments at the committee stage. What resulted, of course, was that committee member started to talk and filibustered the committee. Nothing could happen essentially until that committee member stopped talking.

If there are 17 members on a standing committee, the other 16 members are handcuffed from proceeding with anything further on that bill at amendment stage until that member either decides that he has achieved his mission through some kind of a negotiation or, of course, the member continues to talk until he gets what he wants.

Is this the way we really want to do business? I do not think so. Maybe we should have a look at whether or not there should be restrictions on the amount of time a member can make his or her deliberations at a committee.

There are so many opportunities here to change and improve, I would suggest, the procedures and rules of the House.

On the matter of private members' bills, we have heard this issue ad nauseam in the House. Most certainly this is one of the issues that we will be dealing with at the 2002 modernization committee.

Under the present system, as has been outlined before, under House of Commons Standing Order 86(1) through (5), it is ineffectual at best in its current state. An all party committee meets each session in secret and selects 10 bills by lottery from dozens tabled. Each bill is then subjected to three hours of debate and a vote. Successful bills are brought forward to committee and only a few make any progress. Only a fraction reappear in the House of Commons.

Imagine how much work a member of Parliament has done. I do not know how many private members' bills I have brought forward and they still wait in the drum because I was not lucky enough to have my ticket pulled out of a hat. What kind of business is that for members of Parliament, who are here to represent their constituents, if their constituents are of a mind that we are here as their member of Parliament to do the job? How can we be hamstrung from doing our job because our name is not being pulled out of a hat? It is outrageous and it has to change. We have to allow members to be more relevant in what they do as a member of Parliament.

The proposed procedure follows the reasoning of the proposed practice of referrals after first reading and treating private members' business in the same way.

Government Orders

I have at least a dozen more points that I would like to bring forward, including Friday sittings. Some members have expressed an interest in modifying Friday sittings. That is a good idea. Let us make Fridays a day when we do not discuss government bills. We can move those two and a quarter hours for government procedure into the earlier part of the week by adding a half-hour or 45 minutes to each day, leaving Friday for only private members' bills. That is another solid suggestion.

● (1100)

In conclusion, I believe that the 2002 modernization committee should be an committee open to all members, including even the Clerk of the House of Commons and others, to make suggestions. This process should be transparent and should allow as many ideas as possible to be heard from all members on all sides of this place in order that we can make the best and most well informed decisions as a committee.

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, as we talk about how to make Parliament work better, which is the subject today, I would like to pose the question: Why should Canadians care about this? Let me give an example of why Canadians should care.

When I first came here in 1993, I was very idealistic. I came from a different background, a background where I was used to making suggestions, having them listened to and sometimes getting things done. I found on the committee on which I sat that we were asked to vet in fact the Prime Minister's appointments. When I asked whether there had ever in fact been a case in Canada where one of the Prime Minister's appointments was turned down by a committee, the answer was no. I then asked why we were doing it.

It turned out that question had some resonance with the members of the committee. We set out and did a little study on it and made a recommendation after some time that rather than the committee vetting the Prime Minister's appointees, we should vet them as nominees. That has not taken place. There are still committees vetting appointments after they have taken place. That is nonsense. What a waste of an MPs' time and the appointee's time who comes to committee to be reviewed when there has never been a single case of an appointee being turned down.

In the business world and in the world from which I come, the health world, that would not be done. It would be so easy to change. Simply let the Prime Minister pick the nominees, have them presented to the committee and be vetted by the committee. If there was a problem with a nominee, surely the Prime Minister would want to know. If there were no problems, then the Prime Minister would pick from those nominees and we would have an appointee.

I was going to spend a bit of time on the Westminster way or the British way of handling whipped votes. Because we have spent quite a bit of time on that I will not go over that. I wanted to talk a bit about the mother of Parliaments and about it having a process whereby the government does not force its members on every vote to vote as a vote of confidence.

Let me simply say that there are examples in the time that I have spent in Parliament where I watched majority Liberal members vote against their conscience in a way that was heart-rending. The vote specifically on compensation for hepatitis C, an issue that has raised

itself again recently, was one that I found very difficult because individuals voted against their conscience, against the way their constituents wanted them to vote, and were forced to vote that way.

Canadians wonder how that could happen. It happens because of the convention which says that if the government is defeated on one of its bills or motions it is a vote of confidence in the government and will be followed by an election. That is not sensible and it is not necessary.

There is a solution to that and it does not even involve three levels of whips. The solution is simply to say that a defeated government motion or a government bill will be followed by a vote of confidence. The vote of confidence of course, in the case of a majority government, would automatically be in favour of the government. The bill would fail but the government would not fall. That is the approach that the Canadian Alliance would take to the issue of whipped votes, to follow a defeat by a vote of confidence.

Most bills then, unless they were confidence bills, that being money bills, or bills that the government had campaigned on, would be free votes so that individual members could go back to their constituents and get their impressions and their ideas and be able to bring to bear their own personal perspective on those bills. A defeated bill then would not defeat the government.

I omitted to mention that I will be splitting my time with the member for Surrey Central.

● (1105)

I have also found it interesting and fascinating that the member for LaSalle—Émard has stepped into the debate on democratizing Parliament. Without being too critical of the proposals he has made, he is somewhat of a johnny-come-lately to this issue. He did sit in cabinet since 1993, although recently he has been removed from cabinet, but I did not hear once during that period of time a single mention of these issues. Let me go over, for the public, the things he is suggesting. I think most of the public, and I personally, support these proposals.

First, loosen the hold of party discipline. That refers to the issue of pushing members to vote one way by the party.

Second, increase the capacity of all members to shape legislation. That enters into the field of private members' business.

Third, members would be allowed to initiate legislation. Once again, this is private members' business.

Fourth, standing committees should be overhauled to provide increasing independence or expanded authority. That gets into the recent issue where we now have secret ballots being used for the committee chairs and vice-chairs.

Fifth, reform the process surrounding government appointments. That reflects back to my first point.

Sixth, appoint an independent ethics commissioner.

Government Orders

Every one of those proposals has been long advocated by the official opposition and many members in the House. There has not been, in terms of movement on these issues, anything until the last few weeks, and that is fascinating to me.

What is missing from those proposals? Those proposals give more power to members of Parliament. There is not a single mention of anything that would be based on the constituents. I call that power to the people, which is missing. In these proposals, every one of them gives power to the party. What is missing then? We also need the ability of citizens to push for legislation, not just the MPs pushing for legislation but citizen initiated proposals. We need more use of the other levers of democracy as well to give power to the people, such as very specific use of referenda, possibly at election time to not add extra cost, to invigorate and reinvigorate the democratic process; and plebiscites. Those are tools that are very seldom used at the federal level here in Canada.

We also need to have the ultimate check on an unruly member of Parliament. I call that "fire a liar"; to be able to remove a member of Parliament who breaks the voters' trust.

We need fixed election dates; a reduction of power for the party in power so that everyone in Canada knows when the next election would be, not an election date at the whim of the Prime Minister.

We also need to take back some of the power that Parliament has let slip. I call that judge made law. The charter has put a lot of emphasis on looking at the laws in terms of the charter. Parliament has, I think, left some of its significant power to judges. That should be addressed.

Because I am an optimist I would like to state that there are some glimmers of democracy here. The fact that we are having this debate today, to my mind, is a glimmer of hope. A Speaker that is now elected by secret ballot is hopeful. That was not always the case. We have private members' business that will be votable. That is a glimmer of democracy. I mentioned that committee chairs and vice-chairs will be and have been chosen without the Prime Minister's stamp of approval.

This debate is one that will touch the future of Canada's youth. It should and must matter to Canadians. I urge the Liberal majority government to go one step beyond and give some of the power of the party back to the people: power to the party versus power to the people. The people should win.

• (1110)

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise on behalf of the constituents of Surrey Central to participate in the debate on the issue of modernizing Parliament.

My hon. colleague, the deputy leader of our party, very eloquently gave some of the practical recommendations for modernizing Parliament. I would like to emphasize more the need for parliamentary modernization.

The objective of modernization must be to better serve democracy in Canada. The test of its success will be whether it increases the esteem of the public for their Parliament. Democracy is more than just marking an *x* on a ballot every four or five years. It is time

Parliament reflects that. No wonder voter turnout in federal elections is falling.

Free and fair elections provide an incentive for political leaders to govern more effectively in the public interest, but democratic electoral competition does not ensure true democracy. It requires reform to deepen, strengthen and consolidate democracy to build a rule of law and a culture of governance in which public resources are used for the public good.

A system of effective checks and balances, with an independent judiciary and a network of counter corruption, audit, ethics and other oversight agencies and institutions, can deter abuse of power.

Corrupt, wasteful, abusive, incompetent governance undermines basic economic development. Where governance is endemically bad, leaders do not use public resources effectively. Nor is the private growth sector allowed to prosper smoothly and efficiently.

Where democracy is restricted, governance is poor, more corrupt, wasteful, incompetent and opens the country to recurrent crises. Political corruption scandals threaten to erode public faith in democracy and thereby destabilize the entire system. Corruption aggravates social conflict by raising the premium on control of the state and rendering politics a more desperate, zero sum struggle for control of economic opportunity. An important ingredient in all democracies is the political will of the nation's leaders to improve the quality of governance.

For all these reasons, it is necessary to focus efforts on the promotion and development of democratic structures and institutions and a culture of democracy and the development of an environment conducive to democracy and consolidation of democratic institutions.

Modernization of Parliament should seek to enhance its status so that it is seen as a robust and effective part of the process of decision making by government.

Canadian Parliament is a rubber stamp for the government. The legislature is now dominated by strict party discipline, reducing government members to little more than a cheering section.

We need to encourage results oriented dialogue in this chamber. As things now stand, the purpose of debate is defeated. Members debate with a predetermined, closed mindset and are not willing to listen to arguments. MPs can talk all they want but nothing really changes because an elite tightly controls everything, and there are never free votes on issues most important to the constituents.

Take note debates take place after the government has made decisions on those important issues.

Debates are restricted in Parliament continuously. Closure has been invoked even more times than during the past Mulroney government. I think it has been 78 times that debates have been restricted in this chamber. Attendance in debates is low, as we see now. It is shameful when quorum is called, which is already set very low. It is time to bring increased meaning to everyday proceedings of the House of Commons.

Government Orders

We know that committees are not accountable. They are controlled by the Prime Minister's Office. Government members who fail to toe party lines are disciplined. We know so many changes in this place need to be made, in committees and in other places.

● (1115)

One important element is institutions in government. The commissioners for privacy, access to information, ethics, the Auditor General, ombudsman, et cetera should report to Parliament in a meaningful way.

Their reports should be given more importance. For example, as a follow up to the recommendations of the Auditor General, various departments and agencies should seriously address the concerns and implement those changes. The failures, mismanagement, waste and boondoggles should not be allowed to continue.

Question period is a chance for the public, through the opposition members, to seek information from the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers of government and hold them accountable for their decisions and management of the affairs of the nation. However, as the name suggests, it is question period, not question and answer period. What the opposition members hear from the government in just 35 seconds is only sound bites or sometimes some announcements, but not the real answers to the issues that are important to the nation.

We need to increase access to cabinet ministers so that they can be held accountable. They can answer the questions on issues.

Speaking of question period, I have proposed a motion in the House to change the name of question period to question and answer period so that it can be a meaningful event, not just a media circus whereby the members try to hype their files, or make announcements or sound bites.

The late show or adjournment proceedings should be made more meaningful. Government members should avail themselves of the opportunity to provide supplementary indepth answers. This could be a second question period. The idea would be to restore accountability and transparency in government.

Many meaningful changes need to be made in this place to make real democracy take place in Canada.

When we go abroad we talk about good governance, democracy, human rights and those kinds of things, but at home we need to restore democracy and give it a real chance.

I have many recommendations about committees and so on, but I think I will move to a few other things, like private members' business.

Every member of the House works hard on private members' motions and bills. I have tabled many motions and bills in the House like other members, but nothing meaningful is accomplished because the process is not working.

Private members' business is just like a pacifier to a baby. The baby keeps sucking at it but nothing meaningful comes of it. We keep working hard at our private members' bills and motions, but very rarely do they become meaningful law in this country. What is the use of that process? We need to make significant changes to it.

The subcommittee, which is chaired by the government, is partisan in nature and unfair in the selection of votable items.

One inherent problem with parliamentary democracy is that the government is usually formed by the party which has a majority in Parliament, so naturally there is a bias. That bias is reflected in committees, which should not be the case. Committees should not reflect that bias and Parliament should not act in that fashion.

The Senate, which has the power to delay and modify legislation, is far from a chamber of sober second thought. The Senate is nothing more than a group of partisan, patronage appointees. We need to modify that.

Another issue is regulatory reform. When we talk about democratic reforms, parliamentary reform is an integral part of democratic reforms and regulatory reform is an integral part of parliamentary reform.

The Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations does not have enough power and resources to scrutinize regulations. As we know, 80% of the law in this country is made by regulation but only 20% of it is debated in this chamber. The standing committees should be given the opportunity.

We need to do a lot of work on regulatory reform. We need to harmonize regulations. We need to make regulatory impact statements and the regulatory process should be more meaningful. I am sure that I will talk about regulatory reform in my private member's bill probably in the next month or so.

● (1120)

With these comments, I would like to urge all members to make democracy practical and effective so it can be reflected in this chamber and we can hold this chamber in high esteem.

Mr. Reg Alcock (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a topic of this sort is so wide-ranging and so complex it is difficult to know how to make best use of the time available.

I taped and watched the presentations that were made last night by the various parties as we introduced this debate. It strikes me that in this debate and in the work that has been done, there are an enormous range of suggestions and an enormous number of targets. Some want to look at changing the issues that have to do with the Senate. Some want to look at issues that have to do with matters that are outside of this chamber. Some want to deal very specifically with the rules of the House themselves, and there were some interesting, very specific comments on that.

I want to step back though for a minute because I think part of the problem that we have is that we are maybe trying to address the wrong problem. We keep coming back to this debate. It was not that long ago when we had a debate of this sort. I thought we had done some of these things. One more time we are back here trying to figure out how to modernize the House of Commons.

Government Orders

It is true to say that some of that will require some specific changes to the rules. However, if we really want to tackle this task, we need to spend a little time thinking about what is the problem that we are trying to fix and perhaps spend a little time thinking about how did we get to the point where we want to change this. Then maybe we can come back to looking at some of those things that we might want to change.

From one perspective, despite all the angst that we feel about how this place works, it is hard to argue that Canada as a country is not doing well. Relatively speaking, looking at other countries around the world, we have a high standard of living. We have a civil society that functions quite well. These things are the result of this structure of governance. Therefore why are we so upset about it?

At the same time we have, and I am certainly one of those who feels there is a profound need to reform this place, a growing sense of alienation from different parts of the country. We elect parties. Canadian citizens elect people to represent them who do not want to be part of this country. We elect people who have party positions that profoundly reject the values of other parts of the country. I think that is a reflection of an underlying dissatisfaction with some of the ways in which the country works.

It is also a reflection of the inability of the House to perform one of its prime functions. When I am asked to speak about this place, I describe the House of Commons, in its best sense, as an enormous values clarification exercise for the country. When I came here as an urban member from the City of Winnipeg in 1993, the first thing I was confronted with was the codfish crisis on the east coast. It was something I knew very little about, had very little expertise in and had very little interest in until I was drawn into that discussion because colleagues of mine needed some assistance in sorting out what was a very critical issue to the Canadians that they represented. I have worked with them because frankly I want their support when I have a problem with drought in my area of the country.

It is that process of articulating and establishing that consensus. We talk often about the great Canadian consensus. That is where the House adds real value. We suffer when we allow that consensus building process to become too narrowly focused. In many ways that is at the heart of part of the problem that we feel here.

At the beginning of the government House leader's remarks, I heard a comment that is another part of the problem. He said that we were trying to modernize problems which began with the previous government. There was a sense that somehow these problems were the result of the actions of an individual or a group at one point in time.

It is popular for the other side of course to blame this on the predilections or the inclinations of the current Prime Minister. I have had my own concerns about the positions taken by the current Prime Minister and I have written to him regarding those issues, starting about four years ago.

● (1125)

At the same time, the problems that we must deal with began a long time ago. The report of the standing committee of the British House of Commons, that last looked at this issue, addressed a concern about effective control over government expenditure going

back to 1919. It looked at proposed post-war reforms. The British House of Commons has been going through much the same thing as we are, trying to figure out how, in a modern society, a chamber of this sort can hold the government to account.

I am often drawn to a report written by C.E.S. Franks at Queen's University. This particular paper was written in May 1999. He looked at some of these issues and made the following comment:

Compared with other major Westminster style parliamentary democracies, and particularly that of Britain, the Canadian Parliament is government/executive dominated and more highly partisan. In fact, the whole Canadian system, and the provincial governments as well, are executive centred rather than parliament centred, and highly partisan and adversarial as well.

He goes on to explain a development that is kind of interesting when we reflect on what we are trying to accomplish. He talked about a country that essentially did not have a representative chamber. It did not have a democratically elected form of government in its beginning. It was run by a strong public service coming out of the British colonial office. As the country matured and as it began to develop representative bodies, consultative bodies, and finally the development of the Canadian Parliament, the latter came on as an adjunct to what was already a well established executive.

While the Canadian and British styles of government are executive centred in their nature, the Canadian version is even more centered on the executive than would be the case in the Westminster model. We see that when we look at Westminster. We see the actions of its committees and the things it is able to accomplish. It is not uncommon for a government bill to fail in the British House because members reject it. It is certainly common for members to be highly independent in their activities on select committees.

Another thing that Mr. Franks pointed out is something that I had not thought about much until I started to reflect on our history over the last 30 years or so. I would like to read the quote and then come back to how I interpret it. He said:

In comparison with other western legislatures, the Canadian Parliament is characterized by short-term, amateur members.

That is an interesting comment when we think about it. There have been three big wipeouts of this chamber since the second world war: 1958 with John Diefenbaker when he came in and replaced the majority of members; 1984 with Brian Mulroney; and 1993 when we came to office. We came from a small opposition party and went to a large governing party. A lot of the traditional opposition parties disappeared or were greatly reduced.

A lot of members came into the House with basically little experience with the place. What experience they had in political life tended to be experience built around debate in the process of election, which is highly partisan, highly charged, and highly focused on trying to prove that the other person is wrong. As a result, we carried a lot of that kind of activity to the floor of the House. Committee meetings, instead of being collaborative sessions of colleagues with an interest in seeing good government, became mini versions of question period.

Government Orders

I often wonder how public servants must feel when they sit in front of a committee to make presentations and are basically like set pieces to an ongoing debate, one party trying to prove that the other party is either too right wing, too left wing, too irresponsible, too corrupt, or too whatever. The business we get charged with, which is to attempt to articulate to the government the values that we would like to see represented in legislation or in the operations of the government, gets largely lost.

In an environment like that, where there is more external management, it is easy for members to be relatively irresponsible, relatively casual in their relationships to committee work because it has no consequence, nothing much happens as a result of the activity of committees.

• (1130)

It does not mean we cannot all point to positive experiences. I have had some good experiences in committee. Some committees have done some pretty good work, but by and large, the lack of regard for committee work has caused a lot of members to stop putting a lot of time and energy into it. Members are not unintelligent when it comes to the use of their time. They will spend their time and will focus their time, energy and intellectual capacity in areas where they think it produces the greatest return for the people they represent and the issues that they are concerned about.

I want to add another set of forces. It is interesting to note, and Marleau and Montpetit reference it, the creation of the government House leader. I believe it started casually in 1944 and was formally introduced in the Standing Orders in 1946. As depicted in Marleau and Montpetit, the Prime Minister of the day would come to the House each day and say here is the stuff we should work on, here is the piece of legislation, and then would leave. Then the whips of the various parties would sort of work it out, have their debates and then come to conclusions. If a cabinet minister wished to get something passed or worked on, he would be in here talking to people, working on the debate and trying to build upon the atmosphere that existed in the chamber to get important legislation passed.

The arrival of the position of the House leader meant that the process of negotiation delegation was largely passed over to somebody who became more of an operative expert. How something was passed through the House became more critical rather than worrying about the substance of it. The value of passage became more important than the value of the debate.

However, there are other forces at play here. If we graph the size of the public service in Canada, as a metaphor for the change and complexity, during the period between 1901 and the beginning of the second world war, the size of the public service did not increase that much, between 30,000 and 50,000 members, excluding military personnel because obviously there were bump ups during the war years. Post-war, it increased at one point to a total full time equivalence of about 400,000. It has declined a bit since then but, if we think about that for just a second, that difference in the government, that was at one time relatively small to one that is enormous, produced all sorts of different levels of complexity.

Added to that there were massive and continuing changes in the technology of communication. In 1952 television was introduced in Canada. By 1957, 85% of the country was covered by television.

However, television is an interesting phenomenon because television tends not to focus well on groups. It tends to focus well on individuals, debate and aggression, as opposed to reasoned discourse.

It did a couple of things. Prior to the introduction of television, the local member in the riding would be subject to a lot of the interaction with local constituents and the Prime Minister would be someone whom one would see occasionally. All of a sudden the Prime Minister was introduced into everyone's living room. John Kennedy was considered to be the first television president in the U.S. It is fair to say that Trudeau would be the first equivalent, the first television-savvy Prime Minister in Canada. That produced, without any changes in the rule, an increased focus on the individual through the hot medium. It produced an increased focus on that office on the executive side, and greatly increased the power and authority of the centre.

Another thing also occurred. Technology began to get more broadly introduced and it has had a major impact on the pace of life. Many people have written about the compression of time and distance. Before, when people wrote cheques on their bank account they might have had a week or two before the money was actually taken out of their account. Today, it happens immediately. If we sent a document overseas it might have been a month before it actually got there, today it is faxed overnight. That compression of time has greatly increased the response demands on all of us. We see it in our daily life all the time. It has increased that need for response on government.

What has the impact been on a deliberative chamber like this one, where people need the time to sit, talk, work out that consensus, clarify those values to come to that compromise, and come to that Canadian consensus? It has been essential in order to meet those demands of the incredible pressure for a response this place has been increasingly subject to. New tools, new rules, new changes in the Standing Orders have all served to move things through the House faster.

• (1135)

We still have a tool called closure. If members go back into the history of this place they will find that it was used once around 1932 and I forget why. It was used once during the pipeline debate in 1956 and once during the flag debate in 1966. Closure had that kind of frequency.

Time allocation was introduced in 1972 to assist with the need to get useful information through the House. It was used on average twice a year during the 1970s and about six times a year during the 1980s. I have not checked the statistics recently, but it was over 12 to 15 times a year in the 1990s. There is talk, and I heard the House leader refer to it, about the British practice of using time allocation on almost everything. The British and members of this House have this tremendous pressure from the community and the people they serve to have a decision. They cannot wait. They need to have some kind of a result from this place.

Government Orders

The problem is that we have not challenged ourselves to reform the House. It is not about the minutia of what time do we stand up or sit down on this thing. It is about how this chamber becomes more relevant in the lives of Canadians. How do we engage in those important public debates? How do we work in real time so that we are working at the speed of a decision that is required in a modern economy? Instead, we pride ourselves on the arcane nature of this place, so that we can sit around and have sober debate, and become increasingly irrelevant to Canadians. It is not because people have some sort of desire to take authority away from the chamber. It is because the public must have a decision.

I heard members on the other side talk a lot about regulation and the tendency of government to use regulation. When I was a public servant in Manitoba I was in charge of writing a piece of legislation. I asked the drafters to write clauses that put important decisions into regulation rather than putting them in the body of the bill. It was not because I had any thought about the structure of power and authority in society or the nature of legislative bodies. It was because if a neighbouring province changed its legislation I needed to respond. I could not wait the year and a half or two years it would take to get the bill through the legislature.

Over time we have seen a migration of the power, authority and the influence of this place move away to other forums. It is not because of nasty desires or nasty intentions of individuals. It is because of the real need of a modern organization to respond more quickly. The profound challenge to us is to start to get our heads around how this place must change to function more effectively in real time.

There is a substantive issue at the heart of this. It lies behind the attempts to deal with some of the rules. I was about to say there is too much authority centred in the executive. There is too much authority assumed by the executive. The reality is this place has enormous authority if it chooses to exercise it. I would argue that if we actually exercised all the authority we have there would be such a public outcry against it because we would grind everything to a halt using our normal practices.

We need to erase some of the precedents and practices that have tended to make it too easy for the centre to become the articulator of values for the country and the ultimate decision makers on all things. We must rebalance that power relationship and that is not an easy thing to do.

I used to study children's rights legislation. I remember a report from a professor at Dalhousie University who said that a right cannot be bestowed upon someone without taking it away from somebody else. The professor said that power is a zero sum game.

It is much the same here. If the chamber were to assume more power and authority, then that would have to come from some other place. There will always be resistance. I believe it is something worth doing. We must be clear about what we are trying to do.

I note that there was a comment by the House leader that there is a willingness in the chamber to allow us to revisit the subject and talk in more detail. I will forward some of my suggestions.

Committee membership and the length of terms that members are appointed for should be examined. We should do away with the

striking committee practice of forming committees every September. I believe that a member should be appointed to a committee and the committee should be functional at least for the period from the throne speech to prorogation, if not for an entire parliament, so that there is some consistency in the operation.

• (1140)

Some changes that need to take place internally are really caucus decisions. I know that our caucus is working on this and I suspect that others are as well. Perhaps we can visit those changes in a further debate, but the real challenge to us, with your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, is to think through how we can modernize this chamber so that it begins to function in a way that makes us able to play a role in the important decisions that the country has to make.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Lotbinière—L'Érable.

I am really quite happy to be able to take part in this take note debate to allow all members who are so inclined, if time permits, to express their views on changes being considered to our procedural rules. Given that my colleague who spoke before me only made it to the end of his opening comments, we likely did not get the opportunity to hear any good ideas or suggestions.

We could spend a great deal of time debating all of the changes to the Standing Orders that we would like to see, especially after all the frustrations that we have experienced in the past ten years. During this time, we have found ourselves in a Parliament where, day after day, we have watched democracy being eroded, because of the system we have, where holding a majority of seats makes a party incredibly arrogant. We must come up with rules that will really allow members to feel as though democracy is lived out every day in Parliament.

We are all elected in our ridings to represent the people. Obviously, we run under one banner rather than another, with a certain ideology, rather than another. Our constituents may choose to vote for us or not, but once we are elected, we represent everyone in our riding. We try to keep this in mind every day.

Therefore, we need to feel as though the institution of Parliament has a profound respect for each and every member, and this starts with getting the respect of the executive. When ministers make statements, it should not be at press conferences or in speeches in their ridings in an attempt to earn political capital at every possible opportunity. The people who should be informed first when it comes to the government's intentions are parliamentarians. Therefore, members' statements should be made in the House so that we are indeed the first ones informed of what the government is proposing for debate as draft legislation or as a bill.

Another way to respect parliamentarians is to ask them to act with a purpose. To that end, every item debated in the House would have to be votable; take note debates, emergency debates, debates on bills, debates on motions. There should be a vote on all debates.

Government Orders

I received an e-mail from one of my constituents who says “Mrs. Tremblay, you must use every possible means to oppose the war against Iraq”.

I sat down at home and I wondered what means I had available to me to oppose such a measure. Legally, I can rise and say that I am opposed to any war in Iraq. I am saying it: I am not favourable to going to war against Iraq, not at all, and not for any consideration.

Having said that, what means do I have to prevent, for example, the government from going to war against Iraq? Unfortunately, I do not have any. Even though I was elected with 60% of the votes in my riding, the only means that I have is to rise and vote against such a measure, and if I were to find out that my party supports the idea, I would have no choice but to stay in my office.

• (1145)

Other than that, I do not have any means to prevent the government from doing it. None of the opposition members have the means to prevent the government. It will not listen to the public, to members of Parliament, to our arguments. It will do as always, it will not ask us to vote. Moreover, it is totally dependent on another state, another country. At times, one wonders if Canada is really a sovereign country.

We should take a serious look—because I suppose that the issues discussed during these take note debates will be referred to a special committee—at how Parliament helps improve the reputation of parliamentarians, or at how it adversely affects that reputation. Because of Parliament's lack of democracy and transparency, the public ends up saying “It is always the same thing, nothing changes; they are always the same. It is useless. We no longer care about politics, we will not bother to vote anymore”.

Interestingly, since the debates of the House were first televised, voter participation has been going down, even though this should have helped cast parliamentarians in a better light. Perhaps the government should look at this issue and see what can really be done to improve the fate of members. Let us not wait for a new leader. The government has all the tools that it needs.

The member for LaSalle—Émard made a proposal at a meeting held at Osgoode Hall. This proposal means nothing to people where I come from. It does little to improve democracy. It has already been discussed elsewhere on many occasions.

As far as the voting question goes, I think there would have to be different ones depending on circumstances. Not all votes ought to have an impact on the government's survival. In certain cases we should be able to feel far freer to vote according to our conscience, while in others we would vote according to the mandate given to us by our constituents. They want us to be for or against a given thing, and to vote accordingly.

I think we should be obliged to vote for something if the subject directly concerned by the debate is addressed by a specific point of our election platform. The people who elected us did so on that basis, so we would have a moral obligation in that case.

For example, the Liberal government ought to have felt morally obligated to scrap the GST. That was a fairly major promise. It also ought to have felt obligated to put an end to EI reform, instead of

getting carried away with it, as it has, because the Liberals had promised not to follow the path the Conservatives had taken.

There ought to be more respect. If promises are not kept, there should be sanctions against a government that gets elected under false pretences. It seems to me that misrepresentation is in the Criminal Code.

It seems to me that I have spoken for ten minutes so I will yield the floor to my colleague, hoping that this take note debate will really bring about some changes and improvements to the democracy of this Parliament.

• (1150)

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—L'Érable, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I too am very pleased to take part in today's debate. While this is not an urgent matter, this debate must take place so that we may take the necessary action to restore democracy in this Parliament, on both sides.

I remember when the former Auditor General, Denis Desautels, did a post mortem of the ten years during which he held his position. He clearly said that the powers in the hands of parliamentarians, of members of this House, are being increasingly reduced.

The way the Liberals are behaving, often by making what I would call inflammatory statements outside the House, shows that they are gradually creating a Parliament that does not care about democracy.

For example, the House was asked to vote on a motion seeking to make some changes to the operations of the committees. This was a motion that simply asked that the election of committee chairs be conducted by secret ballot. The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer said on CBC radio that he would never have supported such a motion, because it came from the opposition.

This shows how little these people care about democracy. They forget that, before these members became the opposition, they campaigned and won the support of a percentage of voters. In the case of the Bloc Québécois, its members were elected with very strong majorities, ranging from 45% to 60%.

Despite this, these people say that anything that comes from the opposition is worthless. So, this issue must be examined. Since the Liberals do not seem to be at all receptive, we must look at how the Canadian Parliament works and try to restore democracy in this place. I would like to take a closer look at how committees operate.

It is in committee that I was able to see—and several of my colleagues share this view—that democracy really does not exist anymore, that the discussions that take place in committees are ignored.

I want to point out that the work done in committee accounts for 50% of the duties of parliamentarians. The first part of this work consists in paying attention to everything that goes on here, so as to be able to make comments, suggestions and a contribution to the proceedings of the House of Commons.

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The second part consists in attending question period. Again, question period was borrowed from the British parliamentary system. The opposition normally represents the people, who want to know more about policies, decisions and all that is going on on the government's side. Question period no longer meets that need, because what we have opposite is actors who come before us with their texts in hand, and their canned answers.

These people do not respect or defend the interests of Parliament, but they are increasingly defending the interests of their party. With the infighting going on across the way, some are defending the interests of the Prime Minister while others are defending those of the member for LaSalle—Émard. All this to say that not much is happening in this Parliament anymore. When we look at the questions put to the minister, we can see that there are no answers.

It so happens that the people sent us here, to this place, to ask questions and get information. Often, acting this way undermines the credibility of parliamentarians.

• (1155)

Let us come back to committees. MPs work in collaboration with researchers, their staff and their colleagues. They put forward motions and try to improve the bills or the positions taken by the various committees. Often, depending on the time, we see an employee from the government whip's office come in bringing notes. The next to arrive are members, who do not even know why they are there but were directed by the Prime Minister's Office to attend, with the sole objective of undoing all the work of members who have dedicated hours and even weeks to improving bills.

I know that a vote is an important thing. Every parliamentarian is entitled to one, but in light of the context we find ourselves in more and more often in the House of Commons—incidentally, I have launched the battle at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts—thought should be given to correcting the situation. Perhaps we need a mechanism whereby only the members who participated in two thirds or three quarters of the committee proceedings would be allowed to vote. This would at least have the advantage of forcing the Liberals who come and defeat our motions to take part in our proceedings.

Second, in some committees, the non-partisan aspect needs to be emphasized. Right now, we are again seeing that the Liberals are demonstrating no openness, they always take the party line.

Currently, people who follow the proceedings of the House of Commons are asking serious questions about the work we do as parliamentarians. They can sense the attitude of the members opposite. It is having a negative impact on the work of the opposition and parliamentarians. The discontent from members opposite is palpable. Even the government backbenchers are frustrated that they no longer have any leeway. As my colleague said before, voter turnout is dropping with every election because the actions of Liberal members opposite are undermining the credibility of parliamentarians. So, regardless of what happens, we have to deal with perceptions. The perception of people who read the papers, who watch television and who listen to the radio is that nothing happens anymore in Parliament.

I remember how fed up I was when I saw members voting against people who were sick. I am referring to the vote against people with hepatitis C, when the Prime Minister imposed the party line. When it has come to people acting in this way, how can we expect the public to continue to believe in the institution of Parliament? It needs to be changed and improved immediately.

Take voting for example. We could have an electronic vote. Often, we have a series of votes on motions which are put forward by the members opposite, and which mean absolutely nothing. So, we could have an electronic vote.

I can see that my time is running out, and I have so many things I would like to say. For all those listening today, and in light of the comments made by my colleague, who gave an interesting speech, I hope that today represents a new beginning for democracy and that we will give serious consideration to the work of parliamentarians and to the business of the House, and that we can all work together to restore some credibility to parliamentarians in this House.

• (1200)

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Scarborough East.

It is an honour for me to take part in this take note debate on modernizing the House of Commons. It is, in my opinion, very important to give members the opportunity to express their views on potential changes to the procedure, which the committee could study.

The government House leader has mentioned a number of possible initiatives that could be submitted to the modernization committee. I would like to take this opportunity to speak about two of those initiatives in which I am particularly interested.

In his speech, the minister pointed out that the United Kingdom and Australia have inaugurated a chamber parallel to the House of Commons. For those members who are unfamiliar with institutions of that type, I will take a moment to describe them briefly, because I am greatly interested in this as I have said.

[*English*]

The use of Britain's Westminster Hall was first recommended by the U.K. modernization committee in April 1999. It recommended that there should be an experiment with a parallel chamber in the grand committee room known as Westminster Hall, the famous huge hall at Westminster Palace. Of course Westminster Palace includes the House of Commons and the House of Lords, as well as a large room behind the House of Lords, which is for royalty to use when they are at Westminster Palace. Originally Westminster Palace was a palace, a residence of royalty, of the king or queen. We are talking about the large room called Westminster Hall, an ancient room in that building.

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The committee's report containing these proposals was adopted and now all members of parliament in Britain are able to attend sittings in Westminster Hall to debate matters that are agreed by all parties to be important but for which time on the floor of the House itself is not readily found. For a matter to be discussed on the floor of Westminster Hall, all parties must agree to refer that matter to Westminster Hall. Decisions can be taken only with unanimity. Everyone in the chamber at Westminster Hall has to agree in order for a decision to be taken.

Westminster Hall sits on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings and on Thursday afternoons, for a total of about nine hours per week. That allows for a lot of discussion about issues that the House itself does not provide time for. The specific items considered in Westminster Hall include private members' business, debates on committee reports and other business that is selected through the usual channels.

One of the debates we could hold in a parallel chamber like Westminster Hall is, for example, a take note debate. We are all familiar with the fact that there have been times when we have had take note debates or emergency debates that have gone on into the wee hours of the morning. There is no question that members are prepared to do that. They show great determination to stay during long hours and perhaps sometimes all night to debate important matters, but I am not sure that is being generous to or reasonable for the staff of this place, nor reasonable for our own health, for that matter. It is responsible for us to ensure that we keep hours that while perhaps long are at least reasonable for our own health. Staying all night long for debates and then having to work the next day is not necessarily in keeping with that. That is one more reason that a parallel chamber could be a positive development.

In November 2000, the U.K. modernization committee conducted an evaluation of Westminster Hall and reported that the experiment was proving successful and should be continued. The committee noted that one of the strengths of Westminster Hall was that it greatly added to the opportunities for members to debate matters that were of concern to them as individuals. For example, in the 1999-2000 session, 20 committee reports were debated in Westminster Hall on issues ranging from foreign affairs and agriculture to the environment and health. During that session, 14 general debates were held in Westminster Hall on issues such as children's social services, U.K. engagement in Africa, pension reform, and crime reduction. We can see that a wide range of important subjects is being debated at Westminster Hall.

In fact, the committee noted that Westminster Hall greatly expanded the opportunity for members of parliament to advance private members' items. For example, without Westminster Hall, there would have been only 129 opportunities to debate private members' business. With Westminster Hall, there were 263 opportunities for private members' business to be debated, a 100% increase, a pretty dramatic impact from that one initiative. Overall, the additional number of opportunities available to members for debates went from 135 to 296, an increase of 54%, a very substantial and significant increase.

As a result, the U.K. modernization committee concluded that Westminster Hall had proved to be an effective forum for members

to advance issues. For this reason, the modernization committee stated:

...there can be little doubt that the creation of Westminster Hall is a radical innovation...we see the current experiment as an exciting and major new development which should give the lie to those who claim that the House of Commons is hopelessly antiquated and impervious to any change whatever.

● (1205)

It is important to note that Westminster Hall is designed for individual MPs. It is not designed for the government to advance its initiatives. Westminster Hall is not designed to detract from the business of the House of Commons. To summarize again, the modernization committee concluded:

It is important to note what Westminster Hall has not done. It has not enabled the Government to expand its legislative programme: the business taken in Westminster Hall has been additional business which would otherwise not have taken place at all. Overwhelmingly it is accepted that Westminster Hall has not detracted from the primacy of the Chamber: the House has had no difficulty in keeping the business in the main Chamber going on Thursday afternoons when the parallel Chamber has also been in operation.

Australia has also had a successful experiment with a parallel committee dating back to 1994, called the main committee. In 1993 the Australian procedure committee prepared a report, known as the Blewitt report, with proposals to improve the handling of legislation.

The key proposal of the Blewitt report was the establishment of the main committee. The Blewitt report envisaged a standing committee of the whole house which would deal with the second reading and consideration in detail of certain bills.

The main committee was designed with the following characteristics. It would be less formal. It would show cooperation with and due deference to the house itself. It would work in subordination to the house. Any decision made by the main committee would have to be confirmed by a decision of the house itself. Unanimity was another feature required. Issues lacking unanimity would be referred back to the house for a decision, which is quite similar to the situation in Westminster as I described earlier.

Although the main committee was first designed to work as a parallel legislative stream, when it was implemented it was also established as a forum for debate on government policy and committee reports, much like Britain's Westminster Hall.

Important changes were made in 1997 to provide for members' statements and adjournment debates so that the main committee also became a forum for the ventilation of grievances and matters of interest and concern for individual MPs.

The main committee has had the following benefits. There has been less use of time allocation, which I am sure members across the way would be happy to hear about. There has been more time available for debate on each bill. There has been more debate on committee reports and government policy. As well, there have been greater opportunities for private members to take part.

These benefits in fact can be demonstrated by quantifiable empirical data. In 1992, 132 bills were guillotined or time allocated. In 1993, 111 bills were guillotined. This number fell to 14 in 1994, 1 in 1995 and 6 in 1996. In 1999, 59 MPs made 120 speeches in adjournment debate. Over 80% of MPs who responded to a survey considered the main committee to be a success.

Government Orders

I hope that our modernization committee will seriously consider the advantages enjoyed by Britain through Westminster Hall and by Australia through the main committee.

I had other matters I would have been delighted to discuss. The idea of a parallel chamber is one which I think members should consider very seriously. It holds great benefits. It would save the health of a lot of members and certainly of staff, and would be a much more reasonable approach to take note debates and many other matters.

I look forward to seeing progress in this process.

• (1210)

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's reflections on the experiences of parliamentary reform elsewhere. Let me just say I find troublesome the use of the term modernization in the context of the House because for some reason the government has an aversion to the use of the conventional word reform.

Modernization I would submit is precisely the problem. It implies rendering the operation of the House more efficient, that is to say faster. Often the only tactic at the disposal of the opposition to express dissent or opposition on behalf of Canadians toward government legislation is to cause this place to move more slowly and deliberately.

I would submit that the fact to which he attested, that the Westminster mother parliament is in many respects more democratic and a more deliberative body, and a much older one, supports my thesis that we need to reform this place, not necessarily to modernize it if that means rendering its processes more efficient.

I would like to ask the member a specific question. Given that he has been a student of the Westminster parliament recently and that the broader question of parliamentary reform encompasses reform of the other place and not just this House, perhaps the member would care to comment on the following.

The convention in the British Parliament is that the prime minister is not the only public official to submit to the sovereign names for peerages to the upper chamber but indeed the opposition parties in the lower house, in the House of Commons at the Westminster Parliament, also are permitted to submit names for appointments to the upper chamber. Would the member care to comment on the fact that in that sense the British appointed and quasi-hereditary House of Lords is substantially more democratic and representative of the plurality of modern political choices than is our Senate?

• (1215)

Mr. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to hear of the hon. member's interest in and approval of the Westminster parliamentary system.

I was disappointed that he did not respond to the heart of my comments. I was focusing on the question of a parallel chamber. I am disappointed that he did not show any interest in that topic. I hope members will show an interest in that topic because it has many benefits that we should consider.

The member likes the U.K. system but he fails to recognize that in the Westminster Parliament the committee is called the moderniza-

tion committee. What has happened is we have adopted the same term as used in the mother of our Parliament, the mother of all parliaments as some say.

Clearly we have had a wide-ranging debate today already. The committee itself I am sure will have a wide-ranging debate. I do not think it will be confined by whether it uses the term modernization or reform. It is a question of semantics. I think we should really deal with the issues that can probably improve the way this place works. That really is what this is all about.

The British system is very different in terms of how appointments are made to the House of Lords. It goes back hundreds of years to when appointments were made by the monarchs themselves. It is very different in other ways. For example, the prime minister attends one question period per week. In Britain the prime minister's question time is on Wednesdays if I recall correctly. It is a very different system from what we have here.

In that regard I think many members are interested in seeing reform of our Constitution in due course and in the way both houses in Canada operate. However it is disappointing to note that when there was last a chance to make changes to that with the Charlottetown accord, the member's party voted against a system that would have had an elected Senate.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, just because I will not comment specifically on the comments made, does not mean that I dismiss them.

The member's suggestions are interesting but there are essentially two fundamental problems with our system. First is the method in which people are appointed to the other place, the Senate, where there is no real opposition to the government agenda on a regional basis or otherwise. Second, the House is standing on its head in that the executive controls the private members instead of the private members holding the executive to account.

I noted the member's comments on an elected Senate. Where does he stand on an elected Senate and are his suggestions helpful in respect of holding the executive more accountable to private members?

Mr. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, clearly today we are discussing the modernization of this chamber. That is the topic of our debate and it is reasonable for us to talk about that subject. At the same time I take the member's interest in this question of constitutional change. I am certainly interested in it. I did in fact support the Charlottetown accord which would have provided for an elected Senate. My position on that is quite clear.

We all know the difficulties that arise whenever we talk about constitutional change. I do not hear from my constituents a whole lot of desire for more constitutional wrangling, even if there might be a desire to see an elected Senate.

• (1220)

Mr. John McKay (Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in this debate I would like to offer my observations on judicial nominations, on the issue of take note debates and on the role of a parliamentary secretary and the appearance of ministers at committees.

Government Orders

The first is with respect to judicial nominations and the prerogative of the Prime Minister at this point to make judicial appointments without the supervisory role of Parliament. This comes out of some history where a prime minister did not have to be overly worried about the social views of a potential nominee for a judicial appointment because judges were expected to operate in the realm of what was called black letter law.

Black letter law is a very narrow view of what the common law says on any particular issue. There are limitations on what is or is not admissible as evidence. There are limitations on what can be considered and how one interprets the law. Therefore, the prime minister of the day could sit back, relax and not anticipate that a judicial intervention into an area of social policy would significantly impact the prerogatives of Parliament.

That brings me to the issue of the supremacy of Parliament. Historically the supremacy of Parliament in the area of social policy direction was just that. It was supreme and courts merely interpreted what Parliament must have meant in the circumstances.

However, that was then and this is now. We have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms which has given judges a far greater scope to shape social policy. A judge can put a particular social policy through a charter lens and read an interpretation into a particular piece of legislation. Probably one of the more outstanding examples is that of sexual orientation, where clearly Parliament thought about putting that into the charter and chose not to, but subsequent various judicial interpretations read sexual orientation into various statutes and pieces of common law.

This has resulted, as some say, in what is called a dialogue with Parliament. The charter interpretations are a text that dialogues with this body. Some have interpreted it as more of a monologue and that the judges are having the final say. I am more of the view that there is some give and take, some push and pull between Parliament and the judges. As I say, reasonable people can disagree on the role of the supremacy of Parliament. I think it is fair to say that the supremacy of Parliament has somewhat been eroded by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I raise these background issues in the context of the appointment of judges because when judges were merely black letter law judges we really did not have to worry about what their social views were. Now we do have to be concerned about what their social views are. Their views on particular areas can shape social policy and shape it in directions that possibly Parliament would not necessarily wish to go. That argues for a review of the nomination of judicial appointments by Parliament.

What is the problem with this? I suppose the problem we all look at is the circus that we see in the United States with the congressional reviews of judicial appointments. We see that certain members of congress turn it into, shall we say, a mini-business to ferret out the dirt on various nominations. No stone is left unturned. No embarrassing marijuana conviction or sexual liaison is left to where it should be, namely the private realm of those individuals. Rather it is paraded by the media before the public and it destroys the reputations of very good men and women.

●(1225)

I think there is an intense reaction to this circus that we see to the south of us, these rather graphic examples of turning good men and women away from letting their names stand for judicial appointment. The irony here is that rather than in fact expanding the democratic process, it is actually a turnoff. We see this in voter apathy and in resistance on the part of American electors to engage themselves in congressional elections.

So the issue is this: How can we review a nomination thoughtfully, responsibly and carefully and find out the views of these men and women on important social issues while not turning it into a circus that essentially forces them to withdraw their names from nomination? The short answer to that is, I do not know. Presently we have a system that is very secretive. It is almost like electing a Pope. Possibly we should outfit the Peace Tower to emit black or white smoke on the selection process.

It is not without its politics. I have been practising law for a long time and have some feel for the intensity of politics that goes into the selection of judicial appointments. It is a high art form. It is very intense and I would say very elegant, but it is also very ruthless. Politics is involved in judicial selections, except that the public has no say at all.

The legal community has its own criteria and its own way of doing its self-selecting, but that is based upon its own views of what a competent judge should be. I would argue that by and large the men and women who serve on our benches are very capable people and give very good service to the public. Nevertheless, the public has no say in their views.

So how the people's representatives, those of us in this Chamber, would not turn this process into a circus is the only hesitation I have in this particular issue, but in my view it should be examined. These appointments are of great significance to Canadians.

The second point I want to make is with respect to take note debates. Personally I like take note debates. I like those opportunities. I think they are important debates. What I do not like about them is, first, the short notice that we get. I would like a bit of time to reflect on whatever the debate issue might be. The second issue is that I do not particularly like speaking at 3 o'clock in the morning. It seems that we lay on these take note debates and they go on and on. I do not think that people are at their best at 3 o'clock in the morning. I am certainly not.

The third thing I do not like about take note debates is that there is no formal way in which the government responds to the content of the debate. These debates are usually on very important issues. One example is whether we do or do not go to war. When I first arrived here I assumed, basically on a historical reading, that it was Parliament that decided whether we did or did not go to war. Much to my surprise, Parliament has not decided in a long time, probably since the Korean war, whether we go to war or go to peacekeeping missions. Frankly, I think that the people should have a say. After all, it will be their sons and daughters who are going to be killed or injured in these hostilities. I frankly think the take note debate should be something more than simply a comfort zone for the executive.

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On the point about excluding parliamentary secretaries from committees, I do not think that is necessarily a good idea. Properly instructed, a parliamentary secretary can inform a committee of the views of a minister and the views of a department. I appreciate that some parliamentary secretaries are overly partisan and overly zealous, but possibly with some instruction that can be changed.

• (1230)

Finally, on the point about a minister being present for clause by clause, I was there for Bill C-36, probably one of the most important bills that this Parliament has engaged in. While the parliamentary secretary did an able job on 167 amendments, I thought it appropriate that the minister be there to put forward those amendments.

These are my views on those three issues. I appreciate the opportunity to make these comments.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I actually enjoyed the speech that the member opposite gave today. I wish I would have had the opportunity to ask the previous speaker this question, but I will ask this hon. member as he obviously comes from the same side of the House and I would like his point of view on it.

The previous speaker mentioned something about take note debates and how valuable they are. He included in that the idea of a parallel parliament. I would like to have the member's comments on this topic, because as we know it is difficult enough to time the schedule of members of Parliament so that they can attend the various committee meetings and all other duties that MPs attend to and also attend debates. I think it might be very appropriate for him to indicate right now, due to the silence of all of the members on the government side, how eager he thinks members would be to have yet another parliament to attend, another massive committee meeting, and whether it even would be practical to expect anyone to actually attend.

Mr. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for that question. I agree with him. If we cannot be in two places at one time, how are we going to be in three? It is a good point.

This brings me back to my law practice days, when I used to beat my brains in to get to court at 9:30 so that I could sit there until 2:30 for my case to be heard. It basically wasted those five hours of my day when I did absolutely nothing. It was pretty frustrating.

I find that around here, to be perfectly honest. We are continually rushing to sit somewhere and do nothing. I think this really is more a matter of time management. Frankly, a number of things could be reduced. We do not have to do them.

On the other hand, some of this is brought on by ourselves. There are times when debate is quite useless, frankly, when it goes nowhere and there are endless procedural motions et cetera. I also think, and this is really an off-the-cuff opinion, that some of the time spent in here could be better spent somewhere else. I would not be overly fussed about some of the extensive debate that goes on here, which frankly appears to be pointless and may in fact be pointless, either not going on at all or going on with more focusing of the debate in a more formalized or other chamber. It may mean simply using this room in a different way. That is a totally off-the-cuff opinion, but in

my view this is an issue of time allocation as much as it is one of trying to be here, there and everywhere.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is a matter of high privilege to stand in Canada's Parliament to debate the issues that pertain to our citizens, our taxpayers and, indeed, the future of our country. Pivotal to that whole event or that whole process, of course, is the operation of Parliament itself.

I always think eagerly of the enthusiasm with which our new pages come to the House every year. They are all excited. They have finished high school. They have been accepted into the pages program. They come here and are ready to observe how our Parliament works. I often think of them as being the embodiment of the youth and in fact the guarantee of the future of our country, representing thousands of young people across the country.

As a member of Parliament one of the things I do is visit schools quite frequently. In Alberta it is in the grade six year that there is a unit on government. I make myself available to the teachers in my riding and I visit the classrooms. These grade six students have very insightful questions. Very frankly, occasionally when they ask some of these questions it is really challenging to give them a really good answer and to explain to them how Parliament works or how it is supposed to work and how indeed our country is one of the best countries in the world because of our democratic system.

Deep inside, I always worry that I may not be actually telling them what they really should know and that is how dysfunctional their Parliament is. I try to downplay that, but I also mention to them from time to time that members of Parliament sent to Ottawa by their constituents very often have their hands severely tied and cannot really represent their constituents, for various reasons.

So the main emphasis in my talk this morning is going to be on the fundamental reform of Parliament that I think is desperately needed. We as individual members of Parliament come here with the express purpose of and also the dedication and the commitment to representing our constituents first, representing the well-being of the country second, and third, making sure that we look at the long term so that the country is stable, well run, economically viable and successful, and that our resources in the country are well utilized, well into the decades beyond the time when we will be here.

Mr. Speaker, I was remiss in not mentioning in my opening sentence that I am sharing my time with the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock—Langley. I am very honoured to share my time with her since my uncle is one of her constituents.

Let us talk a little about the need for the idea of a free vote. It is a serious flaw here that we have disciplined votes. I do not mind a party having a stand on something. I think that is great. I think it is wonderful if we can go to the people of Canada at election time and say that we are going to stand for balanced budgets. That was one of our big themes in the election prior to 1993. We said that we were going to stop that incipient sliding into deeper debt which would totally hamstring the young people of the next generation and generations to come with them having to pay the interest and the debt.

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For our party to have come here at that time with that as our primary theme, to balance the budgets and to stop borrowing, I think that was an excellent theme. I am very proud of the fact that as a party we were able to present a united front on that, to the point where a Liberal government, which means, as we know, Liberal spending, was actually willing to do the things that needed to be done, to a degree at least, to solve the problem of continued borrowing. It is also true that they were lucky in the sense that they came on to the scene at a time when, due to some of the policies of the previous government, free trade and an economic boom in North America, the revenues of the government increased.

● (1235)

If we were to look at the numbers, we would see that it was just a fortuitous stroke of good fortune that they came here at the time when they did since the government expenditures actually have increased substantially, but at least we were here with that agenda and we gave a united front.

My party persuaded me to join the party based on those policies. It persuades me to stand up and vote with it because I agree with those policies. I will concede that the Liberal members opposite probably often get up and vote with their party because they are persuaded that it is the right thing to do.

However, we know of a number of instances where individuals, and in some cases a large number of individual members of that party and perhaps other parties, have voted against their will because they were instructed how to vote because of party solidarity, not letting the government fall and all that stuff. That, I think, is deplorable.

I really believe that we potentially have in the House 301 talented individuals, most of whom are able to think very well. They are well endowed mentally. Many of them have excellent training academically and yet we find they sometimes go against their better judgment in order to vote for something because it is government policy. I would like to see that changed. That is the main theme of my talk.

There should not be punishment for dissent. John Nunziata should not have been punished by being given a chair beside me because he simply decided to vote against something in the budget that was not according to the way he thought it should be.

It is interesting that we have rules in our Standing Orders and in the Parliament of Canada Act. It is against the law to influence a member of Parliament to vote a certain way. Bribes are considered a high crime, yet for some reason we do not object when a prime minister, a party whip or any of the other party apparatus says that we must vote a certain way or else. To me that is a serious breach, especially because our laws provide that members of Parliament should have the ability to vote freely.

I remember being on a school board many years ago. It happened with great frequency that one of the members would make a motion. The motion would seem quite reasonable at first so someone would second it. Debate would start and suddenly one of the members would say that we should think of the consequences if the motion were to pass. Another person would pick up on that train of thought and say that something else could happen. It would not take very

long until the consensus of the group was that we could serve the people best if we rejected the motion. We did our job as a school board.

I was the chairman of the board at the time and when I asked for those in favour of a motion to raise their hands, sometimes even the person who moved the motion had been persuaded that it was a stupid motion and decided to vote against it. The majority of the board was opposed and the motion was defeated. We went to the next motion or item of business.

That does not happen in here. We have this insane imposition on our decision making. Even though the Speaker says "the question is..." and he reads the motion that we are debating or that we are voting on, the people who vote are forced into the mode of saying that what they are really voting on is whether there should be an election. We cannot make decisions that way if the real vote is on a question other than the one we are voting on.

I simply make the point that the fundamental change we need in this Parliament is that we put together our collective heads as wise counsellors and we make the best decision because we are persuaded in that direction rather than being coerced into voting the way we do.

● (1240)

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to be here this morning to speak in this take note debate. It was interesting to listen to some of the comments made prior to my speaking because they reflect many of my thoughts.

It was very interesting to listen to the hon. member for Scarborough East who said that he wished the take note debate could be more than a comfort zone for the executive. That really reflects what I think of take note debates.

Yes, it is nice to express our opinions on issues on an interim basis, quickly thought out, largely to fill in time spaces for which the government has no legislation, but what do they really mean? We have a take note debate and very few government members in here listening to it. The results of it are nothing. The government does not listen to what these take note debates are all about and they certainly are not reflected in any of the decisions or policies it comes forward with.

The questions have to be: Are members of Parliament being effective? Are they doing the best job they possibly can within our parliamentary system? After being in this place for nine years, I would have to say that it is obvious to me and to Canadians that changes have to take place.

I came to this place with that particular point in mind, that changes needed to take place and that we needed to reform our parliamentary system as well as other things within government. It has been a frustration to realize that nobody, particularly on the government side, is really interested in any kind of change or reform.

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I have had some positive experiences through the committee process. I have been able to sit in committees that, for the large part, because there were no cameras following the debates and discussions, have been non-partisan and where committee members have tried to come up with changes and good recommendations for the government. However, again, the government does not listen.

I have seen the government take a report from the committee, sometimes a unanimous report, and not only ignore it but come up with some legislation that is contrary to the recommendations coming from the committee.

There are some things that we can do to make this place work a little bit better.

We were elected to represent our constituents. We were elected to come here and express the viewpoints of the people in our constituencies in debates and in committees. We face the frustration of not having the ability to do that through the voting process, which is probably a very meaningful conclusion to debates, but the debates themselves are not necessarily overly important. Sometimes I agree with my colleague; I also wonder why we are debating the issue when the government has already made up its mind what the end result is going to be. However at least the vote records what a member of Parliament is prepared to stand up for.

My hon. colleague from Elk Island brought up the issue of every vote being taken as a confidence vote. That is ludicrous. Why can we not vote openly as members of Parliament, representing our constituents, and defeat bad legislation without the threat of defeating the government? It is done in other nations. It is done in the mother of all Parliaments in Great Britain where a motion or piece of legislation of the government that is defeated does not constitute a non-confidence vote. A non-confidence vote would be held afterward and only if that vote passed would the government fall. That is an easy thing to change and it would make the workings of the House much more open and transparent.

What we have is a real lack of commitment from members on the government side. It would appear to me that the backbenchers of the government do not see a great problem with handing over all the control to the executive branch, or, if they do, they are not prepared to do anything about it.

• (1245)

Our system of allowing only the government to put serious bills on the floor of the House is wrong. It is wrong that government members are forced to support that government legislation. It is wrong that the committees are not allowed to openly research and debate the merits of government legislation and to make necessary changes. It is wrong that the executive branch has that kind of control over our parliamentary system.

Maybe it is not possible to separate the executive branch of government from the legislative branch. I would hope that it would be possible but maybe it is not. If it is not, it can at least function better than it is now. It can at least function in a way that allows the members of the government side to challenge the executive branch of government. Right now we do not have that.

I do not know whether we can legislate that change to separate the executive branch from the legislative branch but it would be nice if we could at least legislate backbone for the government members.

It is unfortunate that members of Parliament have to rely completely on their parties. It is unfortunate that resources are divvied out based on a party and given to the party as opposed to members of Parliament.

I am a representative of the Canada-U.S. interparliamentary group. When we meet with our American colleagues it is interesting to see how they operate. The legislation they put on the floor of the congress is not government nor administration legislation. It is legislation that each and every one of the members, who have something to contribute, feels is necessary. They then are able to go to both sides of the house and find support. If it is a good change and a good piece of legislation, they do not have any problem building the support for that legislation to pass.

It is not government's and not the administration's legislation. It is the elected representatives of the Congress who put legislation forward. I am envious that they have that opportunity. More important, because of that process they are given the resources, as members of congress, to research the legislation as to how it affects their constituency and what impact it will have on the nation and are able to make their decision on voting based on facts and on the research they have been able to do. The way our structure works is that resources are given to the party instead of an individual member of Parliament, which does not give us that same ability to look at each piece of legislation in detail.

The other thing that I feel is an important item in the United States is the responsibility and the jurisdiction that it gives to its committees. Its committees have the ability to look into issues on a very serious matter and to call in witnesses without any controls placed on it by the administration. I would suggest that is another thing that has to be changed within our system. Committees have to be removed from the control of the executive branch of government.

Committees are supposedly the child of the House of Commons. They are the arm of the chamber in order to follow legislation through the process. However, what I have seen in the nine years that I have been here, is committees controlled by the executive branch of government. The executive branch of government is the only one that puts in legislation. It is the control of the committees by the executive branch of government that determines the legislation will not be amended or changed. It is the executive branch of government that controls who the members will be and how they will vote on issues. Until we remove the control of the executive branch of our government from the legislative branch and from the responsibilities that the legislative branch has to the Canadian public, we will not change the way the system operates.

I would suggest that part of the result of how we operate as a legislative body is part of the reason, if not the reason, that Canadians are disconnecting from the governance of their country. We are constantly concerned that every time we have an election fewer and fewer Canadians come to the polls. I would argue that it is because we have ignored them. We have removed our connection to them. We continue to do so with the way we operate.

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•(1250)

If we want Canadians to be truly engaged, whether it is in the voting process or providing us with issues and their comments on issues, we have to be a more open and transparent organization which respects that each member of parliament has a role to do here. The member has been given a mandate by the voters to be here and to represent them.

It is our duty to change the system to allow a member of parliament to function in a meaningful way in the future of our country.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it was very wise of me to share my time with the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Langley. She gave an excellent speech. The member made a comment regarding committees. I would comment that the committees themselves are controlled by the executive branch of our government.

In legal parlance we say it is not right for someone to be both the judge and executioner. There should be a separation. We have to have a government to administer the laws produced by parliamentarians. Parliamentarians should be able to use their own abilities, their research, their input from their constituents and other areas to have a reasonable representation in our laws of what the people want. The job of the committees is to do that.

There are examples in my committee work. In the finance committee we made some 80 recommendations. The finance minister in his budget chose about five of them and ignored the other 75.

There is the example of the air tax. Every witness who came before the committee said that the air tax would kill short haul airline services. We recommended that the tax should not be implemented. However the vote in the parliamentary committee was whipped and it went exactly opposite to what all of us in the committee knew should happen.

I commend my colleague for pointing out that very serious flaw in our legislative process. Committee work is a very important part of making good laws for Canadians.

Although it is not done publicly, at the beginning of each session we have a prayer. We pray for God almighty to help us make good laws and wise decisions. As parliamentarians we would love to do that. We would like to help the Lord to answer that prayer, but the Prime Minister, who considers himself an authority above all authorities, prevents that from happening by the coercive measures taken to control committees.

I commend my colleague for saying that. Perhaps she has a little more to add to the topic.

•(1255)

Ms. Val Meredith: Mr. Speaker, I will add that the Americans do not have a perfect system. There are things that they have that I do not particularly like. However they have the ability for these committees to reach beyond the control of the executive branch. They can hold the executive branch and the bureaucrats, who administer the laws that have been created, accountable.

Our committees cannot do that because of the control of the administrative branch. That is one thing we could look at. It would provide a much greater independence from the executive branch of government. It would not get away from the parliamentary system as we know it. It would only enhance it and make it possible for members of parliament, not only from the opposition side but from the government side as well, to make meaningful changes to legislation.

I am distressed that the executive branch of government seems to hold more weight and give more credence to the bureaucrats than they do to the legislators. My understanding of the system is the legislators make the law, the executive branch and the bureaucrats administer the law. Unfortunately, we have completely gone away from that concept of parliamentary democracy.

After 130-odd years it is time that we start looking at our system and see what is required to modernize it and bring it into the 21st century.

As an outside point, I believe we are one of the few democracies, even countries that we do not consider as democratic, to still not elect senators. I do not think there is another nation in the world that appoints somebody to a legislative body. It is time that Canada grew up, modernized and started electing the senators who sit in the upper House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Clifford Lincoln (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.) Mr. Speaker, I am going to be splitting my time with my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River.

I have been in politics for close to 20 years, either provincially or federally. I have taken part in many votes, hundreds of them. Unfortunately, I have had to vote on several occasions against the government of the day. I did not take any pleasure in doing so. I did it out of a sense of obligation, as my conscience and convictions dictated a vote against the government.

I have always felt that our system was very rigid, considering votes something sacrosanct. This is a system that must be changed, that absolutely must be reformed.

I believe that confidence votes should be an exception to the rule, and not the rule. Free votes, on the other hand, should be the rule, not the exception.

There are all sorts of models of government that distinguish between votes of confidence, which are the exception, and free votes where parliamentarians feel totally comfortable to vote as they please.

It is essential that we examine this system, that we follow the British practice for instance, in order to let parliamentarians have greater flexibility in voting according to their conscience and convictions. The proposed model would go even further than the one we have now, to make parliamentarians accountable to the voters.

It seems to me that each of us is responsible to their voters for making clear what our positions are on issues brought before Parliament. Our voting record is important in that sense. As parliamentarians, for most votes, we should not be allowed to hide behind the party line.

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I would also like to address the issue of private legislation, the bills that members may bring before Parliament. This is a monumental joke. During the nine years I have been here, I worked on many bills, two of which were drawn in the lottery, and rejected of course.

There are criteria in place, but they are so subjective that it is up to committee members to decide whether the matter raised is a matter of public policy or not. It becomes totally subjective, totally partisan. It is a monumental joke.

As far as I am concerned, all private members' bills should be votable, unless an arm's length committee, such as a committee made up of clerks of the House, determines that a bill does not meet the prescribed criteria.

● (1300)

[English]

We have to open the committees to a great degree and even go so far as to let committees initiate legislation themselves. Committees are represented by members who are qualified and who, after doing committee work for a while, become extremely proficient in the subjects that are covered. I do not see why legislation cannot be initiated through committees.

Another item which is significant is our failure to address change and to realize that tradition and rules are good to a degree except if they hinder progress to the extent that they become stupid. I defy any member to tell me the electoral name of any one of the members of his party just off the bat. One member represents Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok and another represents Hastings—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington. I am sure the Speaker has to have a list in front of him to decipher one from the other.

I have been to parliaments. I have been to the U.S. Congress. I have been to the parliaments of Finland, Sweden and all kinds of parliaments where people call each other by their names. It seems very simple to me. Yet here names are taboo. It is a sin to call somebody by their name. If we do we get called by the Speaker. However, my name is my name. I am not Lac-Saint-Louis. That is not my name. I would prefer to be known by my name and people will recognize me by my name as I do theirs.

In committee I am no longer Lac-Saint-Louis, I am Lincoln, but here Lincoln is taboo, I am Lac-Saint-Louis. Does it make sense? Does it improve the dialogue among parliamentarians? I say no. Why should all of us here be hon. members of Lac-Saint-Louis or something else, but as soon as we leave the precinct of this place we are no longer hon., except if we are a minister or a senator? Does it make sense? Why should I be an hon. member here and not be an hon. member in a committee? It would be far simpler to be just plain myself and I would prefer it very much.

Modernization to me involves the electoral process, and it starts there. The electoral process has to be looked at again.

One of the most demeaning functions I have as an elected member, whether at the provincial level or the federal level today, is to go and raise funds, to go and beg this person, this friend, that friend for \$100 or \$150, or to go and see a corporation and hopefully

get \$1,000 here and there. I find this demeaning not only for me but for the person who is asked or the corporation that is asked.

The electoral process has to be changed so that 100% of the financing comes from the state with the necessary safeguards to prevent frivolous candidates, as is the case today. We would be refunded 100% of our electoral expenses if they were bona fide. This would avoid all this financing in between elections, going here to there to beg for money right and left. I think it would avoid conflicts of interest. It would make for a far cleaner process. I understand that the cost to the state would be something like \$125 million, which is peanuts for a country of our size.

We should also look at the electoral process from the point of view of the first past the post process. A first past the post process is not fair.

The Australians have made great strides in parliamentary reform compared to us. They have reformed their type of parliament. They have elected the senate. They have decided that the first past the post process is not sufficient. Candidates have to have 50% plus 1 to gain a seat. This is the case for many countries. We should look at these things. We may not adopt it finally because for some good reason we may want to keep the present system, but at least we should consider the possibility of change.

On adopting modified proportional representation or proportional representation, again I am not saying that this is what we must do, but we should at least study seriously and thoroughly what other people have done in this case. If it will better our democratic parliamentary life, then by all means we should adopt it.

● (1305)

Traditions are great. Rules are great. In my own church, which was the most hidebound institution of any, I have seen immense change in the last 20 or 30 years. Yet the parliamentary process is stuck.

The most typical thing, Mr. Speaker, is that as you rise, the three pages have to rise with you and sit when you sit. Does that make sense? Do you like it yourself, Mr. Speaker? Do they like it? I wonder if this is not typical of our hidebound traditions which happened for no reason. They just happened one day and then became frozen in time.

We have to look at all these things and ask ourselves, is it better that I be called by my name or by the member for Lac-Saint-Louis? Is it better that the pages stand up and sit down? We should look at these things, but we do not.

My plea today is that in the course of this debate we at least resolve among one another to look at these issues. Whether we are from the Canadian Alliance, the Liberal Party or the New Democratic Party, we should look at these issues seriously and reform this place so that it can be a more fair and democratic place for the best interests of Canadians at large and certainly for our best interests.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a comment to my friend, Mr. Lincoln, since he prefers to be called Mr. Lincoln—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would invite the member to take his seat for a moment. There is an old practice in the House, whereby only one member at a time—and right now, that is the Chair—may have the floor.

That said, even though proposals might be the subject of future studies, current practices remain in place at this time. Therefore we will follow the longstanding Canadian parliamentary practice of recognizing members by their title or by the name of their riding.

I would simply invite members to respect the traditional practice. The hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

• (1310)

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Mr. Speaker, I only said that to bring some levity to the House.

I am sorry if I misunderstood the member's suggestion. However, in his comments, he neglected to mention the Senate. The House is aware of my opinion on the Senate: it should not exist.

If tradition is to spare the Senate, does he believe that senators should be elected or appointed? I would like to hear his comments on the Senate.

Mr. Clifford Lincoln: Mr. Speaker, I live in reality for now. According to our Constitution, it is virtually impossible to change the Senate today, because it would require the unanimous consent of the provinces and the federal government. I think that would be virtually impossible to obtain.

However, if it were possible to have an elected Senate tomorrow morning, I would be ecstatic. I believe that the Senate should be elected. I do not believe that in 2002 we should still be appointing people to the Senate.

Therefore, I support the member's suggestion. If it were possible, it would be ideal.

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Secretary of State (Western Economic Diversification) (Indian Affairs and Northern Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I very much enjoyed the presentation by my hon. colleague, which of course draws on his long and distinguished experience in the House. There are ideas and observations which we should very carefully consider.

I would like to make an observation with respect to electoral reform. The Law Commission of Canada has currently undertaken a research project on electoral reform, with high levels of public participation. That will be of great assistance to us as it plays out over the next few months.

In my province of British Columbia a citizens' congress is being created to look into electoral reform in that province. It seems to me that coming from a provincial base, perhaps many other provinces might look at and try out different models. It would be very

instructive to us over time in the federal Parliament to consider what might be tested and deemed broad public acceptance at the provincial level which can be enacted without any constitutional complexity.

I would like to ask a question of my hon. colleague with respect to committees developing and introducing legislation. The theory of the development of legislation through the government—one would hope through broad caucus debate and then cabinet determination and executive drafting is quite different from hon. members in the opposition or members in the news media or people who are advocates for a particular interest group. Government has to bring some cohesion to governance. Different issues have to be traded off.

I wonder, if we developed legislation through committees, experts as they are in their fields, whether they would have the breadth and scope to bring coherence to that legislation as it must balance against other legislative demands and responsibilities.

Mr. Clifford Lincoln: Mr. Speaker, I agree in principle 100% with my colleague, but we should be very careful in setting up such a measure. It would have to be circumscribed extremely strongly.

At the same time I am thinking of areas where a government for one reason or another, fails to enact legislation in areas of key public interest. For its own selfish reasons, it decides to avoid it so that the matter is never brought up here. In the United States system, senators and members of the house of representatives can do so. In our system there is no leeway at all except for private members' bills which get nowhere.

In some measure, provided the measure were circumscribed very strongly by criteria and caveats, committees in certain cases could bring forward legislation to plug gaps which governments deliberately left closed. This is the sense of my intervention.

• (1315)

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are engaged in a debate today dealing with procedural reforms in the House of Commons, a subject which many or most Canadians regard as not too terribly interesting, something slightly more exciting than watching paint dry. Some of us are forced to take a different view and that is because in reality this chamber is probably the linchpin of our democracy.

There is no other place in the country where the people of Canada can place their views, infuse a chamber with perspective on issues and in reality, control the future evolution of policy and law in the country. There is no other place, not in Canada and not in the world, where Canadians can do that except in this House.

As a linchpin for our democracy the rules that govern us here are actually quite important. Sometimes the rules we have influence the culture in the House; at other times the culture we have in the House influences the evolution of the rules. At the end of the day what we have around this place, the rules written and unwritten that we use, are a major factor in the evolution of our democracy.

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There is a philosophical difference that comes up from time to time. I take one view but I have heard other people express another. The House itself in my view is not an empty vessel that is filled with a government every four years or so. It is not a place that is empty until it gets filled with a government. In my view it is not that. The House has a life beyond the two extremes of emptiness and government. A House has a life, a character, a vitality and a presence that recognizes all Canadians.

If the prevailing view is that it is just an empty vessel that is filled with a government, one would question what role there is for an opposition member. The role of an opposition member is as full and vital as the role of a member on the government side. That is because this is the House of Commons and it is not an appendage of the Government of Canada. It is a separate, distinct and vital place that informs and leads the rest of governance in the country.

As we move through elections a few of the bodies may change and the government may change, but the purpose and role, ethics and culture of this place carry on. This place is not a church and it is not a corporate boardroom. No one, Canadians anywhere, should wish that upon this place. It is a unique entity in our democratic system.

It is not quiet like a church and it does not have rules of order like a boardroom with a chairman. It just is a different kind of institution. While it may not be appreciated by all Canadians because they do not have the privilege like all of us do of being here and of living the place, that is a fact. It is a place where we shape policy and legislation and adopt legislation all in the public interest for Canada.

Over the last year or two, being one of those people who do like to watch paint dry from time to time, I prepared a booklet on the subject. There were some 17 suggestions for members of the House of Commons in fortifying their efforts to keep this place as a healthy democratic institution. Not all of the items that I urged upon colleagues involved actual reform. I titled it "Backbench Exercises", a little like let us get out there, do our push-ups and stay fit as an institution.

There were some suggestions for reform. As an example, I suggested we alter the way we do the Friday question period to allow specific focus on one ministry rather than the shotgun approach that we have normally in each of our question periods.

•(1320)

I suggested that we could make use of a second chamber for debate, as now exists in Westminster. A second chamber would allow members, not as government or opposition, to take up motions, petitions and other matters that do not require a vote, but which require, from the perspective of the member, a need to be placed on the public record. Members around this place struggle to find time for private members' business. A second chamber would allow that to happen.

I suggested that we need to develop a protocol of some sort to deal with section 33 issues of the charter that may come down from the courts. We have not had a big one yet, but one day it will come. We will have to wing it on how we handle it in this place and we should try to sort something out before that happens.

Let me focus on two things on which I want to urge reform. The first one is a relatively easy one. It is not so much reform as making use of it and maybe tweaking the rules a little.

Before access to information was legislated by this place, access to information for citizens to gain access to government, the mechanism used by parliamentarians was a motion for the production of papers. That particular procedure in the House was used for over a century. It is used in the House of Commons in the U.K. It is quite old. It was the means by which a member of Parliament could get access to government information.

However, since the introduction of the legislated access to information for citizens the production of papers procedure used in the House has not been used as much and there are even instances of members of Parliament using the access to information legislation.

As a result the production of papers procedure has fallen into disuse. I am a little nervous that it may atrophy, shrivel up and disappear. I am of the view that this place should maintain a parallel, tandem, healthy, functioning production of papers mechanism. While the House always has the authority to do it, the individual member should have that mechanism available. We ought to keep it and use it more than we do now.

The second item I want to deal with is on the subject of disallowance. As the House knows, under chapter XIV of the Standing Orders the House has the ability to disallow a federal government regulation where that regulation does not comply with the authorizing statute or other scrutiny criteria. The Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations manages that envelope and reports to the House from time to time on matters of that nature. Over the last 10 years there have been eight or nine disallowances of federal government regulations.

In that procedure, which is governed totally now by the Standing Orders, it appears that the committee and the House are only able to deal with regulations passed by the governor in council, ministers, and the Prime Minister. They can be disallowed and we have been able to do that in appropriate cases.

However there is a class of regulation authorized to be made by agencies outside government, for example, the CRTC and the Canadian Transportation Agency. These agencies have the ability to make regulations on their own and the disallowance authority, the disallowance powers in the rules, does not apparently allow the disallowance of those regulations. It is rather absurd and silly that the House should have the ability to disallow regulations made by the cabinet but not regulations made by these other institutions.

When our rules were first put in place it was said at the time that we would get around to fixing it up a little later once we saw how the procedure worked. In my view the procedure works extremely well. That is an outstanding housekeeping matter. The disallowance power is proving itself to be an important tool used by the committee and by the House in ensuring federal regulations continue to comply with the law, the charter, the rules of the House and the authorizing statute.

•(1325)

I urge that it be on the list. Let us complete that mechanism and ensure that we have a healthy, strong disallowance of power.

Government Orders

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I highly appreciate the comments made by my hon. colleague across the way, particularly his comments on the disallowance procedure for the scrutiny of regulations committee which is a joint committee of the House and Senate. I wish to congratulate the member on his election as vice-chair of that committee today.

As we debate the modernization of Parliament we know that it is an integral part of democratic reform. Another important component is regulatory reform which has been ignored for too long. Regulatory reform is important because 80% of the law that we see in this country is generally made through the back door. I am speaking of regulations and statutory instruments. Only 20% of the law is debated in this chamber. Members passionately debate and vote on legislation, and deal with those issues differently. However the 80% component is completely ignored or at least goes through improper scrutiny.

I would like to ask my colleague if he feels that the issue of regulatory reform has been ignored.

After hearing from various organizations and Canadians we know there has been an overlapping of regulations in Canada between various departments and different levels of government. There is duplication and many regulations are redundant. We need to separate those regulations into good, bad and ugly and get rid of those that are not needed anymore. Maybe there is a need for a sunset clause in some regulations. Maybe there is a need to harmonize the regulatory process or the regulations between different levels of government. Similarly, there is a need to set up an inter-provincial standardization commission whereby we could standardize various regulatory processes between different provinces.

There are many other things: regulatory impact analysis; cost benefit analysis; setting up input from the public and the media on the regulatory process; regulations sent to committees; and a regulatory flexibility act similar to the one in the U.S. These are things that need to be addressed.

Since the member has a lot of experience on this committee, would he recommend that we study regulatory reform in that committee? Would he urge the government to take some concrete action on regulatory reform?

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, the regulatory burden in this country is quite high but it is an essential element of our legislative umbrella. The previous government and the current Liberal government both took steps to address regulatory reform in the late eighties and early nineties. Between 1993 and 1997 two bills were before this place which would have altered the format for making and changing regulations. It was perhaps some resistance from members on this side of the House and on his side of the House that prevented those bills from advancing because of the method suggested.

As a result each of the departments under the supervision of Treasury Board have in their own way altered the way they create and get rid of regulations with a view to reducing the regulatory burden. Every new regulation has a regulatory impact analysis statement attached to it. There is a process involved. There is no

automatic sunseting but there may be some sunseting in some regulations.

In small steps the government has accomplished a lot of what generically the member is urging. In the whole field of regulatory activity the statute size would be this big and the regulatory burden alone would be this big. It will always be that way and it is a constant effort to keep the regulatory burden financially and economically viable, and to make it effective for the purpose intended. I do not have a magic bullet and I know he does not either.

The member wants to look at the issue. It is something we should always be looking at either on a department by department basis or on a cross government basis. As soon as the pain gets too great or the burden gets too great, as soon as inefficiencies show up, at that point Parliament will probably intervene and look more closely at it.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in today's debate on the modernization and improvement of the procedures of the House of Commons. This is an important issue. We want democracy to be more open for parliamentarians elected to the House of Commons. The public must not wonder what power its member of Parliament has if he or she is not a government member.

Government members who are sitting close to the curtains, backbenchers, are also saying that they do not have enough powers, and they want to have more of a say.

It is said that Parliament has been looking at modernizing and improving its procedures for 20 years, but it is as if it cannot go ahead with it. Committees are set up, but there is never any agreement. We can never bring the issue before the House and get an agreement on changes to the procedures of the House of Commons.

Recently, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs decided to raise in the House the issue of electing all parliamentary committee chairs by secret ballot. The government's argument was "This will be done bit by bit". Government officials were not pleased. The government House leader told us "Why not have another committee to look at the modernization and improvement of the procedures of the House?"

The committee felt strongly about its view. It made a recommendation on this issue and presented it to the House of Commons. The House supported that recommendation. My goodness. We are lucky that the Prime Minister and the former Minister of Finance are fighting, otherwise this never would have gone through. Let us face it: this would never have passed in the House of Commons.

The problem is that the government in office does not want to let go of its power, it does not want to let democracy make decisions. It is as simple as that. The Prime Minister himself said "It is not democratic to have a secret ballot".

Government Orders

In visits to other countries throughout the world, we go around telling the developing countries they need to have more democratic procedures, with a secret vote, and here we have our Prime Minister telling the House that a secret vote is not democratic, that it is not democratic for his people to be able to act according to their wishes and those of the people they represent.

So we have mixed messages here. On the one hand, we want democracy, but on the other we are not prepared to respect it in our own House of Commons. I am troubled by this, I would even go so far as to say I was disgusted. I can understand that the government is defending itself, and wants to keep hold of the power, but it is a big jump from that to telling us that a secret vote is not democratic.

I will give another example, one I am not afraid to give. When it is reported that a labour union has held a strike vote, but not a secret vote, the reaction is that this was not democratic, not right, and that another, secret, vote must be held. Here, we have a Prime Minister who has just told us that a secret vote is undemocratic. Imagine that.

Yesterday in this House, the Leader of the Government in the House said the following:

Members, Liberal members at any rate, vote freely on all private members' bills.

Imagine that.

• (1335)

I will tell a little story, a very interesting one, in hopes that a good many Canadians will hear it. When the Bloc Québécois member introduced a private member's motion calling upon the Crown to acknowledge the wrongs done to the Acadians, little notes were found strewn all over the floor, notes from the Liberals telling their members how to vote.

As the member for Acadie—Bathurst, I asked the Minister of Canadian Heritage for financial assistance to help a singer in my riding who was going to Vietnam. I had been told she could get some assistance, so I went to see the Minister of Canadian Heritage to ask for it. The community rallied around this person and even the ambassador to Vietnam was happy to welcome a star. When Sandra Lecouteur went to Vietnam, she was given an incredible reception. Our little Acadian singer has also sung in Paris and at the Montreal Place des Arts, and everywhere she goes she gets a great reception.

When I asked the Minister of Canadian Heritage whether her department would be prepared to contribute \$1,200—since the opposition does not hold the purse strings—I think I followed proper procedure. There did not seem to be any problem at all. Everything was OK. That was last May.

Since this was June and I had not heard anything further about my request, I tried again to contact the minister. This may seem strange, but it shows the pressure that they put on their members, at least that is what I think. When I met the minister, she told me “There is no problem, the public servants did not do their job”. It was the public servants who were to blame.

In July, I still had not received an answer. So, I phoned the department again and I was told “No problem, this will be done, it has been approved”.

In September, when the House resumed sitting, I once again met with the Minister of Canadian Heritage who said “I will talk to my officials and this will be settled soon”. I told myself “The issue will finally be settled. This is September and I have been waiting since May”.

Then, we voted on the motion tabled by the Bloc Québécois member, asking the Crown to present an official apology to the Acadian people for the wrongs done to them. I voted in favour of the motion. After the vote, I went to see the minister again, but she angrily turned her back on me and left.

Finally, the next day I again met the minister and told her “Where is the \$1,200?” She replied “Go see the Bloc Québécois and ask them for the money, because you supported their motion”.

What I am saying is that there are ministers in the House who have an incredible and unacceptable power when the time comes to vote on motions or on private members' bills.

• (1340)

I object to the government House leader saying that Liberal members vote freely on all private members' business. The hon. member for Beauséjour—Petitcodiac was going around the House of Commons telling his colleagues how to vote, because the Minister of Canadian Heritage was watching how members were voting and she has the portfolio. I say that this is putting pressure on members and this is no longer a democratic process.

I will not ask the Bloc Québécois to pay for the costs of a government program in New Brunswick, in the Acadian Peninsula, when there is a minister here who should do her job.

It is the same thing with motions presented by members. I have a hard time with that and I will explain why. We decided to produce a report on members' motions. All the parties involved unanimously proposed that some changes be made and that we vote on all motions and bills. The names of 30 different members are randomly selected, and these members must appear before a parliamentary committee to see if their motion or bill can be debated and become a votable item.

Out of a possible ten motions or bills that could be deemed votable, the parties only managed to reach consensus on four. Is this not a shame for the members who work so hard in preparing a bill? We have the opportunity to vote on ten motions or bills and we cannot even reach a consensus to vote.

This morning, one of the parliamentary secretaries rose and said that the House should be able to decide if a private member's motion or bill will be votable. Can you imagine how they have paralyzed the House of Commons? The government has no new business to bring before the House. For two days now we have been having a take note debate and there are no bills being considered. I do not think that the House should be spending its entire day like this. Normally, take note debates take place at night.

When there are 30 motions or bills before us and we cannot agree to choose at least ten that will be deemed votable—because there is room for 10—it seems to indicate to me that the House is not prepared to change Parliament, to modernize and improve it.

Government Orders

This morning, at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, Northern Development and Natural Resources, the member for Windsor—St. Clair moved a motion. He debated the motion for four minutes when the committee chair interrupted him and said, “That is enough, we will now vote”.

We are all aware that the Liberals form a majority in committees. Once again, I find it completely unacceptable that someone was prevented from expressing themselves in committee. I have sat on committees where members were not able to express themselves. Some people take longer than others, and others are quicker. But a situation like that which took place this morning is unacceptable. Where is the democracy in that?

When we sit on a committee, it is the same thing. It is obvious. Committee hearings are recorded and televised, they are public. Members of the governing party say, “We Liberals are here to represent the government. We are here to govern”.

It was not my understanding that that was what committees were for. Parliamentary committees should allow Canadians to express their views and they should bring the suggestions and recommendations that Canadians have to Parliament. Then, it is up to the governing majority to decide whether or not they want to accept the recommendations made by the committee. However, that is not what happens in committee.

• (1345)

We are a long way from being able to say that there is a will to modernize or improve the way things are done. Improvements are required not only here, in the House of Commons, but throughout the system, both at the parliamentary and the committee levels.

I do not want to be pessimistic, but I know that things will not change. The only changes that we might see would be along the lines of the ones that took place a few weeks ago. This was a committee recommendation. There was a feud between the Prime Minister of Canada and the former Minister of Finance. The Liberals voted in favour of a motion for secret ballot elections in committee. This was the only time there had ever been changes. They are not proud of it and they feel humiliated because they lost their hold.

I am sure that, after the next Liberal leader has been selected, they will reunite to regain their hold. They will forget all about democracy. They will forget all about open-mindedness, not unlike the former Minister of Finance who is touring the country talking about changing our Parliament. The current Prime Minister is not the only to blame. When he was the Minister of Finance, he took money that belonged to the workers without so much as a by your leave and used it to balance his budget. He eliminated the deficit at the expense of those who are jobless. This is the kind of democracy he is advocating across the country. He will come back to the House pretending to be a new man. He claims to be open, telling people things like “You will be welcome to express your views. You will get to vote along with us. We will not put any pressure on you”. Come on.

I am 47 years old. I was not born yesterday. That is fine Canadian politics, and that is all it is. The press is always after him, following him wherever he goes. He is the nicest and handsomest man in Canada, and he is going to save our country. This is the kind of democracy he stands for.

For example, yesterday, the House dealt with a really important motion. As if it was not bad enough to take the money of the workers who lost their jobs while it was enjoying a \$40 billion surplus, the government decided to target persons with disabilities. It told them “You are not entitled to tax deductions. We will put you on the chopping block. If you cannot find a doctor or a specialist in the health system, you will have to fill out a form”. That form has to be completed by answering yes or no. The specialist cannot even write comments on the form. He cannot say anything about the patient that consulted him. A yes or a no makes things so easy. If one can walk a distance of 150 feet, one is not eligible for the tax deduction.

I know a man in my riding who lost a leg. He uses a prosthesis and he was entitled to the tax deduction for 12 years. Now, under the new policy, if a person can walk 150 feet, that person is no longer entitled to the tax deduction. I asked that man if his leg had grown back. He said no. His foot did not grow back. Denis Boucher's foot and leg have not grown back.

Such measures show how cruel this government can be.

Now, the government is saying “We want to give Parliament power”. We will see if the government does that. Yesterday, Parliament made a unanimous decision. We are the elected members of Canada and the House decided to tell the government to leave persons with disabilities alone. This is what the House said. I am anxious to see if the government will act democratically in this regard. I am anxious to see what it will do.

In this morning's newspaper, it was reported that the Minister of Finance left because he did not want to vote on his own program. This is bad. The person who should change the act or the regulations because Parliament made a decision did not even want to take a stand on his own rules. I am afraid that nothing will change. Let us hope that the voice of parliamentarians will be listened to. Otherwise, all these discussions today are pointless. All the representations that parliamentarians have been making for the past 20 years are pointless.

When speaking of Parliament, we should also address our elections and the way we are elected in Canada. Canada ought to be a democratic country. The Speaker of the House is supposed to appoint certain persons, and now it is the ministers of the government who are doing so. I find that there is no longer any democracy when the party in power is the one in charge of commissions to look into changes in our elections. This is no longer democracy.

There is need for more openness and transparency. More transparency would, I believe, earn us more respect from Canadians. Polls show that only 14% or 17% of Canadians trust politicians. This is a problem. Canadian politics are dangerous. Canadians have lost confidence in us and we are at the bottom of the list.

Frankly, who can blame them? In 1989, the House of Commons passed a motion stating that child poverty would be eradicated. Now, 10 years later, there are still 1.4 million poor children in Canada. Every month, 300,000 children are forced to turn to food banks. How can Canadians have any confidence in their politicians?

Government Orders

I can only hope that this government will open up to Parliament and start listening to parliamentarians. We need democracy, true Canadian democracy.

• (1350)

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully. The last half of the hon. member's speech did not have a lot to do with parliamentary procedural matters, but it struck me, and this is just a very brief comment, that the hon. member seems to dislike democracy when the vote does not go his way. I did not see the hon. member objecting yesterday when the government members voted, to a person, en bloc, to support a motion put forward by one of his colleagues, a motion that was adopted in the House yesterday. I saw no objection at all when every member on this side of the House voted in favour. His objection seems to be that everybody on this side of the House votes against something that he is in favour of or vice versa; that is really not a very good definition of democracy from his point of view.

I have noticed frequently in the House how often his own party votes as a group without dividing among themselves. So if it is okay for the New Democratic Party members to vote as a bloc, it must be okay for the government members to vote as a bloc. I hope the hon. member was not objecting to the democratic right of all the members on the government side to think in the same way, to have the same views and to vote together like they did yesterday in favour of a motion put forward by one of his own colleagues; that is not democracy. This is democracy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for offering his own clarification as to what he thought democracy was.

If he had been listening to my speech, he would have known that it was not about government bills. The government is here to play a lead role. I was speaking about private members' business, which is not the same thing.

The Leader of the Government in the House said "Members, Liberal members at any rate, vote freely on all private members' bills".

This, to my knowledge, is not the case.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleagues in the Bloc have given a standing ovation for this speech, a longer one than I have seen in some time, so I am curious and will ask a question.

I have never said this myself, but there are people who have suggested in modernizing Parliament that to be elected to Parliament members should be patriotic to the country and the nation as one whole, undivided, non-separated nation. Therefore, certain members who are in the House now, under those proscriptions, which I have not brought forward but some have, would not even be allowed to serve. I am curious as to what the member thinks about that.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, as I said, as we have said, we live in a democratic country and I think that we have the right of free speech and people have the right to make a decision. We are talking about democracy and voting in the House and now it is about who

should be included and excluded and how we are going to start to shut out people for their beliefs and for what they like to see done. I do not think that it is up to us. It was not done when it happened at the beginning, when they changed parties and they did what they wanted. We have that freedom of expression in many places and in every province of country. People sometimes express themselves by saying that they are not happy with our country and sometimes I do not disagree. There are workers whose jobs were lost when the Liberal Party took away \$40 billion. Do we think that they will love their country after that? That is a matter of opinion and it is a matter of discussion too.

Mr. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, could the member give his opinions on one of the items for the debate today, the potential review related to judges? Some people suggested that judges should be elected. I wonder what the member's thoughts are.

• (1355)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, they talk about how judges should be elected but I do not know if the judges should be elected or if we should have maybe another democratic way to do it. Maybe we should have a committee or a group to do it.

Right now, the premier of a province will elect a judge or the Prime Minister will elect a judge. They elect all the people responsible, and I think it gives a view that asks if it is right or if there is a different way to do it. I think we should study this process of how we elect our judges. Maybe we could have a process in the House of Commons whereby the names would come up and people would study who would be the best judges for our country. Maybe that would be a good way because of the appearance that it is given when somebody appoints somebody, because of the impression that is left and what we think about. I think that is where it stands. I say that the process should change and we should explore different ways of how we make appointments in our country.

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the hon. members comments. How does he feel about the committee process and does he feel that committees should be freed from the control of the executive branch of government?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker. I really believe that parliamentary committees should be separate from government for the simple reason that parliamentary committees are there to be open to and to listen to Canadians. We are all adults. We should be able to form our opinion. As a committee, we should be able to present our opinion to the House of Commons with a recommendation for or against it. The Prime Minister should not be able to elect his own chair of each committee. The government still has more power because it has more members who can or cannot agree with the committee.

Democratically it will give Canadians a chance to express themselves in committee and have that reflected in the House of Commons where it belongs. When members are elected democratically with a secret ballot vote, which is the way we are elected in our ridings, they can do their real job.

I am sure the government backbenchers will feel a lot better when participating in the process. That is what they tell me when we go outside for a smoke.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

ROSS MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. John O'Reilly (Haliburton—Victoria—Brock, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week marks a significant event in health care for the residents of Lindsay, Ontario and the surrounding area known as the Kawartha Lakes Region.

One hundred years ago, through the generosity of James and Annie Ross, the Ross Memorial Hospital was established to meet the medical needs of the residents of the town of Lindsay and the surrounding area. Now a regional health centre of excellence, the Ross is undergoing a major expansion program and the people have responded by donating a total of \$6 million.

I wish to congratulate the professional health care workers, support staff, volunteers and auxiliary personnel for their dedication to excellence.

* * *

QUEEN'S JUBILEE MEDAL

Mr. Richard Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, last week I had the honour to present 19 Queen's Golden Jubilee Medals to some very great people in my riding. Those people included Noreen Rustiad, Lily Chow, Ray Kandola, Donalda Carson, Tom Masich, Debbie Byl, Dick Voneugen, Johnny Flatt, Charles MacDonald, Bob Stewart, Gladys Goode, Bob Good, Charles Jago, Ivan Anderson, Mona Mark, Dr. Jeffery Cowburn, Jerry Petersen, Jeannette Townsend and Phyllis Gainor.

These are wonderful people who have dedicated their lives to helping their community and the people around them. The communities of Prince George—Bulkley Valley are much the better for having these individuals in them. We all congratulate them.

* * *

● (1400)

NATIONAL DIABETES DAY

Mrs. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, November 14 marked National Diabetes Day. More than two million Canadians have diabetes and this number will reach three million by 2010. Every eight minutes someone is newly diagnosed.

Diabetes is a lifelong condition where the body does not produce enough insulin, or it cannot use the insulin it produces. We need insulin to convert sugar from food to energy and when there is not enough insulin, the sugar remains in the blood such that sugar levels get too high. These high sugar levels over long periods of time cause numerous complications including damage to blood vessels, kidneys and difficulties with circulation.

S. O. 31

In 1999, to enable Canadians to benefit more fully from the considerable resources and expertise available across the country, the Government of Canada pledged \$115 million over five years to the development of the Canadian Diabetes Strategy.

I call on Canadians to increase their awareness and understanding of diabetes and its complications and how physical activity, a balanced diet and healthy behaviour can prevent the onset of this disease.

* * *

DAY CARE SERVICES

Mr. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to note that Family Day Care Services of Mississauga has recently received a grant of \$22,000 from the RBC Foundation. The grant will help Family Day Care Services to provide the material needed in supporting programs that help children benefit from early childhood education.

RBC Financial Group has been a long time supporter of education with a history of giving to the community. It has donated over \$5 million to schools across Canada since 1999.

Day care services make a positive impact on children's ability to get along with others. Please join me in congratulating Family Day Care Services and with them well in the school year ahead.

* * *

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AWARD

Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week Correctional Service of Canada and communities throughout the country are celebrating Restorative Justice Week. Restorative justice focuses on repairing the very serious harm done to communities by crime.

Last night at the Edmonton Institution for Women, two Ron Wiebe Restorative Justice Awards were presented to citizens of this country who are making a difference by reaching out to offenders and victims of crime. The first went to Martin Hattersley, an Edmonton lawyer and an ordained priest of the Anglican Church of Canada, and the second to the Fraser Region Community Justice Initiatives Association of Langley, British Columbia.

The CSC established the award in 1999 to recognize Canadians who demonstrated through their work or lifestyle ways of transforming human relationships by promoting communication and healing between people in conflict, be they victims, offenders, colleagues, families or neighbours.

I urge all members to join me in congratulating the recipients of the Ron Wiebe award.

S. O. 31

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, on behalf Lieutenant Colonel Al Trotter and the people of Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys, I would like to thank the thousands of outraged Canadians who have taken the time to call, write or e-mail Mr. Trotter, myself, Global Television and the Minister of Veterans Affairs in support of this distinguished war hero. If full comprehension of the situation has evaded the minister, letters and calls from across the country have no doubt helped to clarify Canadian views on the value we place on our veterans.

Please, Canada, turn up the heat and continue to inundate this waffling government with letters and calls. Let the Liberals know without a shadow of a doubt that we will not stand by and allow this great war hero to be denied his justice.

* * *

[*Translation*]

LUCIE LATOURELLE

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight today the incredible amount of work done by Lucie Latourelle of Laval, Quebec, who has been involved for more than 40 years with persons with a physical or intellectual disability.

Ms. Latourelle also spearheaded the establishment of Maisons de la Tourelle, a home that recently celebrated its 10th anniversary. Located in Sainte-Rose de Laval, this home accommodates eight persons with a physical or intellectual disability.

By founding Maisons de la Tourelle, the volunteer of the year 2000 in Laval hoped to provide the residents with a family setting where they could develop and take on responsibilities geared to their abilities, while under constant supervision.

Dreams like Ms. Latourelle's dream can lead to actions which, while they may often initially appear insignificant, spread happiness and joie de vivre all around us.

* * *

• (1405)

THE MOVIE "UN HOMME ET SON PÉCHÉ"

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the characters of Claude-Henri Grignon are part of the collective imagination of Quebecers. Many of us remember a scene or a line from the radio or television series.

For a few fleeting moments, these mythical figures, these legends, will come back to visit us, some 50 years after the original movie was made.

I want to acknowledge the impeccable work of the large cast, including Pierre Lebeau, whose portrayal of Séraphin Poudrier, the miser, is masterful, Roy Dupuis, as the handsome Alexis, and Karine Vanasse, the young woman from Drummondville whose fresh-faced youthfulness gives us a remarkable Donald.

Incidentally, the movie is opening tonight in Drummondville. I urge Quebecers from all generations to be part of this great moment in the cinema of Quebec.

[*English*]

FISHERIES

Mr. R. John Efford (Bonavista—Trinity—Conception, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to announce that a major change is about to take place in the fishing industry in Newfoundland, a good news item.

I want to congratulate the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans for putting together a consultation process that will allow the industry in Newfoundland and Labrador to hold formal discussions with the Government of Canada and the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to allow the vessel replacement program to take place. This has been an issue for some 20 years that has been ongoing in Newfoundland and Labrador. Because the fisheries have changed so much, the lives of people have been at risk.

I am pleased to announce today that this process will take place in a timely fashion and decisions, hopefully, will be forthcoming in the year 2003.

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CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the government has a solid record of stopping good legislation in its tracks. The government has been unafraid to sacrifice the public interest for its own perceived party interests.

Three weeks ago the government played that game by stopping two bills that immediately would have made Canada's children safer from the growing problem of child sexual exploitation. The government refused to consider raising the age of sexual consent and refused to even consider tougher sentences for pedophiles. It will jail farmers for selling their wheat, but will not jail those who prey on 14-year-old children.

In response several organizations, including the Canadian Justice Foundation and Mad Mothers Against Pedophiles, have announced that they are joining with me to make Canadians absolutely aware that the protection of children from sexual abuse is not on the radar screen of the government. Working together we will build a national coalition of Canadians who will target not only pedophiles but the Liberals who protect them. We will work with concerned Canadians from coast to coast to stop the legalized abuse of children.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Hélène Scherrer (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning the hon. Minister of the Environment released the Climate Change Plan for Canada. The plan incorporates the best ideas gathered in ten year's worth of consultations and cooperation.

It is based on the general outline of the draft plan on climate change tabled here in the House in October, and on the comments from provincial and territorial governments, industry, environmental groups and citizens.

The Climate Change Plan for Canada puts us on the path to becoming the most conscientious energy users and producers in the world; it will make Canada a leader in the area of developing new, greener technologies.

The plan will enhance quality of life for all Canadians, providing cleaner air, improved health and an increasing number of new economic opportunities.

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[English]

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a snapshot of Canada's health care system today reveals a very puzzling and disturbing picture.

We have a new, comprehensive study of half a million patients showing that death rates in for profit kidney dialysis clinics are 8% higher than in non-profit clinics.

There is health commissioner Romanow saying that the option of more profit driven care defies logic and that the evidence just is not there to back it up.

At the same time, we have the privatizing premiers, Campbell, Klein and Eves, racing to put health care up for sale, and Senator Kirby, a board member of a private health company, solemnly recommending even more privatizing.

Health is Canadians' number one concern. We are at a critical decision point in our history, yet the picture gets blurry when it comes to the government's stand on for profit care. The health minister is missing altogether and is not in the picture.

Where is the government on privatization? Where is the health minister? "Where's Waldo?"

* * *

• (1410)

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during a trip to Europe accompanied by Quebec's minister for aboriginal affairs, Michel Létourneau, the Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees, Ted Moses, praised the peace of the braves. Hardly words that European journalists are used to hearing.

This is testimony to the Government of Quebec and Premier Bernard Landry, who managed to conclude an historic agreement with a great people, an agreement that will guarantee harmonious economic, social and environmental development.

This also sets an example for other great nations of the world to follow, foremost Canada, by looking to Quebec, which is "something akin to a great people", as René Lévesque said. By slamming the door on such an agreement with the Crees, the federal government does not measure up well in comparison.

S. O. 31

[English]

CEDARBRAE COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the grade 12 history students from Cedarbrae Collegiate Institute in my riding.

The students have travelled to Ottawa to visit the Parliament Buildings and, of course, to get a better understanding of how the government works. I had the opportunity to meet with the students. I also have visited the school on many occasions in the past.

I believe it is very important for all students to take the opportunity to visit Parliament and experience firsthand how the legislative process works. As such, I encourage all my constituents, and all Canadians for that matter, to do the same as the students from Cedarbrae Collegiate Institute, to visit Ottawa in the future.

Again let me welcome the students from Cedarbrae Collegiate and thank them for visiting us here today. I am confident they will leave Parliament Hill feeling inspired and proud to be Canadians.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, something happened yesterday in the House of Commons that should not be allowed to happen again.

The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans announced, in private, with a deliberate leak to a small group of Atlantic Liberal members of Parliament, that the fishery could possibly be shut down. His own department and Atlantic Liberal members of Parliament leaked the information. They came out of the meeting, spilled their guts to the media, whined and cried, threw up their arms in the air and asked what they could possibly do in such a situation.

Maybe the minister should have asked what he was going to do with the overfishing on the nose and tail of the Grand Banks and the Flemish Cap. What are we going to do about a foreign fleet that has been uncontrolled and our lack of representation at NAFO? What will the minister do, not just in the Gulf of St. Lawrence but in zone 4x, his own doorstep, where the cod stocks are not endangered?

* * *

AL-ANON FAMILY GROUP

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the Al-Anon Family Group on its 50th anniversary and acknowledge its important contribution to our communities. This very special occasion coincides with this year's Canada National Addictions Awareness Week.

For 50 years the Al-Anon Family Group has been a source of help and hope for families and friends of alcoholics in communities throughout 115 countries. Al-Anon, and its group for younger members, Alateen, have founded in Canada alone over 1,600 Al-Anon and 115 Alateen groups.

Oral Questions

With treatment and support, people can recover from alcohol addiction and make a positive contribution to their communities, their families and their workplace.

I offer my congratulations to the Al-Anon Family Group and urge my colleagues to join me in recognizing the important role it has in our communities.

* * *

KYOTO PROTOCOL

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, as an accountable MP, if I were to vote for major changes to health care or seniors' pensions without having a reasonable cost benefit analysis and social impact statement, I would be considered irresponsible.

There is a parallel in what the Liberal ideologues are asking us to do with the Kyoto accord. They have been unable to justify the likely costs and implications of ratifying this obviously bad deal. We also know that even if we could eliminate 100% of Canada's CO₂ production, the costly accomplishment would not even register on global climate measurement systems.

In Parliament, I will continue to ask the government to show us a scientifically sound proposal, a proper decision making document. If the proposal can meet reasonable standards, I will support it. However I will not support the poor submissions before us today, which appear to be very expensive, ill-defined, politically correct, emotion based and somewhat designed to appease special interests rather than Canada's long term national interests.

I urge the government to tell the whole truth about Kyoto and exercise inclusive leadership for positive change.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

•(1415)

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Quebec and Ontario compensated all hepatitis C victims. Now that we know that the federal bureaucrats who were involved in this tragedy were on staff before 1986, will the Minister of Health ask cabinet to compensate all those who were infected with the hepatitis C virus and have contracted the disease?

[English]

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are well aware of the decision yesterday to lay charges in this very unfortunate matter that affected so many Canadians.

The matter really now is sub judice and any spokesman for the government, including the Minister of Health, who I think will be here shortly, will have to be extremely careful in order to protect the rights of all those accused, as well as those people who have suffered.

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I note that was not an answer to my question at all. Let me pose the question another way.

The senior federal bureaucrats who have been charged, and I note charged criminally, by the RCMP in the tainted blood scandal were employed by the government prior to 1986. The government categorically said that there was no responsibility before 1986.

Will the government change its stubborn policy and now look at looking after every single victim of hepatitis C prior to 1986?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with great respect to the hon. member, we cannot do by the back door what we cannot do by the front door.

This matter will be litigated and any statement that is said, even here using parliamentary privilege, could affect this case.

I would ask the hon. member to perhaps pursue another line of questioning. The fact is that this matter is now sub judice and has to be dealt with in a very careful manner.

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, notice the legal approach to this rather than the compassionate approach.

The Liberal government said that it would be too expensive to look after those victims outside the 1986 to 1990 period. Therefore my question for the health minister is very specific. How many victims have been compensated and how much money is there left unused in the bank that could and should be directed toward those victims outside this artificial legalistic timeframe? How much?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no artificial legalistic timeframe. This government has put over \$1.4 billion into compensation and assistance.

As the hon. member is well aware, there was a negotiated settlement. Some \$900 million is being supervised by the court right now to ensure that over the next 70 years compensation is available to those who contracted hep C between the period of 1986 to 1990.

In addition, we have some \$525 million available—

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CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday a senior government official called the President of the United States a moron. Perhaps we could dismiss this damaging insult as an aberrant remark but, sadly, it is part of a consistent pattern of knee-jerk anti-Americanism coming from the government, from comparing the American policy on Iraq to Pearl Harbor, to blaming the victims of 9/11, and now responding with humour to this remark.

Will the government confirm that this comment was made by the Prime Minister's director of communications, and if so, does it reflect the views of the Liberal government?

Oral Questions

Hon. David Collette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, fortunately for Canadians and Americans, what is most important here is the personal relationship between the Prime Minister and the president, and that is an excellent relationship.

We will not comment on anonymous sources in the newspaper. We will comment on fact, and the fact is that the Prime Minister and the president enjoy an excellent relationship. In fact let me say that Canadians should understand that Americans, all Americans, understand that they have, and I quote, “no better friend, no better neighbour, and no better partner in the world than Canada”. Who said that? Colin Powell, the secretary—

• (1420)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Southeast.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, does one good friend treat another by calling its leader a moron? Does the minister believe that the comment was acceptable simply because it was said off the record?

When will the government finally take accountability for the kind of knee-jerk anti-Americanism that has caused our bilateral relations with our most important trading partner to deteriorate to the worst level in decades?

Will the government hold the official, who called the President of the United States a moron, accountable by demanding his or her resignation?

Hon. David Collette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, why do members of the Alliance always take the negative approach with respect to Canada-U.S. relations?

The fact is that it is a healthy relationship. From time to time there are disagreements but the personal relationship between the President of the United States and the Prime Minister is an extremely good one.

Alliance members often criticize Canada, not just here, but they go down to Fox TV and take shots at Canada and Canadian policy. That is unacceptable.

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[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, the Minister of the Environment released his climate change plan. This plan confirms our apprehensions, since the reference year will no longer be 1990, but 2010 instead.

Will the Minister of the Environment admit that using 2010 instead of 1990 as the reference year is tantamount to totally ignoring past efforts and setting aside the fundamental principle, which is the polluter pay principle?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we want to do, and this is very clear in the plan tabled in the House this morning, is to recognize what companies have done since 1990. These companies will be protected from economic problems, since they acted sooner than other companies.

We have no intention of lumping everyone together. Where there is a problem, we will resolve it.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, they will not resolve anything. By setting 2010 as the reference year, the government is telling those companies that pollute “Continue to pollute until 2010; it will be all the easier to reduce pollution then, since you will have polluted more than you should have”.

Does the minister realize that greenhouse gas emissions will not diminish, but that, on the contrary, they will increase until 2010, and this will hurt those who have made efforts? The reference year will not be 1990; the government is allowing people to pollute until 2010. This is what it is proposing.

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the situation presented by the hon. member is precisely the reason why we must have a policy that is flexible and that takes into consideration the examples that he just gave the House. There is no question of having inflexible rules, under which everything would be black or white. Each individual situation must be examined on its own merits.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in response to a question we put to him on Monday concerning the subsidizing of alternative energies, the Minister of the Environment suggested we wait, because the matter would no doubt be taken into consideration in the discussion on what will be in the budget next February.

If the Minister of the Environment was serious about his answer, how can he explain that nothing substantial can be found in the plan on subsidies for developing alternative energies, and wind energy in particular?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I see no contradiction between what I said the other day and what is in the document in question. Yes, there will be fiscal measures in the budget that the Minister of Finance will table, perhaps in February, perhaps in March; I do not know when it will be tabled, but it will include such actions. What we are planning to have, generally speaking, as a blueprint for the future, for the next ten years, is in the document I tabled today.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the minister's plan, the more a province has been polluting, the less it will be penalized in terms of job creation. Moreover, the plan provides for subsidies for hydrocarbon producers, to help them meet their targets.

In all fairness, could the minister promise that for every dollar spent on hydrocarbons, an equal amount will be spent to support the development of renewable energies?

• (1425)

[English]

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the balance between the renewable sector and the non-renewable sector is very important. The hon. member has definitely put forward a very interesting point of view which should be taken into consideration and discussed.

That is being discussed in the meetings of the federal government, the territories and the provinces. It is being discussed among ourselves, the governments in Canada, and with industry.

Oral Questions

I certainly hope the hon. member will take the opportunity next week to discuss that very issue here in the chamber.

* * *

KYOTO PROTOCOL

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats stand four-square with Canadians behind Kyoto ratification, but under today's proposal the Canadian coal and oil industries would be subsidized with free permits to continue their polluting ways.

Canadian families would receive minor subsidies that would not even include the cost of better home insulation. In contrast, oil and coal companies would receive emissions credits covering 85% of any increase in their emissions.

Why is the federal government rewarding coal and oil producers for increasing greenhouse gas emissions?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting point of view. The balance between certain sectors of the economy is very important and we have tried to get the best balance we can.

We certainly expect other people from different political parties and different regions of the country to take different points of view. I would simply remind the hon. member who, when she was a member of the Nova Scotia legislature, tried so hard to be the poster girl of the coal industry that perhaps it is not exactly the way she described it.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 22 years ago I led the fight in Nova Scotia to get on with clean coal technology.

It is not a question of a point of view, it is a fact that the federal proposal subsidizes coal and oil production. To add insult to injury, this is being done to benefit energy exports, not even to meet our own energy needs.

Why are Canadians being asked to subsidize an increase in greenhouse gas emissions for the benefit of coal and oil exports? Does the government stand with Canadians who want to reduce emissions or stand with coal and oil companies who want to drive emissions up so they can export their coal and oil?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will not comment on the very clear contradiction between what the hon. lady is saying now and what she said, and I have the quotes from *Hansard*, in the Nova Scotia legislature. I can assure her they are night and day; they are totally different positions.

The member of course is not the only one who has flipped and flopped on this particular issue. I am expecting more from the Conservatives in just a moment. I will tell her that it is a difficult balance and we look forward to having her reasoned contribution to the debate in the next few days.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, the government has yet another scheme about Kyoto. This is not a plan, it is a con game.

Ottawa says it is based on consultation with the provinces, yet Nova Scotia says this latest version reflects contempt and disdain.

Saskatchewan says the plan is being rammed down the throats in Saskatchewan.

[*Translation*]

This is a profound invasion of the constitutional jurisdictions of the provinces. The federal government has either rejected or changed 10 of the 12 principles proposed by the provinces.

[*English*]

Why does the government refuse to work honestly with the provinces on climate change?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that needs international cooperation. It cannot be dealt with on only a provincial basis.

If I may quote a distinguished Canadian, he said:

We need new international legal mechanisms to forge global cooperation to protect and restore the atmospheric life support system.

He went on to say:

The only effective way these and other international issues can be addressed is through concerted international action and agreement.

I am trying to implement the legacy of Prime Minister Mulroney.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. I realize this is a week where that answer might be apt but we have to have some order in the House so we can hear the question from the right hon. member for Calgary Centre who has the floor.

• (1430)

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, first he makes sexist comments about the leader of the New Democratic Party and then he tries to associate himself with a prime minister far more successful than any he has served with.

My question however is for the acting prime minister—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. I cannot hear the right hon. member for Calgary Centre. I know some hon. members may be unsympathetic, but he might say something out of order and then there would be real trouble. The right hon. member for Calgary Centre has the floor and we will hear him. Order.

Right Hon. Joe Clark: My question for the acting prime minister is not about the Prime Minister but about the people who owe their positions to him.

Does the government deny that at the NATO summit a senior Canadian official referred to the President of the United States as a moron? If such a comment was made to the press, will the government name the official in question and reprimand the official in question?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said a few moments ago, I will not comment on anonymous sources in the newspaper.

The fact of the matter is we have a very healthy relationship with the United States. The fact is that there is respect and when we have differences, we have differences. Unlike the government of which the right hon. member was part of, we are not toadies to the Americans and they respect us for our independence.

* * *

PARLIAMENTARY PRECINCT

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday we witnessed a startling and potentially dangerous breach of security during the unveiling of the portrait of the Right Hon. Brian Mulroney.

There are conflicting reports as to how the individual gained entry to the place that should have been under strict and tight security. One report alleges the active participation of the office of the government House leader in helping the individual gain access.

Can the government House leader confirm the truth of this allegation?

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is rather unusual to have one spokesperson for the board asking the other spokesperson for the board a question on behalf of the board's activity.

However, on behalf of the Board of Internal Economy let me assure the House that the disruption at the unveiling of former Prime Minister Mulroney's portrait on Tuesday of this week was completely unacceptable. That the intruder passed through three occasions of screening that day provides little comfort in light of what followed. The fact that the intruder was able to gain access to the event and get close enough to pose a risk to the current and former prime ministers is cause for concern and appropriate action.

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, there are conflicting reports and there seems to be much ducking and scrambling for cover. There are allegations as to who was to blame and who was less than alert.

This matter is far too serious and the repercussions could have been so tragic that the House must know all the facts. The House must be assured that something like this will never happen again.

I ask the government House leader, would he agree to refer this matter to the procedure and House affairs committee so that all individuals involved and those alleged to have been involved can be called to testify under oath?

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in this regard the Board of Internal Economy did review the situation yesterday. It is regrettable that the member could not be there. The board directed the Sergeant-at-Arms to undertake additional measures to ensure that such a situation does not happen again.

I am not prepared to discuss the details of additional security measures as that might serve as a source of information to others who would seek to evade them.

[*Translation*]

Oral Questions

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government's assistance plan for the softwood lumber industry is inadequate.

The government announced the initial phase, but since then there has been not a single word. Yet everyone acknowledges that additional concrete measures are needed to provide companies with some prompt assistance.

When is the minister going to announce phase two of his aid program? Time is of the essence.

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are consulting with our partners. We are in the process of preparing a program to support communities and help them adjust to the softwood lumber crisis, not just in Quebec but in B.C. and other affected regions of Canada as well.

● (1435)

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister's fine words need to be followed up with some concrete actions. Companies are losing their market share and investment is slowing down. A number of companies are at risk of disappearing, as the AMBSQ has confirmed. Because of the Minister of Industry's lack of leadership, precious time is being wasted.

What is he waiting for to help out these companies? More company closures?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are not waiting. We are in the process at this time of preparing programs and approaches to assist the affected communities.

In fact, last week I visited two communities, Saint-Fulgence and Saint-Honoré, in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region, which is greatly affected by the crisis.

I spoke with the workers, and with the mayors. I assured them, and reassured them, that very soon we will be there with funds to help them turn their economy around.

* * *

[*English*]

KYOTO PROTOCOL

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the government's latest Kyoto presentation provides even fewer cost estimates than the first one.

While the government would have us believe that there will be no ill effects on Canada's economy, Industry Canada's own report says that the government has underestimated the costs of Kyoto by up to 30%. The report also shows an investment decline of up to 55% and employment dropping by up to 27% in certain sectors.

Why is the government forging ahead when it clearly has failed to tell Canadians the true costs of Kyoto?

Oral Questions

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member made an error in his preamble. This is not a new report. It is in fact quite an old report. It occurred before the discussions 18 months ago in Bonn and also those a year ago in Marrakesh. It does not take into account either the sinks issue or the clean development mechanisms issue negotiated at those two meetings. It does not, for example, take into account the emissions trading system.

It essentially was an academic exercise of two people within that department. It was not expected to be or designed to be a modelling of the plan that we have before us now.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I think it is time we had the truth of what is in the report.

Let me tell the House what is not in there. There is no clear target. There are no specific actions. There are no comprehensive cost estimates. The government still has no implementation plan. There is no planned legislation.

If we are lacking a clear plan, could the government tell us how it expects to get the provinces on board, or is it still intent on just steamrolling ahead without the provinces' consent and just doing its own thing?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we certainly want to have continuous discussions with the provinces as we have had for the last five years, in fact 10 years with the five years before the Kyoto agreement.

We want to continue to have that cooperative approach of 14 governments which has essentially marked this whole debate over the last few years. We think that is important.

We regret the fact that Alberta pulled out from co-chairing. Alberta and the federal government were co-chairing up to this summer. We regret that but we hope we can bring Alberta back in.

Certainly I am willing and my colleague the Minister of Natural Resources is willing to meet with our provincial counterparts at any time, anywhere.

* * *

[*Translation*]

IRAQ

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, in response to a question I asked him on the advisability of debating and voting on Canada's participation in an attack against Iraq, the government House leader fell back on the weekly meetings of House leaders to dodge the question.

Here is my question for him today. Will the government House leader demonstrate that he is taking this issue a little more seriously and tell us that the government plans on agreeing to both a debate and a vote in the House on this important issue?

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I refuse to accept the hon. member's suggestion that the meetings between House leaders, which include her party, are not taken seriously.

I feel that her party's House leader takes his job very seriously as do all the other House leaders. Referring an issue that comes under the joint responsibility of the House leaders to these meetings is not taking the matter lightly, but very seriously indeed, and her House leader takes it seriously as well.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is not the House leaders who will decide if there will be a vote in the House, it is the government.

If Kyoto deserves to be debated and voted on, then a war, which would mean hundreds of thousands of soldiers possibly risking their lives in a conflict, most certainly deserves the same treatment. Even Mr. Blair understands this. There will be a vote on it in the British Parliament.

Will the federal government commit today to doing the same, holding a debate and a vote in the House before taking part in any war in Iraq?

• (1440)

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the procedure that was used in the past has always been to give the House an opportunity to debate potential military action. This has been done maybe ten times since 1993. It is part of a new mechanism used by the House, that of take note debates. We have always held such debates, after consultations with House leaders. I repeat what I said earlier.

* * *

[*English*]

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the revenue minister bragged about the prosecutions and convictions in the GST scandal and suggested that we ask those who are in jail if they think the government is doing a good job.

That is a very interesting response considering that one of the many fraud scams uncovered was operating out of the Kingston Penitentiary. Those GST rebate cheques went directly to the Kingston Penitentiary.

Canadians are outraged at the Liberal government's careless treatment of their hard-earned tax dollars. When will the minister finally act to fix this system?

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here are the facts again. We have had 13 successful prosecutions out of the 13 cases that we took to court. Of those 13 prosecutions, 5 resulted in jail terms for a total of 11 years. There are people behind bars because of the fraud that has been committed.

There are 14 additional cases before the courts now and there are 20 that are still under investigation. We take this extremely seriously. Our enforcement unit is working with police to identify anyone who would defraud Canadians.

Oral Questions

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is a little bit like closing the barn door after the horses are already out. Instead of fixing the system, cheques are mailed to anyone with a postal box and a cellphone. Some criminals may get caught but by that time the lion's share of the money is already gone, in some cases offshore.

I ask the minister again: When is the Liberal government going to take concrete action to stop the flow of free money to convicts, criminals and con artists?

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we are not dealing with loopholes. We are dealing with fraud. We are dealing with people who improperly apply for a tax refund that they are not entitled to. That is a criminal offence. We have succeeded with prosecutions and people are in jail because of that.

We have taken significant action. We have an enhanced registration review of applications to ensure that wherever there is a flag, risk management techniques are used to identify those who should be audited or investigated, and we are doing that.

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GRAIN TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the threat of a strike or a lockout with regard to the ongoing grain dispute at the port of Prince Rupert has rested heavily on the minds of many members of the House.

I would like to ask the Minister of Labour what is being done to bring the parties to this dispute back to the bargaining table, and when can we expect a settlement?

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that Prince Rupert Grain Limited and the grain workers union reached a tentative settlement early this morning with the help of the conciliation officers I appointed to help them through the negotiations.

The tentative settlement, which is being fully recommended by the union, is subject to ratification by the union membership. Not only does this agreement speak to the importance of the collective bargaining system, but it will also ensure the continued movement of grain through the port of Prince Rupert.

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[Translation]

FISHERIES

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is reported in today's newspapers that Ottawa is considering shutting down what is left of the cod fishery in the Atlantic. It is also said that according to some sources, Ottawa does not anticipate compensating the thousands of workers who will be affected by this measure.

Can the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans tell us if it is true that there will be no compensation? If that is the case, is he prepared to present a plan and table it in the House of Commons, for the thousands of workers who will become unemployed and for fishers?

● (1445)

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for asking a most important question for the Atlantic regions.

These media reports are referring to a decision that has not yet been made regarding the harvesting levels for certain stocks of cod. These stocks are the gulf stock and the northern cod stock. The other Atlantic stocks are not affected.

We are waiting for the report of the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council to get its advice on the harvesting levels that we should have. We should receive this report in late winter or early spring, and we will then advise the House accordingly.

* * *

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the embattled Minister of Natural Resources.

Recently the government announced a package aimed at helping workers in communities in British Columbia and elsewhere who have been hit hard by U.S. softwood lumber tariffs. The package, however, does not include a pension bridging proposal to help older workers retire with dignity and open up jobs for younger workers.

When will the government listen to the IWA and to other unions, to industry and to provincial governments, and add pension bridging to the federal softwood lumber package?

Hon. Herb Dhaliwal (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, we delivered a package on a variety of issues. One is the diversified markets. In addition to that, we announced \$240 million in terms of providing community adjustment as well as retraining and as well as making sure that we have more employment opportunities. This adds up to more than \$340 million.

We have also said that if more needs to be done if we do not get an agreement we will do more for the industry and we are committed to that.

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HEALTH

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the health minister rejected any plan to compensate all victims of hepatitis C outside the original package, but then she went on to lecture the House on how inappropriate it would be to prejudice the outcome of a criminal trial.

The question would be, is that still a no? Or is she in fact awaiting the outcome of those criminal trials to determine whether these victims are going to be compensated?

Oral Questions

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me again reiterate for the hon. member that the government has put in place \$1.4 billion not only in terms of money for compensation but money for care in relation to hep C victims, not only between 1986 and 1990, but in fact pre-1986 and post-1990.

People should remember that in fact we put on the table some \$525 million for those hep C victims pre-1986 and post-1990. That money is going to the care of those people in the provinces and communities where they live.

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Mr. Speaker, the minister should answer the question. There is \$1 billion left in that compensation fund, which would more than take care of those people outside those predetermined dates. If the minister checked with her actuary, she would know that.

The question is, is she going to help them or not? Is she going to be compassionate?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been helping them, as I have just outlined.

I wish the hon. member would appreciate the fact that we had a court agreed to settlement fund that is administered by a fund administrator. In fact, there are no surplus funds in that fund. In fact, we know full well that those dollars will be dispensed to victims between the period of 1986 and 1990, over a considerable period of time, conceivably up to 70 years. There are no surplus funds.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, sadly, on more than 100 reserves across Canada residents have to boil their water or risk serious illnesses.

The government has not responded with action. It has responded with a \$6 million study, the paralysis of analysis.

The government can find \$44 million to build a brand new, totally unnecessary reserve in northern Manitoba, but it cannot fix broken down water systems.

These are not just bad choices. These could be fatal choices, especially for seniors and children.

I am asking the minister today, will the government put an immediate stop on the building of new reserves and start cleaning up the water systems on our existing reserves?

• (1450)

Hon. Robert Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again it is unfortunate that the member does not get himself well briefed. I tried to explain last time he or one of his colleagues asked this question.

Since 1995 we have spent above and beyond our normal capital funding for water treatment plants and sewer treatment plants, with some \$500 million extra. This year we will spend over \$200 million in water treatment plants alone to upgrade the systems on reserves.

The information that the member has submitted to the House is blatantly false, and I wish he would stop putting those comments to the House.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the minister's temper is flaring. He should try living on one of these reserves.

The minister has replaced dozens of chiefs with his own financial managers in the last couple of years. Then he tells the managers that they do not have to pay the bills for local small businesses. This leaves tens of millions of dollars owing to private sector, family owned businesses. That is grossly unfair to those Canadians and the government is doing nothing about it.

The minister said that the chiefs are not responsible. The minister's manager is not responsible. When I asked the minister, he said he is not responsible.

On behalf of these Canadians, I want to ask the minister, if he is not responsible for this, who is—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Hon. Robert Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me put this question to the member again, as I did last time, and then I will answer the question for him. Is his party saying that the Government of Canada should guarantee every transaction between the private sector and a first nation?

If his party is suggesting that the government should go good for every single contract that is out there in the private sector with a first nation, we are talking about literally billions of transactions every year. This responsibility lies with the first nation government and the private sector and that is where it will stay.

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[*Translation*]

ÉCOLE DE MÉDECINE VÉTÉRINAIRE DE SAINT-HYACINTHE

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the veterinary college at Guelph University, in Ontario, recently received accreditation from the American Veterinary Medical Association, after receiving millions of dollars from the Canada Foundation for Innovation.

Could the Minister of Agriculture tell us why the veterinary college in Saint-Hyacinthe cannot rely on the same level of support from the federal government, at a time when it is struggling to stay alive?

[*English*]

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the money that went to the University of Guelph was money that came to the University of Guelph as a result of an application to the Canada Foundation for Innovation. All universities have had the opportunity to apply through that. When they do, they indicate in their applications how they want to use it and their applications go into the system for that fund like all others.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by abandoning the veterinary college in Saint-Hyacinthe, the federal government is preparing to pull another Saint-Jean military college on us. They have closed down the only French language military college and are about to do the same with the only French language veterinary college in North America.

Are they not preparing to play the same trick again on the francophones of North America?

[English]

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no intention at all. The provinces support the veterinary colleges all across the country, and every university and every college had an opportunity to apply to the Canada Foundation for Innovation fund. I have not had a chance to see whether that college did or not, but I do know that it had the opportunity to do so. If it did so and was successful, it would have to follow the use on which it applied for it.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, in Canada criminals are out of jail before victims are out of the hospital.

Although the Department of Justice spent \$136 million last year on a gun registry that has failed to keep guns out of the hands of real criminals, it allocates only \$2.7 million to the victims of crime.

Why is the plight of victims such a low priority for the government? Why are victims only worth 2%?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here we are once again back to the question of the very principle of the protection of our society.

We all know that on this side of the House we stand by that principle. We did proceed in the past and we will continue to proceed with the question of the gun registration system which is in place. Of course some may say that it is costly, but we are talking about protection of our society.

We have to talk about costs to a certain extent, but we have to talk as well about efficiency. When we look at the statistics on the impact that has had on our society, it has been very positive. We stand by those principles.

● (1455)

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, maybe he could tell the people who were gunned down by gunmen in downtown Toronto that the gun registry is working.

The government has spent almost \$1 billion on a gun registry that simply does not work and it continues to spend over \$100 million a year simply because it is too embarrassed to admit that the system does not work.

Not for my sake, but for the sake of the victims of violent crime, why will this minister not redirect the money to programs and police services that work?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, within Justice Canada we have various programs in order to improve the situation in our society in terms of security and protection. For example, there is the national crime prevention program. It is a good partnership with the private sector and non-profit organizations as well as the provinces. We are getting involved as well in some other areas. We refer to the question of the gun registry. It works. Of course it has been costly, as he said. We started the whole program from zero and we have built up a very good system. Now it is up and running. If we look, for example, at the revocation rate, it is higher compared to the previous system. We stand by—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

* * *

PIPELINES

Mr. Roger Gallaway (Sarnia—Lambton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pipelines have been abandoned throughout southwestern Ontario and other parts of Canada yet the National Energy Board has no rules to protect landowners when their use stops.

I would like to ask the Minister of Natural Resources whether after 10 years of consultation would he now tell the NEB and his officials to create rules that ensure the safe removal of these pipelines from privately owned lands?

Hon. Herb Dhaliwal (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the matter is already regulated under the National Energy Board which operates under the authority of the National Energy Board Act. It is an independent federal regulatory agency responsible for the regulation of interprovincial and international pipelines.

More specifically, the NEB is responsible for all aspects of the construction and operation of federally regulated pipelines. Abandonment of any pipelines regulated by the NEB requires prior approval pursuant to subsection 74.1 of the act and is subject to the provisions of the Environmental Assessment Act.

However, I will take the matter into consideration. This issue has been raised by the hon. member—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the government's incompetence on the trade front has resulted in our largest trading partner, the United States, targeting the wheat sales of prairie farmers. The Americans are alleging that the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly results in subsidized exports and dumping. Thousands of wheat farmers on the Prairies do not even want the monopoly because it results in them receiving lower prices for their wheat along with lost marketing opportunities.

Privilege

Why does the government not give prairie farmers freedom of marketing choice like it does in the rest of Canada?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the same export rules apply everywhere in Canada. The same export permits are required in every case. The authority over the Canadian Wheat Board is vested in the hands of farmers themselves through a producer-elected board.

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the minister knows very well that in fact the Wheat Board is not run by farmers; it is run by government appointed people. The minister also knows that farmers in the rest of Canada do not have to go through a buyback.

I am asking the minister directly, should farmers in Ontario have to go through the buyback through the Canadian Wheat Board?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, farmers in all parts of Canada, whether in Ontario or the west, have the ultimate control over the situation through a democratically elected system.

Let me make one point. The government stands for farmers. Not like the opposition whose previous leader went to Washington, stood on the steps of the U.S. capitol, joined hands with Newt Gingrich, and sided with the United States.

* * *

● (1500)

[Translation]

COD FISHERY

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, scientists are on the verge of confirming that the catastrophic management of fisheries by Fisheries and Oceans Canada may warrant a total moratorium on the cod fishery. A government document suggests that such a moratorium will have a major impact on the eastern regions of Quebec and the Lower North Shore, as did the 1992 moratorium.

Instead of making the same mistake as in 1992, does the government plan to cooperate with Quebec to put forward concrete measures to help the communities that would otherwise pay the price for the government's inability to manage cod stocks?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want the hon. member to know that we had preliminary discussions with the Government of Quebec.

On December 2, I am scheduled to meet my counterparts from the Atlantic provinces, Quebec and Nunavut, to discuss a number of issues. Probably the most important one on the agenda will be the cod fishery. We will plan ahead for a possible reduction or moratorium and a partnership with all stakeholders to support the communities affected.

TELEVISION TRANSMISSION SERVICES

Ms. Carole-Marie Allard (Laval East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Canadian Heritage tell us whether she feels that Canadian television transmission services are being jeopardized by the satellites operating illegally in Canada at this time?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Laval East for her question. The situation she refers to is a very serious one.

At the present time, up to 1 million Canadian homes are receiving illegal signals. This represents a \$400 million loss to the broadcasting systems, which represents thousands of jobs.

I congratulate the broadcasters of Quebec for today launching an information program aimed at ensuring the survival of Canada's cultural life.

* * *

[English]

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I undertook to return to the House this afternoon concerning two requests for emergency debate pursuant to Standing Order 52 made by the hon. member for Churchill and the hon. member for South Shore concerning various aspects of the east coast fishery.

The Chair appreciates the importance of the situation and the grave concerns expressed by the hon. members concerning that situation. However, having considered the requests I have concluded they do not meet the exigencies of the Standing Order at this time.

The Chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS, NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a question of privilege on behalf of the hon. member for Windsor—St. Clair because it needs to be raised at the earliest opportunity.

I would like to seek your guidance on events that took place at the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, Northern Development and Natural Resources. The member for Windsor—St. Clair was in the process of debating his motion to summon a witness to the committee on Bill C-4. The motion was in order; proper notice was given. He had only spoken a few minutes when the chair interrupted the hon. member and put the question on the motion, even though the hon. member had not finished his intervention.

Several times the hon. member for Windsor—St. Clair raised his objection to this move and refused to yield the floor, but the chair ruled that he could not speak on the motion because the question had been put.

According to Marleau and Montpetit at page 857, in a case such as this, the chair should have either suspended or adjourned the meeting. Instead the vote took place on the motion of the hon. member for Windsor—St. Clair and the meeting continued without the member having the opportunity to express himself on the motion which he had put to the committee.

Mr. Speaker, is there any recourse for the hon. member in this case? I would like to seek your guidance on this.

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no doubt you will want to take this issue under advisement and return to the House later. The events as they have been recounted to me are somewhat different than those presented by the hon. member.

I want to remind you, Mr. Speaker, that the deliberations that went on in committee are not yet before the House. No report has been made to the House and therefore, for that reason alone, it would be out of order.

Additionally, you are no doubt aware, Mr. Speaker, of the decision rendered regarding the chairmanship of a committee in 1992 by Mr. Blenkarn, as the chair of a committee. The chair deemed that debate had gone on sufficiently and the time for voting on an issue was now before the committee.

Furthermore, I am told that the chair of this committee had consultations with the membership of the committee before taking the action that was taken and the action, in fact, reflected the view of the committee at the time it was taken, not that that was a prerequisite. I believe that should be stated as additional support for the action of the chair of the committee.

• (1505)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member just made an interesting point, but I would like to note that he was not at that committee and I was. The chair overruled the hon. member for Windsor—St. Clair when he clearly had the floor and it was his right to debate his motion as long as he cared to hold the floor.

There cannot be two sets of rules: one for the government and one for the opposition parties. Whether or not we agree with his motion is immaterial. The fact is that he had the right not only to raise the motion but to debate it.

We should wait for your ruling on this, Mr. Speaker. When you have read the books and procedures I am sure you will come down on the side of the hon. member for Windsor—St. Clair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say that I, too, was present at that committee meeting. I support what the member for South Shore is saying. The member for Windsor—St. Clair did indeed have the floor and he could have kept talking but the committee chair did not allow it.

I hope that the Chair will make the right decision regarding these facts.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, with regard to my question of privilege, I had asked that you indicate the procedure to be followed in such a case, based on Marleau and Montpetit.

Privilege

It is hardly democratic, as far as I am concerned, when a member moves a motion and the government—which has a majority in committee—through the chair, turns aside and says, “I do not want to listen to you”. There were only a few minutes left in the debate. You can check.

As the member said just now, regardless of whether or not one agrees with a motion, one must be polite enough to listen to members in committee and in the House. This was a motion brought forward by the member for Windsor—St. Clair. This is why we are speaking to this question of privilege.

I expect you to make the right decision in this case and give us some guidance for the future.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was present when the Chair of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, Northern Development and Natural Resources acted in the fashion we are complaining about today.

I can tell you that, in the nine years I have been sitting on committees—I was a member of the Standing Committee on Finance before—I have never seen such a dictatorial way of running a committee meeting. We are not given the privilege of speaking. This is contrary to the procedures in the Standing Orders.

This is the first time that I experience working in a committee almost under a reign of terror, being careful not to draw attention to ourselves and being stripped of all our privileges. That is to ensure the proper operation of the committee, according to the Chair.

This has to stop. I agree with my hon. colleagues. You need to intervene to put an end to this dictatorial way of running the committee.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to your attention something that happened this morning, at 8:30 a.m., during the Environment Canada briefing on the unveiling of Canada's plan regarding Kyoto.

An hon. member: That is a different matter.

The Speaker: Order, please. We are discussing a point of order. Nothing I have heard the hon. member for Rosemont—Petite-Patrie say was about the committee. Our discussion is about the proceedings of this committee.

Do other members wish to speak on this matter? If not, we shall move on. However, I must also make two things clear. As hon. members know, the Speaker is not some kind of appeal court for decisions made by committee chairs. At the same time, of course, there was a problem in this committee this morning.

• (1510)

[*English*]

I will review the transcript of the proceedings of the committee when it is available and come back to the House with a decision on this matter. However I would like to hear some clarification from hon. members who were present as to whether or not there was an appeal from the decision of the chair to the committee and if the committee in fact made a decision, in respect of the chairman's decision, to proceed with putting the question immediately rather than hearing the hon. member for Windsor—St. Clair.

Privilege

[Translation]

The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot has the floor, no doubt in connection with this matter.

Mr. Yvan Loubier: Mr. Speaker, I understand you are not there to administer the day to day affairs of committees. You are there, however, and we are very grateful that you are, to protect members' privileges.

The way this committee operates is trampling on our privileges. This morning was not the first instance. We have met three times and the same thing has happened each time. As members of the House of Commons, we are calling upon you, Mr. Speaker, as guardian of our privileges, to intervene and remedy the situation for the future, in order to restore to the committee an atmosphere that will be more propitious to committee work. Without everyone's cooperation, nothing will be accomplished.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question you have asked. Since the member for Windsor—St. Clair is not here, I was obliged to raise the matter on his behalf.

I would suggest you have a look at the blues to see how the debate went in committee. According to the information I have received, the member objected to the behaviour of the chair during this meeting. The chair ignored him totally and, again according to the information I received, moved to the vote.

The best way to find out what transpired in committee is, therefore, to consult the blues.

The Speaker: Very well, that is what I will do.

[English]

KYOTO BRIEFING

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, my office received an e-mail yesterday at 4:56 p.m. The e-mail was marked "importance high" at 4:56 p.m. and referred to a briefing being given by the environment minister with respect to the Kyoto plan or lack of plan, but we will not go there.

This is an important issue for the House. Yet the briefing notice was given at 4:56 p.m. when no member's office would have been able to receive it unless someone was sitting on top of the computer at that time. If the e-mail is sent at 4:56 p.m., sometimes it does not get in for a few minutes.

It gets worse. In addition to the notice of the briefing being sent at 4:56 p.m., the briefing was for 8:30 a.m., when again most members would not have been able to make arrangements to attend, but for those very few who were fortunate enough to have somebody sitting on top of a computer around 5 p.m. last night and fortunate enough to get notice in time to get to an 8:30 a.m. meeting.

What happened? I will tell the House what happened. Government members were in fact meeting with the minister about the Kyoto plan, but the opposition members were shuffled off to some bureaucrats.

Surely it is incumbent upon the government to treat all members of parliament with equity and with fairness. What occurred is clearly unacceptable, both in terms of ignoring proper procedure and giving proper notice and ignoring the parity and equity of members of the

House to receive the same information from the minister. There is no reason at all why the minister should exclude opposition members from a briefing that he had with some other members of parliament.

I would ask the Speaker to chastise the government and ask that this not happen again.

● (1515)

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the House leader of the official opposition is a seatmate of the member. She will know that I informed House leaders on Tuesday of this briefing.

Yesterday the minister might have extended an additional courtesy of sending an electronic mail to members on all sides of the House at the same time. Whether he did or not does not change the fact that House leaders were informed Tuesday.

I can endeavour to do what I can to ensure that opposition members speak to each other in the future, but there is a limit as to what the government House leader can do to ensure that opposition members get along better than they do now.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is unusual for me to rise in the House on a point of order.

With respect to the briefing, and how it unfolded, I am not so much opposed to the timing of the notice, but I do find it unusual and ironic that, for a non-partisan plan, a government plan, there were two different briefing rooms. There was one session given to government members and another one for opposition members, as though there were two different messages to be given.

This practice is a good example of the partisan politics surrounding this action plan. What we are asking for is transparency. We expect the minister to clearly outline the elements of the action plan, and that it be done fairly.

Of course, we would have liked to have been given reasonable notice, but more importantly, there should not have been two sessions, one for opposition members and one for government members. This is completely unacceptable.

[English]

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, listening to all the debate on both points of order only indicates why the motion for today and yesterday is so important for changing the rules of the House.

I would like to say to the government House leader that he is partially correct in his comments. We did discuss it at the House leaders meeting. There was a question put to him: would there be a briefing on this issue? He asked his staff member and said, "I am sure there will be and would you check into that?" The next I heard of it was like every other member, by e-mail at 4:56 p.m. yesterday.

The people who gave this briefing to opposition members, who are treated as second class members of Parliament in the House by certain departments of government, told the members who were there that they only heard about giving this briefing around three-thirty or four o'clock yesterday afternoon.

Privilege

Therefore it was put together in a hurry. That is the government's privilege to do that. However the fact is the officials did not even know they would be giving the briefing until late in the day. If something is that important, I would have thought the minister's office could phone members' offices and say that it was happening at 8:30 in the morning.

My party happened to have a big dinner for its leader last night and most members were gone probably at the five o'clock time. Other members were in committee meetings. Their staff is gone when they get back to the office. This was a very important briefing. There should have been good notice given so that all members could have been there.

I would think that every member of Parliament, no matter on what side of the House they are, should be treated equally. I went through this when I was the critic for fisheries where we were hustled into a room with the public and the Liberal people were in another room. It is not the way parliamentarians should be treated, and it is a good reason why we have this modernization debate.

I hope you look into this issue, Mr. Speaker, and ensure that it does not happen again. Members deserve proper notice. We are all very busy when we are here. The government knows this. When it has bad news, it puts out press releases at five or six o'clock on a Friday afternoon because nobody will read them until a few days later.

Let us get something happening so that members are treated fairly and equitably and ensure sure they are informed properly.

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as it is I who they are criticizing for the notice, first, as soon as we have material that is available, we try to make it available as soon as possible to members on both sides of the House. They are now complaining about the fact that as soon as we had the material available we made it available to them with briefings to boot; not just giving them the document. We could do it differently, but the complaint would then come that we were holding material back and not making it public to members on either side of the House.

It is one of these situations where basically it is pretty easy to criticize one way or the other. We are damned if we do and damned if we do not. However, if the hon. member who is now leaving the chamber would like to have further briefings on this and further information about it, we would be happy to provide that to her.

There are certain practical reasons for getting material in the hands of members as soon as we can. That is a courtesy. It is not in fact treating them with disrespect. If they do not want it, they do not have to come. I do not know whether she came or not. However I do know government members were briefed in much the same time, in fact, I think about a half hour earlier and they had much the same notice.

Were all of them able to get there? Of course not, but that is understood with all the work we do around the House. As the hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast has made clear, we have many other demands on our time. I recognize that and it is possible that people would like to have it at a different time. I will be happy, if the hon. member who has raised the complaint would like it, to give her further briefings.

For those who could get there, it is important for her to understand that we gave the briefing just as soon as we could. We did not hold back on documents, which is exactly the type of criticism that she would level had we in fact adopted the very proposal that she has put before us today.

• (1520)

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, I want to make two very brief points. First, our party also received the notice after hours for a meeting before hours. Unless we are provided with extra resources, there is no way we can monitor those times.

Second, I would like to point out that the government House leader did not indicate either time or place for a briefing. He indicated there would be one. I want to ensure that is clear on the record.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Brien (Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I think that there were two questions asked of you at the same time, and I would not like to see the second part neglected.

First of all, contrary to what the leader of the government in the House has said, I would point out that the invitation to the Thursday morning briefing was not issued Tuesday, but around 5 p.m. yesterday. That is, the end of the day yesterday. The timing is at issue.

The other point raised by my colleague for Rosemont—Petite-Patrie is of equal concern. How could there be two different briefings, one for opposition MPs and one for government MPs? This does not strike us as a desirable practice, let alone an acceptable one. I would like to see the Chair address the two points: the notice given and the way the sessions were organized differently for two groups of members of this House.

[*English*]

The Speaker: The Chair has heard all the arguments from hon. members on this point: the Minister of the Environment, the government House leader, the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill who raised the point, the hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, the hon. member for Témiscamingue, the hon. member for Rosemont—Petite-Patrie and the hon. member for St. John's West. I hope I have named everybody who participated. I have considered the matter with some care.

Matters of press conferences or release of documents, the policy initiatives of the government, are not ones that fall within the jurisdiction of the Speaker of the House unless they happen to be made in the House itself.

Business of the House

This was a meeting that was organized, apparently by the Minister of the Environment from what we have heard, to brief hon. members concerning material that was to be tabled in the House, and in fact I understand was tabled this morning. How the government or the minister organizes these briefings is not something that is done in consultation with the Speaker or has anything to do, technically, with the Speaker. The minister could have five meetings. I know for some they have one for the media and some for MPs. For others they might have a meeting in a caucus meeting setting and tell stories in there, of which the Speaker has absolutely no control and does not even get to go and hear.

It is very difficult for the Chair to intervene in a situation where a minister has chosen to have a press conference, or a briefing or a meeting and release material when the Speaker has nothing to do with the organization of that.

[*Translation*]

If documents are tabled in the House, this must certainly be done in compliance with the Standing Orders. The Chair can enforce this, but not anything that goes on outside the House.

In this case, even if the hon. members have complaints about how this morning's meetings were run, this is not a situation where the Speaker can intervene on their behalf.

The same thing goes for those who are invited to meetings and for the way people are notified of meetings. Whether there is one meeting, or three or four, makes no difference. In my opinion, it is impossible for me to intervene in this case.

[*English*]

I can only say that I think the hon. House leaders, who are the ones who organize these things generally, who work out the way these will happen and who normally discuss these matters, should continue to have discussions. I urge them to cooperate in these discussions so we avoid this kind of conflict both in the House and in our dealings done outside.

Beyond making that recommendation to the hon. members who serve as House leaders in this House and who do such a wonderful job, I am afraid there is little the Chair can do on this point.

The hon. member for Surrey Central also has a point of order. This seems to be a day for points of order, but we will want to go the debate on modernization as obviously this is a matter of interest.

• (1525)

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Mr. Speaker, I request the unanimous consent of the House, which I believe you will get because we have had discussions with all parties, to revert to presenting reports from committees for the purpose of presenting the first report of the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations.

The Speaker: Does the House give its unanimous consent to revert to presenting reports from committees?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

SCRUTINY OF REGULATIONS

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we are very anxious to hear what the government House Leader has to offer us for the rest of today, tomorrow, next week and even further if he can go that far.

With Kyoto being so much in discussion, I want the minister to assure the House that before a motion to ratify Kyoto is placed before the House there will be an implementation plan that Canadians understand and that sets out the benefits, how the targets will be reached and its costs, as called for by the Canadian Alliance motion that was adopted by the House on October 24.

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will continue this afternoon with the discussion of parliamentary modernization. As a result of the great interest by members on all sides of the House and the level of participation in this debate, I will be consulting with colleagues to see if it is possible, notwithstanding the scarcity of time around here, to find more time to debate this motion.

Tomorrow we will consider Bill S-2 respecting a number of tax conventions.

Pursuant to the request of the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons, I am pleased to announce that on Monday we will commence debate on the long-expected motion with respect to the Kyoto agreement. I thank the member for his interest. This motion will be put on notice later this day. Given the considerable interest in this matter, I expect it is not impossible that the debate might take longer than one day. Therefore I will also announce to the House that on Tuesday and perhaps other days we will debate the Kyoto motion.

In terms of legislation, I would like to do report stage and third reading of Bill C-4 when it is reported from committee. It is my intention then to call Bill C-3, the Canada pension plan amendments, as legislation following that. Because of the very large number of bills presently before committee, as they are reported to the House of Commons we will bring those forward for debate at report stage and third reading.

*Points of Order***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS***[English]***CANADA TRANSPORTATION ACT**

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, due to illness, the member for Lethbridge will be unable to reinstate his private member's bill, an act to amend the Canada Transportation Act, formerly Bill C-436 from the last session, before the deadline pursuant to Standing Order 86.1. I request that it be deemed introduced by the member and that it enjoy the same status as it did in the last session pursuant to Standing Order 86.1.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent that Bill C-314 standing in the name of the hon. member for Lethbridge, entitled an act to amend the Canada Transportation Act, be deemed to have been introduced, read a first time and ordered to be printed, and reinstated at the same stage Bill C-436 would have been at had we not had a dissolution of the previous session?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Bill C-314 deemed introduced, read a first time and ordered to be printed, and reinstated to the same status as in the previous session)

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

HOUSE OF COMMONS SECURITY

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday a point of order was raised by four of the five parties in the House by different members of those parties concerning the disruption at the unveiling of the portrait of a former prime minister on Tuesday of this week. The members who spoke requested that there be a report back to the House.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Board of Internal Economy, the board did consider this matter last night. The board agreed unanimously that there would be a report of its discussions to the House at the end of question period today. It is regrettable that one of the parties who also sits on the board chose not to respect that agreement but I do think, given that the request came from the House, there should be a fuller explanation of what was discussed and what action was taken on behalf of members of Parliament by the Board of Internal Economy.

As I attempted to say earlier today in a response, what did happen was, in the view of the board, and I am sure all members of the House, totally unacceptable. The fact is that an intruder was able to gain access to an event and get close enough to present a risk to both the current and a former prime minister. That is obviously cause for concern and appropriate action.

In that regard, the Board of Internal Economy thoroughly reviewed the incident at its meeting yesterday with the Sergeant-at-Arms and directed the Sergeant-at-Arms to undertake additional measures to ensure insofar as possible that such a situation does not happen again.

• (1530)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, is it possible then that we would adjourn the House of Commons until the parliamentary committees finish all of their work? We would save Canadians a lot of money. Normally take note debates are done at night and we deal with bills that are of great importance to Canadians during the day. The government really does not have anything on its agenda.

Would it be possible to deal with Kyoto on Monday and vote on it on Tuesday? This way Canadians would be very happy.

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for suggesting that the Kyoto agreement is worthy of the kind of support such that on Tuesday it could be voted on. I will take that as representation on his part and on the part of his party for an early vote on Kyoto which I would be willing to support.

Notwithstanding that, I know a number of members want to speak on this very historic document. It is our commitment and that of our Prime Minister to have a vote on this historic accord before we leave for the Christmas break.

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am sure it will not be Tuesday of next week.

There have been consultations with all parties and I believe you will find unanimous consent for two items.

First, I request to have Motion No. 230 withdrawn. It is a motion standing in my name establishing a procedure for secret ballot elections at committee. The House has already pronounced itself on that issue.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent that Motion No. 230 be withdrawn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. John Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, the second item has to do with a private member's bill in the name of the member for Lethbridge, Bill C-436 from the last session.

The Speaker: While we work on getting that bill, the hon. member for St. John's West has a question.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the government House leader.

Some time ago in answer to other questions about when Kyoto was coming before the House, he made it quite clear that he first wanted to discuss it with the first ministers. I wonder if that is going to take place. Is there a meeting planned for the weekend that we do not know about or is the government going ahead without such consultations?

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, it is borderline as to whether that has anything to do with the business statement. I said no such thing. I said we would not be putting the motion before the House before November 21, the day that had been set aside for a federal-provincial ministers meeting. We would not be debating the motion before then. I have now put the motion before the House for debate next week which I also had indicated would happen at the House leaders meeting.

Government Orders

As I pointed out, and as the House leader indicated yesterday, I am not prepared to discuss details of any additional security measures. I believe that only serves as a source of information for others who might seek to evade them and cause further risks to security for the House, those who work here and visitors.

Since the question was raised in question period in relation to this incident, I also want to make it very clear that the information I have and any information the board was given does not support media reports today that a staff member of the government House leader's office escorted the intruder into the event. It is clear however that after leaving the gallery, the person in question sought direction from someone working on contract for House security and was mistakenly guided to the government House leader's office. It is recognized that this person went beyond his clear and limited responsibilities and inadvertently contributed to the situation. Security management is taking appropriate measures to deal with this issue.

I want to thank the members of all parties, including those who sit on the Board of Internal Economy, for their concern about this matter. I trust that this report from the board does respond to those concerns.

• (1535)

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, in my role as opposition House leader, I take great offence to the government whip saying that, and I assume that she was talking about me, that somebody in the opposition chose not to respect this agreement. I was not at that meeting last night because I was doing some investigative work on this issue and got tied up and could not be there.

I have not talked to the other member from my party about this issue since that meeting for the sole reason that I think there are questions that need to be asked. I may have asked them at that meeting last night if I had been there.

There are conflicting reports with regard to this issue. It would seem there are two different stories. It would seem that if somebody from the government House leader's office did not escort that person from that office to the event, more questions have to be asked than just how he got up on the stage. How did that person get from that office to the event? How did he get in the door? If he walked down the hall, then there is more to this.

I would think that the public right now is looking at this as a cover-up somewhere. Why can we not have the right to ask those people questions, under oath, as to how this happened? It should not have happened in the House. I asked in question period whether the government would be prepared to send this to the privileges committee of the House, so we could get to the bottom of this issue and not just shove it under the rug as seems to be happening right now. It is obviously not your role, Mr. Speaker, to do that because we do not have a motion to that effect but I will be asking this question of the government House leader because it is very, very important.

I do not want to be part of anything that looks like a cover-up in the House. A short discussion in a Board of Internal Economy meeting is not adequate for this security breach that could have been a lot more serious than it was.

• (1540)

Ms. Marlene Catterall: Mr. Speaker, it is very important that both the House and the public be very clear on this. The government does not direct how the House is operated. That is done by the administration of the House under your direction, Mr. Speaker, and under the direction of the Board of Internal Economy on which all parties in the House of Commons are represented, including the House leader of the official opposition.

The House leader for the official opposition admits this is a very serious situation for the House and one that has to be avoided at all costs in the future. It is regrettable that rather than being present at a board meeting that was taking responsibility to investigate and inquire into and hopefully take corrective measures around that situation, he chose to miss that meeting to pursue his own interests. He has nobody but himself to blame for his failure to be at that meeting.

Frankly, I find it unbelievable that his party's other representative on the Board of Internal Economy would not have reported to him the conclusions of the board's discussions, especially since he is officially the second spokesperson for the board.

The government in no way directs the House or the administration of the House. The government cannot refer this matter to a committee. However, we as members of Parliament and members of that committee can certainly bring it to the attention of the committee, and I invite the member to do so.

The Speaker: I do not think we need to hear any more. The point of order if anything here was brought by the chief government whip when she made her report. We have had a reply. We have had an answer to the misunderstanding. We have heard enough on this point. There is a disagreement and we could go on all day on it. I am not prepared to continue. We will leave it at that and move on to orders of the day.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier.

As we talk about modernization once again, I want to put forward a few points that, as we talk about it over the coming years, might be put into the discussion, and some points which may not have been raised before.

Sometimes I get frustrated with the time we spend talking about procedures here when we are on the verge of a war where our sons and daughters and many innocent citizens could be killed, when people do not have shelter or enough food to eat, when many people in my riding and in others are unemployed, when fishermen have no fish and when farmers are in a drought. Hopefully we can get back to dealing with some of those issues quickly.

Government Orders

However, in that we have set aside two days for this debate, I would like to put out some ideas to think about in the coming years.

Last week I was in Washington observing the U.S. congress until it closed at three in the morning on, I believe, Thursday night. It is not that I am recommending we copy the American system, but there is an interesting structural difference in the shape of both of those houses, which are different than the two houses here. As we know, here we have sort of a confrontational system. In case the public does not know, we are actually a distance of two sword lengths from each other and, with the passion of today's question period and others, they might see why.

In the United States congress the houses are built in a half circle, with both parties sitting in the half circle facing a speaker in the centre. One can symbolize that as common people from a common country facing a moderator with a procedure or a problem. They are all trying to address a problem together as partners with different points of view, but the opposition is the problem facing the country, not each other. Whether or not that works, I think it might be interesting for further consideration.

Another thing the members of the U.S. congress can do, which is quite interesting, is share their time in debate. One of the previous speakers who spoke in the debate this morning had a 20 minute time slot. A person can get through a lot of points in 20 minutes. I will probably get through about eight or so in only 10 minutes.

In the American system, officials can stop and lend their time to one, two or three other people to make an intervention and then carry on. What happens then is that they get quite an animated debate with several people from each side offering different views on the point as it arises. It is quite interesting and something to think about.

Another long term thing to think about, although I am not necessarily advocating it but putting it on the table to consider, is finding a way of ensuring that members in cabinet have the technical expertise in cabinet, especially in an ever increasing technical world. For instance, in the American system and in the French system, which is a hybrid system, unelected members of cabinet or members who were experts in their field can bring a great deal of expertise to the portfolio, which has of course the deterrence of not having the moral authority but the advantage of having the technical expertise to lend for consideration.

We also should at some time consider the possible disconnection with the bureaucracy in the House, especially with people who are outside cabinet or a parliamentary secretary responsible for a particular department. If one were to go to a political science class and ask what the legislative branch of the federal government is, the simple answer that person would be given is this body. However that is really only the tip of the iceberg. The legislative process involves several hundred thousand government employees and ultimately the population, and reference to similar legislation in the world community.

● (1545)

In the months and years it takes the experts and employees of the government bureaucracy to develop legislation, a lot of knowledge, a lot of rationale and a lot of consultation with citizens of our country and other countries have gone into the legislation. When it gets to the

House, members are rushed. They must deal with dozens of constituents, address many bills and attend many committees and meetings. I am not sure they have adequate time to ask questions, to consult or to have interaction with some of the people in the bureaucracy who have the expertise on a particular bill to be able to justify or explain any misconceptions. On the other hand, questions being asked by Canadians could then be asked of the experts who would have to respond, explain or do further research.

I also want to make a brief comment on the sitting schedule. I of course am the worst case in this situation because I am on a plane 6 out of 14 days. Perhaps the House should look at a way of having a longer number of days together, 10, 14 or more. We could then have more days off for travel time. I know there will be all sorts of varying opinions on that.

I also wish to comment on the take note debates which have been and can be a very successful medium for dealing in more depth on the urgent matters of the day. These matters have sometimes been left by the wayside as we carry on with the regular procedures on long time law-making of things that are worked over decades. The perfect example is September 11 when we were in the process of discussing some poison for ground squirrels and a take note debate for a number of days allowed us to spend time on a very serious issues at the time, given the appropriate time and input from all members of parliament because it can go on late into the night.

However, if we do hold those debates, which I think have been handled very well so far, I think it is incumbent on all the participants, and that includes not only the people in the House but the people in the government departments who are responsible for the particular area, to carefully analyze the many hours of debate and extract the salient points. As well, the employees of the minister should be taking notes so the minister and other decision makers can have those salient points to look at in a reasonable time without sifting through all the extraneous material. They can use that information to improve or solve the situation. The purpose of the whole debate is to find a better solution to the problem by using all the good ideas that come from all members of the House.

I believe this has been done to some extent in the take note debates so far. I hope that will become a practice, where there is that involvement and that sifting out of the very valuable information from all sides of the House.

One of the parties had suggested advance time on opposition day motions. Once again this makes eminent sense. Legislation can take months and years to prepare. If a motion is proposed the day before, how will Canadians know that we have made a thoughtful, reasonable and well researched decision on a major issue?

Government Orders

Those are some of my ideas. I would be delighted to entertain questions.

• (1550)

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier today during question period my colleague from Mercier asked a question of the government House leader concerning, in many respects, one of the most important and most fundamental decisions that a body of elected representatives could make, and that is the decision of whether or not to send Canadian men and women off to war.

Many of us on this side of the House are asking that we have an opportunity, as elected representatives, not just to debate this issue, not just to have these famous take note debates, but to actually have an opportunity to vote, to voice our position on behalf of our constituents on this fundamental issue of whether or not Canadian men and women should be sent off to war.

I want to ask the hon. member, who I believe chairs the foreign affairs group of the Liberal caucus, whether he agrees that on an issue as fundamental as the right of parliamentarians to vote on the sending off of men and women to the possible war in Iraq, and God knows many of us hope that this will not happen, we should be able not just to debate that issue but to vote as well.

Mr. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, it is a very timely question because, as a matter of fact, our foreign affairs caucus addressed that issue this morning.

To be honest, I will not answer yes or no to the question because it obviously requires a larger debate. I am glad the member brought it up because it is important for people to consider here. However I can say that there are a number of ways that all of us, as the member has, can eloquently express some views on this. I have on a number of occasions already. As I said, we were working on it as early as this morning. There are various avenues to get the very diverse views of our constituents across to the decision makers who ultimately have to make the decisions.

There are a number of things involved, partly for timing reasons and partly for confidence reasons. Members have been elected by the people and cabinet is elected to ultimately make certain decisions. However, I think through the methods that we have talked about, those lengthy take note debates, debates in the House on this issue, as well as opposition day motions and question period, the mechanisms are there to get the views of the people, which, as he knows, are very controversial on this particular topic, as it is on all important topics, and bring these views forward to the group of people that Canadians have selected to make that ultimate decision. I think it is very important to get those views to the decision makers.

• (1555)

Mr. Svend Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I listened with great care to the hon. member's answer but, with respect, he did not answer the question. He talked about opposition day motions, question period and take note debates.

The question is very straightforward. Does he or does he not believe that we, as elected representatives in the House, should have the right, not just to debate but to vote on the issue of whether or not

Canadian men and women should be sent off to fight a war in Iraq? Yes or no.

Mr. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, with respect, the member did not quite listen to all of my last answer. I explained that I would not give a yes or no answer to his question. However, there are yes or no votes on opposition day motions on such items.

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I also listened very carefully to what the member for Yukon had to say. I would like to ask him about something that is a little different. Perhaps he has had experience with it in the committees on which he has been involved and could comment on it.

One of the positive changes that has already occurred is the way committees can be televised. In addition to having one and a half rooms equipped for television, which we have always had, it is now possible for any standing committee to be televised by any television company with appropriate notice, and the notice is minimal. For example, if the chair of the committee is advised the night before, a TV group, following the rules, can put a camera in the room and televise the whole proceedings.

My concern, however, and it is one of the reasons I have mentioned it a couple of times in the House, is that there is no real sign of either the media or the committees taking advantage of what I think is a wonderful opportunity to strengthen committees and make people more aware of committee work.

I wonder if the member has any ideas on how we can stimulate interest in televising committees.

Mr. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the member has done a very good job in raising this in the House and he has to keep his campaign going.

On behalf of my constituents, televising committees and other processes for constituencies like mine, which is the farthest from this honourable House, is very helpful because there is a disconnect the farther we are away. Constituents cannot walk into the offices on a daily basis and feel connected to what is going on. Anything they can see through the televised system is a big help. It gives them a sense that this is their Parliament and their House. They can see what their members do and how they might have input.

One problem for my constituents and constituents of many of my colleagues across the way is the three hour time difference. This makes it even worse. They have even less access in normal time spans to some of the procedures.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am taking part in this debate today because I notice that members of this House who may not necessarily be part of government have a responsibility to strive toward greater balance between the legislative branch and the executive branch.

Government Orders

It is within that context that I would like to address my remarks. This issue of leverage or equilibrium between these two branches, and the judicial branch as well, is fundamental to our system of government. Our parliamentary government affords us an opportunity, here in this House, where the executive and legislative branches work alongside on a daily basis and each tries to get the upper hand.

A problem sometimes arises when there is an imbalance of power. It is fundamental to strive towards a balance. It is also realistic to say that it is only natural that there be some movement. There is movement in our lives, in society, as everyone knows; things are not static. So things change. An incident may bring about a change, a political will to do things differently for instance.

There may also be a desire to change direction. In the past 30, 40 or 50 years, there has been a tendency to concentrate more power in the hands of the executive branch than in those of the legislative branch. I think we have come to a point in our parliamentary history where the legislative branch is expressing, in various ways, the desire to try to come back toward a better balance.

The pendulum seems to be swinging back, in the sense that, for many years—30, 40 or 50 years—the trend has been toward concentrating the power in the hands of the executive branch, even at the expense of the legislative branch at times.

I feel there is a need to gradually correct this situation. It is not a good idea to rush to introduce changes that affect the well-being of everyone. I am not the first to say this. I recommend that members read the book by Professor Donald Savoie entitled *Governing from the Centre*, which is being quoted widely.

Nevertheless, we get the impression that, since the 1960s, there has been a move toward greater concentration in certain executive bodies and, consequently, greater concentration of power in the hands of the executive branch as compared to the legislative branch. Our experts, Messrs. Marleau and Montpetit, who produced a very important procedure manual, also trace this evolution over the decades.

In this context we find certain tools of great importance to the legislative component. The first of these, in my opinion, at least the one I have been involved with throughout my many years here, is the committee, whether a standing committee of the House or a special committee. The committee structure itself is, in my opinion, the ideal tool for restoring some of the influence, some of the authority, some of the power, to the legislative branch.

In this connection, I trust that the Special Committee on the Modernization and Improvement of the Procedures of the House of Commons, along with others, whether within individual caucuses or all-party groups with an interest in this question, will take certain matters into consideration.

Where committees are concerned, for example, did members of each party have an opportunity to speak about the number of committees in place? Their number can be problematic; we are called upon to sit on so many committees that, in some ways, we feel we are no longer effective. Might certain committees be consolidated? Might others be created? Is there room for any more?

● (1600)

Society evolves and I had to go through this. In fact, it was the former Leader of the Opposition who suggested a standing committee on science and technology. Unfortunately, such a committee could not be created and it was attached to the Standing Committee on Industry, which is already a busy committee. While we cannot doubt the goodwill of committee members, we may question the committee's ability to do all this work.

Perhaps we should also look at the number of members who make up a committee. There seems to be a standard formula. It is understandable that some committees may generate more interest than others. It seems that there is always a great deal of interest for the finance committee or for the foreign affairs committee. Perhaps we could have more members on some committees and fewer on other ones. I realize that all the parties want to be represented and this poses a problem, but I think we should look at this.

I am also thinking about the staff of the committees. Why is it that the clerks of certain committees are replaced on a regular basis? During a session, some committees will have two or three different clerks, while other ones will keep the same clerk not only for the whole session, but for the whole Parliament. There seems to be something wrong here, depending on the committee.

The same is true for budgets, the resources available to all of the committees. I had the opportunity to sit on the liaison committee and I saw that the resources allocated to the committees are not sufficient, first, but also that they are not allocated fairly. So there is also this whole issue that should be considered.

There is also the issue of reports, which has been raised by other members. Incidentally, I will have to reread *Hansard* for yesterday—I read it quickly—and for today, in order to ensure that I fully understand all of the comments made by those who have taken the floor.

As for reports, I have a recent example in mind. The Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages issued a report on the situation at Air Canada and the company's lack of compliance with the Official Languages Act. I must say that I was very disappointed by the government's response. First, it took a long time. Yes, it was within the 150 days, which may be too long, but it was a flat refusal. We have here a situation in which a company that has responsibilities under the Official Languages Act continues to shirk them, and the government refuses to put any pressure on it. Perhaps we need a better mechanism to follow up on committee reports.

There is also the whole issue of parliamentary secretaries. Should they be members of committees or not? There are arguments for and against the idea. They could certainly attend, without any right to vote. This might be the best solution for everyone.

Finally, we need to affirm ourselves. Are members who sit on committees, and those who chair them really aware of all of the powers of authority committees have? I doubt it. I am not fully aware of them myself; I have discovered some of them, and exercised them and it was wonderful. Twice, witnesses did not wish to testify, and we summoned them to appear using the authority given to committees by the House.

Government Orders

Members of committees could learn more about the powers they already have and do not use. I think it would be useful for the modernization committee or some other committee to look into this, to really focus on the role of committees, but also the tools available to them to improve their effectiveness and their authority.

I also have a few quick comments to make on oral question period. I have always been fascinated by this question period where we give 35 seconds to someone to ask a question, then 35 seconds to another to answer it. The subjects being dealt with are often incredibly complex, and sometimes quite broad.

When there was an exchange between the Prime Minister and the four opposition leaders on our participation as a country in the effort in Bosnia, the rules were suspended for a while. For three quarters of an hour, perhaps an hour, the party leaders were able to ask questions. These were well thought out questions; they had had the time to prepare them and the Prime Minister had the time to respond. The 35-second rule was set aside.

I must admit that this was one of the best exchanges that has ever taken place in this House, and I would like to see more like it.

● (1605)

The matter of the Board of Internal Economy is another thing that bothers me. It is the board that administers the House of Commons, the members. All the members from the government side are appointed by the executive branch. The five representatives from this side of the floor are appointed by the executive branch, not the legislative branch, not the MPs. It might be worthwhile looking into that and having the representatives chosen by the elected members of this House. The only one who is selected by everyone is the Speaker, who is elected at the start of each Parliament.

I do not know anything about the agendas or the outcomes of decisions reached there. I do not believe I can even attend the meetings, whereas any other committee meetings, even in camera ones, are accessible to all MPs. I question the barriers built up around the Board of Internal Economy.

Finally, where private members' business is concerned, progress has been made, and I acknowledge that, but there is still one thing that needs changing, in my opinion. We must not have to depend on the luck of the draw to bring a bill or motion before the Parliament of Canada. This is still the case, and I think it needs reviewing. We must ensure, one way or another, that each member of Parliament can present his or her motion or bill, and there must be some kind of mechanism to ensure that these are examined publicly.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to what my colleague had to say. I have heard his proposal for a standing committee on science and technology before, and I certainly would encourage anything within the system, a committee being one example, that would focus the extraordinary resources which the federal government already has in the area of science and technology, including financial resources, physical resources in terms of laboratories, and human resources in terms of scientists. Anything that could focus it I would certainly support.

I want to ask the hon. member about committees. He is right. That is where there should be some changes if this is to empower

members of Parliament. I would like to ask him about a technical thing which I believe restricts the influence of our committees.

● (1610)

Mr. Speaker, as you and the hon. member know, on each standing committee there are typically 16 or 18 members with an appropriate distribution from the parties. There has to be a quorum of a certain number for regular events, to pass motions and so on, and they have a much smaller quorum for hearing witnesses and taking evidence and that kind of thing.

It is my thought that if committees are allowed to travel, it automatically empowers the members. It seems to me that when members go to Nunavut or Quebec or somewhere else to hear evidence they hear people speaking on their own ground and the members come back to this place empowered as a result.

There are at least two problems with regard to this. They are technical problems. It is possible now to have a quorum to hear witnesses, so it is not always necessary for 16 or 18 people to travel. There is a problem, however, that is, the committees are supposed to represent all parties in the House. Two of our parties have only 12 or 13 members and as a result it is a great burden on them if one of them has to leave for a few days to conduct hearings.

A committee may decide to travel and visit certain parts of the country to study whatever it is studying, but the motion requesting permission to travel comes to the House and requires unanimous consent. It almost never gets it. This is not, by the way, refusal from the government side, but often from the opposition side, and as I have said, I understand that problem.

Can the hon. member think of any way that we can develop enough confidence in the House that committees can designate five or six members who can travel and then a mechanism whereby we could get permission for them to travel in a relatively easy way?

Mr. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, we are certainly capable of doing that if we have the budgets to do it with. As it is now, a committee first has to get permission to travel from everyone in the House. I think a committee should have the ability within itself in a majority way to decide if it is going to travel or not, and second, it should have the budget and it should live within that budget.

This is not something new. Most committees have the ability to travel. The finance committee does it on a regular basis every fall in its prebudget hearings. We have had the fisheries and oceans committee do extensive travel, and the transport committee as well. This is nothing new and by and large it is a very useful exercise. Also it is less costly than when the executive does it. I have seen budgets for when departments carried out the same kind of exercise throughout the country. They were much more costly and involved than when committees of the House did it.

Government Orders

I do not have a problem with it if the responsibility for and the decision to travel rest with the committee, within the confines of the House sittings and so forth. There has to be respect for quorum calls and for the ability of the government to pass its legislation and so forth. Everyone understands that and it is why we have so-called off weeks. Maybe we could deal with the scheduling. I think that the authority could easily rest within the committees as long as they have some control over their budgets.

● (1615)

Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on the issue of modernization in this place.

I honestly believe that we need to have a long hard look at the excessive use of time allocation and closure and bring back meaningful debate. Quite likely very soon, the House will be asked to debate the Kyoto protocol, arguably the most important issue to hit this session. While I would never anticipate a decision of the House, I will anticipate the Prime Minister and his House leader. Even though the government has absolutely no agenda it will resort to closing off debate on Kyoto because it is concerned that if enough Canadians become aware of the impact, the government will be in hot water.

If one is on the right side of an issue and debates it sufficiently enough, one will win, and the Liberals know that they are on the wrong side of the Kyoto issue so they will respond by stifling debate. They used the same tactic when they raised the CPP premiums by 70%. They figured that if Canadians were upset about a 7% GST, they would not have much appreciation for a 70% CPP hike, so they rammed the bill through using closure at every turn.

The naval aid bill of 1913 marked the first time in Canadian parliamentary history that closure was used. When it was used to shut down the pipeline debate in 1956, a respected academic, C.E.S. Franks, dubbed the incident the most important in Parliament's history. He argued that the pipeline debate had "inaugurated the modern parliamentary age of both obstruction and reform".

If 1956 marks the inauguration of the modern parliamentary age of obstruction, then I submit that 2002 marks the age when the right of the opposition to filibuster died. The opposition no longer has the tools to obstruct. Normally, as soon as the government gets a whiff of a filibuster or anticipates controversy, it closes off debate and advances the bill through the system before the public gets wise to its contents. On the second day of debate on the CPP bill, the government invoked time allocation. The remaining stages of that bill met the same fate. The public felt the impact of Bill C-2 long before it ever heard there was a bill before Parliament.

It is important to note that the finance minister at the time was the member for LaSalle—Émard, the member who now cries crocodile tears about democratic deficit.

Time allocation and closure are supposed to be about managing time. The government uses time allocation to manage controversy. When it introduces a controversial bill, it invokes time allocation almost immediately, slipping the bill through Parliament before the opposition has time to solicit public support for its point of view.

Filibusters are a part of our history and play an important role, since they raise the profile of an issue so that the public can learn and respond. Sadly, that tradition has been lost because this government and its predecessor have taken just about every filibuster tool away from the opposition.

The last time the opposition waged a successful filibuster was with the Nisga'a bill. Unlike debate, the government could not curtail voting, so the Reform Party introduced hundreds of motions, causing the House to vote around the clock for 42 hours. It was that unusual event that made news as far away as the United Kingdom. It was a successful filibuster tactic in that it raised the profile of an issue.

How did the government respond? The first order of business in this Parliament was to remove that tactic. The current government House leader shuts down debate at every turn, often leaving the House with nothing to debate. Since this session began we have had an unprecedented number of take note debates. We have taken note more often than we have taken action. There is no legislation, so we take note and navel gaze for days at a time when Canadians are faced with serious issues that demand action.

The reason we are taking note today is not that we do not know what to do or that we need to convince ourselves that reform is needed. It is that the government has nothing else to do and would rather take note than take action.

It has become so bad that sometimes government members have had to filibuster their own bills in order to give the appearance that the House has something to do. Under the current House leader's reign, the House has had to be adjourned early every Friday and sometimes on Thursdays. Just last Monday, we shut down more than one hour early.

It might come as a surprise to some, but the Canadian Alliance is not entirely opposed to the use of time allocation and closure. With a few changes, these procedures can be used legitimately and effectively. I would like to read into the record the Alliance's policy on closure and time allocation from Building Trust II, our document on the issue:

First, we recommend amending the rules to provide the Speaker with greater discretionary authority. The Speaker should only allow a time allocation motion to be put forward if he is satisfied that the motion does not infringe on the rights of the minority.

● (1620)

Second, we believe that a change in attitude is required. An Alliance government would respect the parliamentary tradition of the balance between the right of an opposition to solicit public support through debate and reasonable delaying tactics and the right of a government to eventually have its legislation come to a vote.

The final point would be to provide more legitimacy to the legislative process, including the process for allotting time, by allowing free votes.

The excessive use of time allocation is symptomatic of a larger problem. The government has little time for parliamentary process because it arrogantly believes that its own internal process is sufficient.

Government Orders

While we can appreciate that much work goes into the creation of legislation, Parliament is where the views of the public are brought to bear on the process. The current process is unacceptable. Once a bill is introduced in Parliament, or leaked to the media in advance, another extremely thorny subject but best left for another day, once introduced, the public and the media accept that it will become law. The parliamentary process is often seen as little more than a delay. What takes place on the floor of the House is nothing more than a time game. Debate is not intended to convince anyone of anything but is used to fill time. That is the perception of the public.

The government is interested in only one thing. The question it asks of the opposition is not how it feels about a particular bill, or how it feels it might be improved, or why the opposition's constituents have a problem with it. No, the only question on the mind of the government is how much time the opposition is going to spend on it.

The government House leader takes all this information from the opposition parties regarding time and decides if it fits into his timetable. What is said or done on the floor of the House and in committee is rarely considered. The concern is not what is being said, but how long it takes to say it. This is the only leverage the opposition parties have, so they use it. An opposition that messes up the government's agenda occasionally succeeds in getting change. The result is that speaking and listening become irrelevant, while disruption and delay occasionally achieve change.

We should consider giving more value to debate, rather than time, by allowing free votes. Free votes would go a long way toward altering this dysfunctional relationship between the legislative and executive branches of government. With free votes, the government would have to listen to debate. It would have to negotiate and be willing to compromise. With this process, legislation could be improved.

Because of the use of closure, members have resorted to other means to legitimately raise the profile of an issue. These other means are no substitute for legitimate debate, but in the absence of such, members are left with little choice. The most obvious recent example is the Nisga'a voting marathon in the last parliament. I am sure that Canadians would much rather listen to reasoned debate than to the ringing of bells or to members' names being called for 42 hours straight.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my hon. colleague for what are characteristically thoughtful remarks on this subject.

I would like to ask the member a question. First, I share his frustration with the strange allocation of time and debates in this place. I have never quite understood why it is that for some bills on which I have wanted to enter into debate I have been unable to do so because of time allocation and closure, yet we find ourselves now, and very frequently, with no legislation before the House. Why is it that some members are prohibited from speaking on critically important pieces of legislation but then time is burned in this place?

It is funny that whenever there is time allocation to which the opposition objects, the government House leader gets into a frenzy about the costs of operating the House and says we cannot permit the

House to debate extensively because of the cost. That does not seem to be a factor on days like this.

My question for the member is in regard to his observations regarding take note debates and their increasing frequency. Is the member aware that in the Westminster parliament there is a convention whereby the senior member of the executive responsible for a particular issue will actually sit in the chamber as a matter of strict convention and monitor a take note debate, so that somebody literally is taking notes, somebody with executive authority and responsibility? Would the member care to reflect on whether that is the practice in this place and whether he sees, now or at other times, senior members of the executive responsible for the matters of concern taking note of what the legislature has to say?

Mr. Chuck Cadman: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I know it is not appropriate to comment on the presence of members in the House so I will not do that.

I accept the concerns of my colleague on this because, for myself, participating in these take note debates completely intrudes on my time. I know I could be doing something more constructive. With the way things have been going in the last little while my constituents are asking what members are doing because they do not see any legislation. When I tell them we are doing these take note debates, they ask me: What are those? If nobody is taking notes, what comes from them?

There are times when I honestly have not been in the House myself to take notes. I am sitting back at my apartment while the debate is going on so I am trying to take notes by watching it on TV. However, from the perspective of what these take note debates are supposed to be about, we would hope that when we are dealing with some of the issues that have come up on these take note debates that the senior government members are taking notes and paying some attention to what members are saying.

That goes to the thrust of what I was trying to say. How much of this is valued comment and does the government sit and listen occasionally when we are talking about what we consider to be substantive issues? I do not believe the government cares. The government is just filling time, as we can see by the House adjourning early on numerous occasions lately, and the total lack of substantive legislation before us at this time.

● (1625)

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed to hear the member's comments. I understand the role of the opposition is to criticize, but I am disappointed when members condemn out of hand normal procedures and practices in this place, particularly when the member asks who is taking notes.

Government Orders

The purpose of this debate is to make it public. It is on the electronic and written record. That is why we engage in discussions of this type. He may feel that we should have a vote at the end of this or something of that type. However, I would be disappointed if he simply felt that this is a waste of time. My colleague mentioned another Parliament. I do not know of any other Parliament where there is a free and open discussion of this type. I realize the limitations.

I hope the hon. member is not condemning out of hand everything that goes on in this place, which is likely the most open Parliament in the world with all its limitations.

Mr. Chuck Cadman: Mr. Speaker, I would not condemn out of hand absolutely everything that goes on in this place. What I would condemn is the fact that the government does not seem to care what goes on in this place because it never seems to take any of the views of the opposition seriously.

There may be some arguments and political differences, absolutely. Some people may consider that some things are frivolous. That is fair enough. The problem is we never see any reaction by the government to actually take what people have to say seriously and incorporate it into its legislation.

Certainly, I take this place seriously. I would not come here if I did not take it seriously, but what I do take seriously is my committee work because I feel that is where a lot of the work is done. Unfortunately, the public is not that terribly aware of it. What the public sees is what goes on here. People are getting a little incensed at what has been going on here for the last couple of weeks because they see nothing productive coming out of this place.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, today we are debating the so-called modernization of Parliament. What we really should be talking about is the re-democratization of Parliament. This place has become undemocratic in so many respects that I could talk all day about examples that I personally have experienced in the last nine years in which I have been a member of this place.

I wish to cite some examples that happened today. We had two points of order brought to the chair. One was from a committee where a committee member had something to say on an important issue before the committee and was summarily cut off by the chair. It was like “you are not going to get to talk about this, sorry, you lose”.

Since when are members barred from engaging in the kind of discussion which is the point of committee work? Yet that happened. Members complained and the response was that if they did not like it they should have asked for the ruling of the chair to be challenged. Then what would happen? The Liberal majority on the committee would simply uphold the chair. Opposition members are sitting ducks.

I have sat in committee where the gavel comes down, the meeting is adjourned before it is time because the minister is there and getting in hot water. I have sat in committee where the most basic rules of fairness and democracy are torn to shreds and the response is that the committee can do whatever it wants.

We all know, from personal experience in the House, that the rules of democracy and fairness are not followed in committee a lot of the

time, particularly when the government is getting into trouble and decides it is going to railroad the process to get its own way. That is not democracy.

What we have in our country, and let us be honest about this because there is no point in not being honest and we are not going to get anywhere if we are not honest, is an elected dictatorship. We have a Prime Minister, it does not matter who that person is, who practically runs the country single handedly. We have a Prime Minister who appoints all the members of cabinet and parliamentary secretaries. Increasingly the Prime Minister decides who gets to run in a particular riding to be the candidate for the party.

The Prime Minister appoints all of the justices of the Supreme Court, the Federal Court, and any other federal court appointments. The Prime Minister decides who gets to be the head of a crown corporation. The Prime Minister decides who gets to sit in the Senate. The Prime Minister runs the country with such immense power that it is becoming increasingly undemocratic.

That is the problem. That is the real nub of this whole thing. Many members on both sides of the House from all parties want to see this place re-democratized. It will not happen because there is a lack of will in this chamber to make it happen.

In opposition there is much beating of breasts about re-democratizing the system. Before the Liberals were elected in 1993, when they were in opposition, they put forward in the red book a good plan for re-democratizing this place. As a candidate at that time I agreed and supported that plan. The plan disappeared as soon as the Liberal Party was elected. Since that time more power has been arrogated to the Prime Minister's hands. Any re-democratization has been a figment of imagination.

In order to re-democratize this place two things would make that happen. First, we must have a Prime Minister who would be willing to give up power. To ask someone to give up power is a pretty chancy proposition. If we want to have a real change in this place we must have the cooperation from a prime minister who holds so much power in his or her hands.

• (1630)

Second, we must have government members who are willing to support in real substantial ways the re-democratization of this place. That is just not happening. Why is that not happening? We go full circle because government members want to benefit from the power that is held in the hands of the Prime Minister.

Government members want the appointments to cabinet. They want the appointments as parliamentary secretaries and chairs of committees. They want to ensure that their nomination papers get signed so that they can continue to be members of this place. They do not want to be on the outs with the Prime Minister who has their future, their political opportunities, in his hands. So they simply kowtow and bow to whatever they have to do to ingratiate themselves with that all powerful Prime Minister.

We see the incredible spectacle of members of Parliament on the government side bringing arguments forward in committee and in the House that no intelligent, rational person could ever credit as being proper arguments. They twist and mangle facts. There is a devious interpretation of things. We see it day after day.

Government Orders

I could bring up examples that happened today in debate but I do not want to embarrass anyone. It is not my intention to do that. We must face facts here and the fact is we have members who twist themselves in knots to follow the agenda that is put forward by their political masters in the PMO. That is exactly what is happening.

We have good suggestions for parliamentary democratization, not just from the opposition. We put forward our "Building Trust" document, which people can find on our website. Those are good issues. The PC Party brought forward a good parliamentary redemocratization document. I agree with most of what is in there. The Liberals have brought forward those proposals but they never go anywhere. Why do they not go anywhere? There is no collective will on the side of the House that has more votes than the opposition side to make it happen.

We can blow all the hot air we want to. We can talk until the cows come home about all the things we would like to see happen, but until members on the government side of the House are willing to stand up and stand firm, and be counted when it comes to redemocratization of this place, the rights and privileges of all members and the democratic conventions of the House will continue to be eroded. It does not matter what we say or want. It does not even matter what government members say they want because they are not willing to vote for those things.

In only one instance did that happen this month and that was because there was a political personality clash on the other side. It was not about principle so much as about factionalism on the Liberal side. Thank goodness there was some movement, which government members supported to the extent that we got it through, to allow us to elect committee chairs by secret ballot. It was a big breakthrough. That was the only one in nine years I have seen. That was because there was factionalism on the Liberal side, not because of a matter of principle.

If it were a matter of principle there would have been more reforms coming through. If it were a matter of principle Liberals on committees would never allow the kind of abuse of the democratic process or the rights of members that happens almost every week in this place, if not every week. That is the problem we have.

We are talking about parliamentary modernization, which is a total misnomer. It should be about restoring a reasonable level of democracy. I am not suggesting that the opposition should be able to run everything. I hope to be in government myself and I would not want the opposition to be able to filibuster, obstruct and completely hold up the business of government. That would be ridiculous. No one would support that. I do not support that in opposition. I am talking about a reasonable level of democracy where democratic rights of process and procedure are not steamrollered every day of the week in this place without a peep being raised by the majority, which has the power to change it.

● (1635)

The government has nothing on its agenda so it will throw out something for us to talk about to fill in the time. A little while ago it was health and everyone talked about health. The government said that it would let us talk about that awhile. Then it said that we would talk about parliamentary "modernization" because it was a hot issue.

It will not change unless the Prime Minister decides it will change or unless enough members in the House decide they will put the principle of democratization ahead of their own personal partisan political future and advantage. That is the truth of the matter. We need to get serious about it if we are ever to address this problem in a meaningful way.

The Deputy Speaker: Before proceeding to questions and comments, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Davenport, Fisheries; the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, Employment Insurance.

Mr. John O'Reilly (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am always interested in what the member for Calgary—Nose Hill has to say. She has a very interesting perspective and dissertation.

She indicated that she was in favour of the plan. I did not quite understand how she agreed with the Liberal plan but ran against it. She wants the opposition to appoint the cabinet. That would then mean that the government side would appoint the critics. I am not too sure how far this goes; I am trying to get this straight in my head.

Democracy is based on a majority rule. The government in power has an obligation to govern and the opposition is paid to oppose and is supposed to offer alternatives.

What are the positive rules she would ask to have changed to modernize the way Parliament operates? I would be interested in her views on that.

● (1640)

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, the member ought to be well acquainted with the things we want to do to re-democratize this place because we have published them, we have put them forward and we have tabled them in our Building Trust documents. They are many and varied.

This is another example of the extreme disingenuous response of government members to rational debate and thoughtful comment. The member said that I agreed with their reforms but that I am against them. That is not so. I said that I supported them. I also said that the Liberals were against them because they never voted for them once they were in a position to put them into place.

He said that the opposition wanted to appoint the cabinet. Never once did I say that and he knows that I did not say it. He knows it would be complete and utter foolishness to suppose that the opposition should appoint the cabinet.

I would expect him to fight for his caucus to have some say on who sits in the front benches, but I doubt if he would even fight for that.

Instead of responding in a thoughtful way to what I said, he twisted and mangled it to misrepresent the points I made. That is not what we call debate, and yet that is what happens continually on that side of the House. Why? Because the Liberals do not really want to grapple with the issues. They simply want to throw enough mud at the issue so no one knows what anyone really is talking about and we really cannot reach a reasonable consensus.

Government Orders

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, for the last while in the House we have watched the government avoid its legislative responsibilities. We have found today and yesterday that it is trying to use up time with the health debate and parliamentary reform debate. However I want to talk a little about what we are not doing.

We heard today from the Industry Canada study that the effects of Kyoto will be very severe in a lot of different industries. In the coal industry, investment may be down 48% and employment may be down 21%. In the crude petroleum industry, investment may be down 33% and employment may be down 14% if Kyoto is ratified. In the refined petroleum sector, investment may be down over 50% and employment may be down 27%. I have been involved with agriculture. We have heard about the fact that input costs could go up 30% and net income could drop 25% to 40% because of the implementation of Kyoto.

I find it interesting that, while we have spent a lot of time over the last week talking about some of these things that are important, when it comes to what I would call an issue that is essential for the future of Canada, the government seems to have indicated that it will give us hardly any time at all to debate this issue.

Would the member be willing to give us her wisdom on the aspect that on one hand we seem to be filling in days and on the other hand, when we come to these important issues, it seems like the government wants to rush them through and not give people the chance to debate them cleanly and clearly?

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, time to debate is important. I certainly concur with my colleague in that. I would suggest that in addition to time to debate and study issues, it should be meaningful. Simply giving people time to get their thoughts off their minds does not help anything, unless we are willing to thoughtfully consider the perspectives that are brought forward and by trying to reach some consensus on behalf of Canadians. That is exactly what does not happen.

I raised a point of order in the House this afternoon because I received an e-mail of high importance at my office last night at 4:56 about an important briefing that was going to happen at 8:30 this morning on Kyoto. What was the response from the other side? I am sure everyone is fascinated to hear this. The response was that they tried to give us the information as fast as they could. If we get something in the middle of the night and we pass it on in a briefing an hour later, have we discharged our duty to inform members of Parliament? Of course not. That is ridiculous. That is the kind of ridiculous argument we hear from the other side.

It is not just that we have time to debate Kyoto and other important issues, such as the issue we are discussing today, but it has to mean something. It will not mean something unless members on the other side work and mean business about bringing forward a consensus of members of the House, respecting the perspectives of other people, taking them into account and going with some of the recommendations that are made.

The committee made 76 recommendations on the regulations for the Immigration Act. After all the hours of study, how many of them were accepted by the government? I was not on the committee at the time, but this is what happened. Out of all the recommendations,

only one-third were accepted. Why are we wasting our time in debate if it is not taken seriously and if it does not have the kind of impact that it needs to have?

Again, there has to be a seriousness in coming together to discuss issues in a way that will address them on behalf of Canadians rather than simply serving the interests of the governing party.

• (1645)

Ms. Aileen Carroll (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member opposite that I take very seriously the opportunity to engage in this debate. What I only regret is that, with the pace all of us work, sometimes we do not have the time to gather all our thoughts of a number of years and present them in the House. I take the task very seriously and I consider this opportunity a privilege.

One concern I have, which leads me to conclude that parliamentary reform is very important, is the serious decline in voter turnout. During the last election we saw approximately 60% of Canadians exercise their franchise. Even worse, a lower percentage of young people are exercising their franchise. It is my belief and contention that the reason they have declined to do so is that they have stopped believing they influence the governance of their country. They do not consider that who they select and send to Ottawa will be able to give input to the process and therefore convey their convictions about public policy. That in and of itself should trigger a need to look at parliamentary reform.

After five years as a member of Parliament, I too have experienced the frustration of attempting to give input and influence that said development of public policy. From a personal level, that motivates me to join my colleagues on both sides of the House in the discussion and debate that we now have before us.

It is not an easy task. Some very renowned Canadian academics have articulated the need for parliamentary reform and proposed a methodology. In the process they have provided excellent insight into this complex and formidable task.

It cannot be done in a haphazard or incremental manner. However lodged we may be now in what appears to be an increasing, perhaps outmoded format, the process of change must be balanced. It must be interwoven. If we move too quickly in one direction, we risk altering the entire system in a way that will have an adverse effect on the desired outcome, the desired outcome being the modernization of our parliamentary process.

What do I think is key in what needs to be done? It is the need to enhance committees. It is in committees that we as MPs do our best work and work that is often disregarded.

To enhance committees, we need to see the referral of legislation after first reading. Some ministers have on occasion, if not commonly, done so in draft form. Then MPs and Canadians can develop legislation. If we wait until after second reading, the legislation has already been passed by a majority in the House in principle. Going to committee after first reading allows an engagement process. This is somewhat denied if we go there later on.

Government Orders

The engagement of citizens is an important factor in allowing them to understand the government agenda and to convey their public interest. These are the two ingredients of the development of good laws and public policy.

The strength of a committee is its openness in hearing from citizens and their organizations. Only when we enhance committees will we be able to find a commonly articulated level that will allow Canadians to represent a diverse country. It is not easy to find a public policy that fits all parts of this great country.

To develop that commonality, we need openness and we need the ability to allow witnesses to truly have input. While it exists now insofar as bringing witnesses to Ottawa or taking our committees to the citizens, I do not think what they say, what we hear and what we propose is adequately incorporated into the final product.

● (1650)

In addition to the committee changes, I would suggest changes in the methods here in the House of Commons, because debate on the floor of the House of Commons, in my view, rarely plays such a role as committees could in the enhancement of the format.

Regarding committee membership and chairs, we certainly have had considerable discussion in recent times, as to whether or not the chair should be voted on by the members and indeed whether or not that vote should take place in secrecy. I would suggest that this too is an area in which we have to move in a measured way. That is to say, it is more important to first enhance the role of our committees than to decide whether or not we should elect a chair. While I think the latter is worthwhile, I am not at all convinced that a secret ballot is necessary. Again, at the outset a secret ballot may allow members a freedom they feel they do not now enjoy, I would certainly hope that we would evolve away from choosing secrecy as we have enhanced our committees and we see parliamentary reform in total as a move forward in the direction many of us want to see it going.

Mostly what needs to be considered is that the role of the House of Commons is twofold. First, the House of Commons controls the public purse. Second, the role of the House of Commons is to hold the government accountable. Over many years the executive branch has taken off while the House of Commons has stood still. House of Commons control over the executive is virtually limited to the draconian measure of a vote of non-confidence. The Canadian executive branch therefore wields near total power in Parliament. The Prime Minister and the cabinet make most policy decisions and in fact within the Canadian system the Prime Minister is indeed far more than *primus inter pares*, first among equals.

What changes can be brought about to shift power back to Parliament, bringing about a far better balanced relationship between the legislature and the executive? One proposal that I think has considerable merit is the Westminster system's concept or usage of a three-line vote. It has been proposed in a talk given by the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard in another venue, but I think it is very worthwhile for this new committee on modernization to consider. The three-line vote consists of the following: a one-line vote would not be a confidence measure and members of Parliament would be free to vote as they chose; a two-line vote would include a strong policy recommendation to government members, but would still not be considered a matter of confidence; and three-line votes would be

restricted to key matters such as the budget, with MPs indeed being expected to vote on party lines as it would be considered an issue of confidence in the government.

Finally, although there are many other priority items, the all important matter of control over the public purse is one of the greatest and most important powers of the House of Commons. The budget process, however, such as it is, I think is chiefly meaningless. The majority of MPs are totally confused by the estimates, part I, part II, and part III, and it is easy to get caught up in performance indicators. Instead, we need a process that is far more accessible and far more user friendly, and done not by the government but by the House of Commons. A well considered proposal, brought forward by an academic as well, recommends that the House of Commons pick two or three departments annually and do a precise and in-depth review instead of endeavouring to review all departments every year. In my view, this proposal bears considerable merit and should be considered by the committee as it looks at the report we are sending to it.

● (1655)

The Special Committee on the Modernization and Improvement of the Procedures of the House of Commons has to be enhanced right from the beginning, because it is undertaking the task that we are all attempting to give input to today, as we tried to yesterday. So in my view the committee must be free to listen to Canadians in a manner that not many committees have attempted to do. If this process of modernization and reform of Parliament is not an open, public, consultative one, it is doomed to failure. It is an oxymoron. This committee, as constructed, must make itself very available to Canadians, to the young people who do not bother to vote, to the interest groups that feel they have tried to give input, unsuccessfully, to public policy development, and to the members of Parliament who think that they too could do a better job.

I commend the members of the committee to their task. While I recommend this openness and this consultative approach, I believe too that it must have a time line. It cannot be open ended. All of us are coming to a sense that changes, real changes, must be made, but they must be made in the balanced way that I believe I and other colleagues have recommended.

I have said elsewhere that when I was elected to come to Parliament and my colleagues were elected to come here and represent their constituents, we were chosen partly because of the parties we represent and partly because of many determinants. But I am of the firm belief that I was chosen to bring to the process my judgment, my critical analysis and my particular life skills. I do not feel that with the system as it now exists I am able to do that, to use them to their fullest. Indeed, at the end of three or four years we will be judged on whether we did or did not do that and that is the essence of the democracy we are discussing today.

In order to do what we have been tasked to do, we need to enhance our role in committees, we have to enhance the committees themselves, and we need to enhance this place where it is a privilege to stand and speak.

Government Orders

There have been other suggestions. One that has been brought forward and that we need to think about and debate, and which has been mentioned in other venues, is whether or not appointments to the Supreme Court should be reviewed by a legislative committee. From my perspective, they should not. I have a very firm belief in the separation of three powers: the judiciary, the executive and the legislature. I think we would risk slipping into the circus of our neighbours to the south when it comes to the kind of appointments to the American supreme court we have watched in the past, if we think we can bring that in and slide the appointment process across into the legislature. At the current time, it is the prerogative of the Prime Minister. Perhaps we should consider whether that prerogative should be more broadly expanded to include cabinet.

These are the kinds of issues that I think we all have the brains and talents to discuss well.

Finally, I too, as do many of my colleagues, strongly support an ethics counsellor responsible to Parliament, just one person in one office, overseeing the House, the senate and the cabinet.

• (1700)

Mr. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the very thoughtful intervention of one of my favourite colleagues. I always use her as an example when people ask me for an example of integrity in thought and deed. I think my colleague is wonderful.

Because my colleague expressed so much interest in committees, I want to ask about how the structure of a committee meeting can affect the atmosphere. I want to follow up on the thought I was pursuing earlier this afternoon with respect to the relationship between the shape of the two houses in the United States and the shape of the two houses in Canada.

In committee, as we know, for every meeting we line up like troops of opposing armies, one on each side of the committee room. Of course we start on the very first day with a structural confrontational atmosphere, which is not always the attitude.

Would there not be times when it would make sense for us to sit anywhere in that circle? People could sit in any seat, which would be symbolic of facing a common problem together, of looking forward to solving that problem on behalf of Canadians as one group instead of being in a confrontational structure. In fact, we have already made some advances in that respect in the House, because as members know we have the set-up of the committee of the whole, in which people can sit anywhere. I think that leads to a very collegial and very productive debate when we are all trying to come to a solution on a particular problem.

Ms. Aileen Carroll: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his kind comments and I am also grateful for the insights that he shared earlier today. I did not hear all of them, but I think he has given a good précis for me to respond to.

Once we build in an enhanced role for our committees, and once we send to committees legislation after first reading or in draft form, so that what we hear from our witnesses, the reports we study and the homework we do, which is very important to the task we have, once we have that ability to get in on the ground level, that in and of itself will diminish some of the partisanship. It will not be an easy task.

The other discussion that needs to ensue, and I did not engage it tonight because we are all trying to get in our timelines, is how committee members should be selected. Some have proposed that instead of the government House leaders it should in fact be the caucuses that should interview and talk to the members and find out what special interests and expertise people have. They would be the people to do it. I have not thought enough about that.

In many ways what we are doing here is bringing forth ideas that we hope this committee will seize upon, while admitting that we have not thought everything through. It is a very serious process and nothing should be changed until it has been thought through. Once those kinds of changes have come to the committee format, then the dynamics the hon. member has described will alter in the direction for which he is hoping.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of her speech the member opposite talked about the importance of the voters selecting good MPs and making sure they have good representatives here.

I am just wondering if she would agree with me, then, that her party's policy, used in so many places and times, of appointing candidates rather than letting the constituents choose their candidate for her party, undermines her credibility and her party's credibility when they claim to be interested in allowing parliamentary reform and in allowing voters more participation in the process.

Ms. Aileen Carroll: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. First, I would say that in my experience appointments have been the exception rather than the rule. I understand why they were made in some cases, when there was an attempt on the part of the Prime Minister or other prime ministers to create a balance in gender or in cultural groups that have come to Canada so that the House reflects our diversity. I can see the motivation. I think that most likely, to be frank, it should be used as a last resort, because if we step back further from the House into the nomination process that is a very important part of what we are trying to accomplish. I would say that in my experience it has been the exception rather than the rule.

• (1705)

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I am interested in knowing if the hon. member thinks it is more important that the Prime Minister appoints those members to create those balances, as she calls them, rather than letting the voters in the constituencies make the choice of the candidate they would like to have represent them in the House of Commons.

Ms. Aileen Carroll: Mr. Speaker, the people have the opportunity to vote for whomever they want to at the time of the election. What we are discussing here is how a person is chosen to represent the party. Having been involved in one of those contests, as I am sure my hon. opponent has, I probably found it a tougher job and I worked harder, spoke to more people and put myself forward in more venues than I did even when I ran in the election. Largely I am comfortable with that. I am being frank, and I can say that I have always had some difficulties with affirmative action. I see the upside and yet I am concerned about the downside. I think that is factoring into this from the hon. member's perspective. I do not think I have anything more to share on that.

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Mr. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member said earlier that we had to elect good people because they come here to give thoughtful consideration to legislation and debate.

Does the hon. member have any suggestions on reform related to the huge demands on time? There are so many responsibilities in committee, in responses to e-mails and letters and in the vast volumes of legislation and amendments. How can more considered and detailed thoughtfulness be given to a particular piece of serious legislation when in the present system there are all these competing demands on time?

Ms. Aileen Carroll: Mr. Speaker, like my colleague from Yukon our party has more questions than I have answers in that regard. Historically when people came to this place, to serve their constituencies and the people of Canada, they had to cope with the amount of information that comes when one is in charge of foreign affairs, defence, health, immigration and all of the issues. However, never has any generation of members of Parliament lived in an information driven era such as the one we live in today.

It becomes increasingly difficult as we get into this important discussion of reform. We want to enhance our committees. We want them to be able to input the process, to bring all the collective wisdom and experience that they hear from Canadians and organizations, to develop the best public policy they can. That is what should come out of committees. It is bringing information to the House where colleagues have been caught up in processes dealing with human resources development or defence.

How do we inform one another, even if we all survive the information process that the member so accurately described, to be able to, at the last post, share the fruits of our labour so that we are able to inform our colleagues of the good job we have done and why they should support us on both sides of the House in what we have brought forward. It is no small task that we have engaged.

Mr. Steve Mahoney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the first things we should change around here is we should stop wasting an entire parliamentary session talking about change. It is interesting because we have a system where we could actually do this in committee. The problem is it is not on television and it is not what the opposition wants.

I want to congratulate the opposition for actually having taken over the agenda and forcing us to go through an entire parliamentary debate. The point was made, although somewhat disingenuous, by a member opposite that we could be debating Kyoto, Iraq, health care, housing, seniors or immigration. These are things that matter to people outside of the beltway.

We live in the beltway, so what do we do all day long? We say that we are frustrated. We cannot get anything done. We are lonely backbenchers and so we want to change the system. What is interesting is that, in my experience of having spent eight years in a provincial legislature and five and some here, it is usually the people who lose that want change.

Let me give the House an example. From 1987 to 1990 I was part of the David Peterson government in the province of Ontario. The leader of the opposition was the hon. Bob Rae. Mr. Rae and his caucus would put out platforms on parliamentary reform saying that

they needed more free votes, more power for backbenchers and more power to the people. They would stand on their hind legs and make these pronouncements. Then we all remember what happened. It was an accident in history. All of a sudden that same Bob Rae woke up as the premier of Ontario one morning and said, "Holy smokes, how did that happen?" There is nothing more fearful to an individual or more frightening than when he or she actually wins when not expecting to. Hence, he became premier.

Did we see changes? What we actually saw in the Ontario legislature was a tightening of the screws. Members of that caucus and party could not go to the washroom without permission from the whip never mind having the freedom to stand up and speak their minds and do as they wished. He went from being a loser, whining about not having enough freedom to express views, to having won the responsibility to govern.

Let me address that for a moment. What I hear in this place, particularly from the opposition members in an attempt to discredit the government which I understand is their job, is that we should have votes on everything in parliament. They feel that the government should not have the authority to go out and make a decision when in fact the government, which is the Prime Minister and the cabinet, not only has the authority to make a decision it has the responsibility.

If we were to put every issue on the floor of the House of Commons and only move on that issue, and if we had a majority vote each and every time, we would polarize this nation. We would put ourselves in the position of being unable to act in the best interests of the majority government that was elected by the people of this country. It would be an addiction of the responsibility of the Prime Minister, the cabinet, and of those on this side of the House who support the government.

A backbencher is technically not part of the government. One can declare oneself to be a backbencher in support of the government or, in the case of the opposition, to be a backbencher not in support of the government. As we have seen from time to time there are members on this side of the House who would call themselves backbenchers not in support of the government. It is the way the system works.

We talk about reform. We can have one-, two-, or three-, line. I was a whip for five years in Ontario. I understand the process. I was a candidate for the leadership of the provincial Liberal party in Ontario in 1991 and I had a platform. I had a platform that came from Jim Coutts who was one of the advisers to the Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Guess what the platform included? It was unbelievable. It could have been, should have been, might have been but was not. What can I tell the House. It was not my decision. I voted for me, although there is no proof because it was a secret ballot.

• (1710)

Let me go to the issue of secret ballots in committees. What a farce. To suggest that somehow it is the democratization of this place is the most laughable fraud that has been perpetrated upon the people by the people in this place, that somehow it has freed us up and we are running down the street yelling that we are free, we can vote the way we want.

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I was not here for the vote. I was in Norad doing something that I thought was important: learning about the North American defence system; learning about what we would do in case of a missile attack from North Korea; and learning about what Canadians do in the military to help support the United States to keep North America safe. I thought that was more important than worrying about how we elect vice-chairs and chairs of committees. I was not here for the vote, but if I were I would have voted against the motion. Someone who does not live in the beltway, who does not totally understand the issue, might ask me why I would vote against secret ballots.

Every time we vote in this place we should be required to stand up and say, "I am the member for Mississauga West and here is my vote". We should not have the option of doing it in secret. The only secret ballot that should apply in a democracy, and with respect I know we have made an exception to elect the Speaker, is the one that is in the hands of the people. They will cast their secret ballots and that is exactly what they have done.

In 1993 they cast secret ballots and they sent a majority to this place that is represented by the Liberal Party. They did it again in 1997, through secret ballot, and again in 2000. My advice to the opposition is if it wants more power it should get more members elected. That is what it is about. It is not about coming here and saying "I ran on a campaign that said everything was rotten in Parliament and it is undemocratic but I lost, so now I am going to tear down the institution from within".

That is what is happening with all of this. I respectfully suggest, and I might be in the minority, that this is a travesty and a waste of time of the talent of the men and women on all sides who should be working hard on behalf of Canadians instead of spending an entire day on this, and now the opposition wants more time. Our House leader has to negotiate with other House leaders in committee, so there is give and take. They give us this bill or that bill or that vote or let us get on with this and we will give the opposition more time. Then it has the nerve to stand up and say it is our idea.

We want to get on with the business of the government, the business of the people of Canada. We want to get on with dealing with things that matter to Canadians. What has happened here through the negotiation process with the House leaders is that our House leader is finding himself shackled because the opposition members want the opportunity to stand up. They know it is a glorious opportunity to stand up and say that the government and the Prime Minister are awful as if the Prime Minister invented the parliamentary system. They say he is a dictator.

If we were to go back to the beginning to Sir John A., we would find that the parliamentary system has had a basic core based on the British parliamentary system that has not changed. One might argue then should we change? Well sure, let us make some changes that take ideas to committees. What is interesting is that if a committee wants to do that it can order its own business. Committees should travel more, get out into the countryside. They should meet with Canadians and hear what they have to say. However, what happens?

An hon. member: Why don't they?

Mr. Steve Mahoney: I will tell the member why, and I thank him for the question, because the opposition decided that it will not allow

committees to travel. Why? Because when the secret ballots happened, after that last illustrious vote, five committees did not elect people to the position of vice-chair from the official opposition.

• (1715)

What do we have? We have the defence critic for the official opposition and another one from the Bloc Quebecois saying that is it, committees are not going to travel and they are going to shut them down. Is that not ridiculous? People should also know that those vice-chair jobs come with an additional emolument of \$5,000. I guess their noses are out of joint and their pockets are a little lighter because they did not get elected. However, they are the ones who forced the issue to come to this place. They have the power.

That is another misconception, that somehow opposition members have no influence. I would suggest that if members on that side of the House or this side of the House really believe they have little or no influence around this place, they should go home. They should resign their seats. If members believe that they are ineffective, that they cannot make things happen in this place by working through committees, by working with ministers and colleagues on all sides of the House, then they are doing a disservice to the people who sent them here to make a difference.

Let me provide another point of view. Members say they want to reduce the partisanship. Sure they do. We were elected as Liberals and they were elected as Reformers. They swapped over and became the Canadian Alliance. Perhaps there was another party in the middle, I cannot quite remember. Those folks were elected. There are some newly converted Progressive Conservative members as well.

Everyone is elected by participating in his or her party and by winning a nomination in a riding. Then when a member arrives here, that person is expected to denounce his or her party, to say that member is not going to support the party. I have news for them. If a person on my hockey team intentionally shot the puck in my team's net, I would not want that person on my team any more. It is pretty simple.

Does that mean it is mindless? Au contraire. I have a benchmark with which to compare the caucus system in this place because I served and worked for eight years in the caucus system at Queen's Park. At Queen's Park it does not matter who is in office. The command and control is in the corner of the pink palace, as it is referred to. They let people know what they think people need to know. It is a system that needs some opening up.

I have been very impressed with the caucus system here. We sit in our regional caucuses. In my case in the greater Toronto area on a Tuesday night colleagues get together to debate issues. People would be astounded at how often we disagree with one another. It is a very healthy atmosphere. We receive reports and we hear from other people outside. People come to talk to us at the GTA caucus. Of course there is the rural caucus, the western caucus and the Atlantic caucus. We meet with all of these people.

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Then on Wednesday morning we meet, in my case, in the Ontario caucus, which includes the southwest Ontario, northern Ontario, and GTA caucuses, as well as the central and eastern Ontario caucuses. Everyone reports there. Once again we have all the opportunities for discussion. My point, of course, is that we are a team. We get together every Wednesday morning.

Our Prime Minister claims that Wednesday is the most important day of the week and he is absolutely right. If a caucus member wants to make a point, fight an issue, go after something that is important with a ministry, if a caucus member wants to take on a minister, he or she can. Our Prime Minister says not to stand up and make general statements but to name names.

Once we are finished in the Ontario caucus we go across the hall to the national caucus. That is where every member of the Liberal caucus should be on a Wednesday morning unless there is pressing work outside Ottawa and a member cannot be there. Even the senators attend. Lo and behold, it is quite remarkable that we disagree from time to time.

● (1720)

With regard to reform, I would like some kind of confidence that what I say at the microphone in caucus does not appear in the *Hill Times* literally word for word within a matter of hours. That would be nice. But we are dealing with a large group of men and women and it is pretty difficult. They have their relationships with the media and we get some leaks from time to time. It is a little frustrating. Of course the media and the opposition love to take advantage of that particular situation.

However, this caucus system works. Stand up. Show me what the rules are. That is what I said when I was elected. Show me where the doors are and I will figure it out. I do not need to come in here and whine poor me, I do not have enough power, I do not have enough authority, I need to change the rules around this place. I know what the rules are and I make them work for my constituents. Any member in here who does not do the same thing, in my view respectfully, does not deserve to be here.

Let me talk about another example. Earlier I believe it was the member for Burnaby—Douglas who asked a question of the member for Yukon about whether we should have a debate and a vote on whether or not we should participate in the war in Iraq.

Are we are going to abdicate that kind of decision making authority and responsibility by the government to 301 people, and maybe some of them will not be here, and simply go by the results of that vote? The government and the country would become laughing stocks.

We have been elected to do a job and we will do the job within the rules that exist. If we want to make some changes because some people feel they cannot get in the back door, we can discuss it but why do we have to take up so much valuable time? We should be dealing with issues that are important to all Canadians, issues that matter to them.

I was not going to debate on this particular issue because I found it frustrating. I want to be careful of the wording I use here, but it is something retentive. We tend to look inward at ourselves and ask what can we find that is broken, what can we find that is wrong and

go around like nest pokers. That is what we called it in my municipal days. Someone would go around with a long pole and poke nests to see if there were any birds in them. That is what is happening here.

There are a bunch of nest pokers on the other side of the House who are going around and saying, "Let us see if we can poke some trouble out of there". Why do we not deal with substantive alternatives?

The vote on electing chairs and vice-chairs to committees carried. Fine, it is over and gone. What is really interesting about that is that members should have the experience of running to be caucus chair in a caucus the size of this one. That is done by secret ballot. People will look at someone right in the eye and say they will vote for him or her but we know that they did not, or we do not know because it was by secret ballot. Now we are going to perpetuate that problem all the way down to every committee.

In fact we did have one of our colleagues who was nominated after that vote took place to become vice-chair of a committee. Contrary to the wishes of the consensus from the Liberal side she was nominated by the opposition, except that after the nomination there was a secret ballot and she is now vice-chair of the committee. In essence, with her vote and the opposition vote, they actually defeated the government side. It is brilliant strategy. I wish when I was in opposition I had thought of it but in reality it is just a way to try to upset the apple cart and to turn things on their ear.

An hon. member: It takes a while to catch on.

Mr. Steve Mahoney: The hon. member said that it takes a while to catch on. No, I knew it right from the start.

I tried to say to my colleagues in caucus, let us not be fooled. The opposition was not sent to Ottawa to help us. When the opposition puts a motion on the floor, it does not do it so it can say to Canadians, "We love those guys over there in the government. We think they are really good folks and we are putting the motion on the floor so we can support them". That is not the role of the opposition.

The role of the opposition, obviously, is to oppose but when it does that, it should try to put forward some alternatives. That is what we do not see from the opposition. Day after day we see carping and attacks, and for much of the time personal attacks on members on this side, not only members of the cabinet, but it is even to the point where recently a parliamentary secretary was personally attacked for comments he made in debate in this place.

● (1725)

I close by saying that it is unfortunate we cannot take the time in this place to debate matters that are of concern to Canadians, not parliamentary reform which frankly I think makes most Canadians want to stick pins in their eyes.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): There is not even one minute left. I will take one question.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Madam Speaker, it is too bad there is only a minute because there are a lot of members over here with questions.

I have never heard such tripe in all my life. To pretend that we are wasting time here when the House leader, the one who dictates the agenda, is the very one who commandeered us into discussing this motion. I agree that it is useless. It is up to the government to implement parliamentary reform.

I just wonder—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Order, the time has expired. The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

BANKING ACT

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ) moved that Bill C-229, an act to amend the Bank Act and the Statistics Act (equity in community reinvestment), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, I would really have liked to ask the hon. member for Mississauga West a few questions; unfortunately, there is not enough time, but I think we have here a rather eloquent example of the wrong way to carry out one's role as a parliamentarian, by not taking into account the positive work of the opposition.

Each of us, as members of Parliament, have financial institutions in their ridings. Each of us, whether in large urban centres or in rural areas, have in our communities people who have been poorly served by financial institutions.

The bill before us has had a long life, given that I had the opportunity to introduce it on three occasions and it was debated twice already. Each time, the government refused to consider that, while we live in a democratic society, while we have a Charter of Human Rights and while there is a Superintendent of Financial Institutions, it is possible nonetheless that, in reality, the way banks are behaving may be such a concern that there may be a need to look beyond the border to find solutions to the problems we are experiencing.

In 1998, I travelled to the United States to study the community reinvestment act. This is a piece of legislation that was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1977. So this is second generation legislation. It was reviewed under the Clinton administration. Unbelievable as it may sound, given that the U.S. does not have a society with a propensity for interventionism and that Americans are strong believers in private enterprise and market forces, they passed legislation making it possible to assess how well financial institutions, mainly but not exclusively banks, meet the credit service needs of all consumers, and the most disadvantaged in particular.

Those who are well off, who earn a respectable income, are financially solvent, have no problems with financial institutions. Today's debate concerns those who are less well off and who are met

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with prejudice when it comes to their ability to honour their financial obligations.

I remember the time, just before the MacKay report was released, when we had to ask questions in the House on a regular basis because financial institutions refused to even consider opening a bank account for a person if he or she did not have three pieces of identification. Clearly, if a person was receiving social assistance or was thought to be economically disadvantaged, it was extremely difficult to open a bank account.

I will acknowledge that the situation has improved somewhat. An agreement was reached between the Canadian Bankers Association and the superintendent of financial institutions; now the banks do not require three pieces of identification, only one, and it has been agreed that a bank account cannot be denied someone simply because he or she is on social assistance. However not all bank branches and not all financial institutions follow this regulation to the letter.

I would also like to applaud some of the residents of Hochelaga—Maisonneuve. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health knows this, there is no room for defeatism in this riding. If there is one area where the residents are dynamic, where they believe in standing together and where there is no place for resignation in policy, it is indeed the riding of Hochelaga—Maisonneuve.

Guy Biron, one of the most involved citizens in Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, put together a coalition; he is the chair of the senior citizens issue table, but that is not all he does. He is also involved with ASTA at the SHDM in Rouville. He is a man whom life has treated very well: he has a happy home life, has had children and contributes much to his community.

• (1735)

In 1977, this coalition made the following finding in the riding of Hochelaga—Maisonneuve. We are not going back 75 years. We are not talking about before industrialization. At the time, there were close to 30 financial institutions, 27 to be exact. Today, there are only 11 left. These 11 financial institutions include five banks. This shows how financial institutions have deserted poor communities. Option-Consommateur, which is a non profit organization, estimated that, over the past 20 years, in the City of Montreal alone, 150 bank branches have shut down.

Of course, these branches did not give advance notice and they did not care about the future of their clients. They shut down to streamline their operations. These branches leave without being at all concerned about the impact on our communities.

In a society like the United States, this situation would have been much more difficult, not impossible but much more difficult to watch. Why? Because the beauty of the Community Reinvestment Act is that it ensures that there is someone in the system to monitor how financial institutions fulfill their responsibilities.

Private Members' Business

Take the example of a bank like the Morgan Citizens Bank of New York. If it does not meet the credit needs of the Hispanic community or of the poorest segment of the Afro-American community, everyone will know about it on March 1 of each year, when those responsible for implementing the law release a report in which they assess institutions by giving them an A, B, C or D rating. This is somewhat like in school or in university.

Of course, the beauty of the community Reinvestment Act is that it ensures that consumer groups follow this public disclosure exercise. Banks must provide explanations when they stop their activities in certain areas. Consumers take this into consideration when the time comes for them to choose a financial institution. Not only do consumers take this into account when the time comes to choose a financial institution, but the bodies responsible for enforcing the law also take this into consideration when the time comes to authorize mergers or any other related operation.

It would not be that hard to have something similar to the community reinvestment act in Canada. Why is the government against such a bill? For a number of reasons. First, as we know, banks have one of the best lobbies on Parliament hill. Also, banks make large contributions to the Liberal Party's campaign chest. I certainly hope it is not the only reason for the government's action, although I am sure it has something to do with it.

As members of Parliament, we have to realize that we cannot fight poverty if we are not willing to instruct financial institutions to grant credit to each and every segment of society.

I regularly go over the reports of the Canadian Welfare Council, an organization set up to advise the Minister of Human Resources Development. Our society has not gotten any richer.

In 1968, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, as head of the Liberal Party, campaigned for a just society. There were concerns about poverty. Now, over three decades later, we realize that there are more and more poor people and an increasing concentration of wealth.

There is a paradox in my riding of Hochelaga—Maisonneuve. Although it is very poor, it is expanding economically. It is thought to be the next Plateau Mont-Royal. And as you know, Madam Speaker, you who are so well connected, the Plateau Mont-Royal is where artists meet and things happen in Montreal.

• (1740)

Hochelaga—Maisonneuve is said to be the next Plateau Mont-Royal. It is the place with the third-highest number of building permits, particularly where I live near the Olympic stadium. Young couples are abandoning the suburbs, abandoning the downtown core, and coming to settle in Hochelaga—Maisonneuve. That is understandable; anyone who lives there knows it is a great place to live.

There are four metro stations. We have rue Ontario. We have a good public transit system. There are a lot of strong community groups. Anyone who lives there knows it is a great place to live .

I can give one couple as an example. Jannie Beauchamp, a master's student, and her partner, also a master's student. They wanted to settle in Hochelaga—Maisonneuve and make it their home. They made a lot of preparations. They phoned 32 different

insurance companies and all refused to insure them, as if Hochelaga—Maisonneuve were a disaster area.

This is exactly the practice that was used in the United States in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. It was called "redlining"; the financial institutions took the map of the States and circled certain areas in red, hence the name. These institutions systematically refused, regardless of the details in the file, regardless of the merits of the case, to lend money to people who lived in those areas.

We in Canada want to believe this is not so, not possible, but it is exactly what is happening. The financial institutions, the banks, practice systematic "red lining" style discrimination. As long as the legislator does not take the necessary steps to force the banks to explain themselves, to admit why they are totally deserting certain communities, the situation will continue unchanged.

There is no point in having a securities commission, no point trying to bolster the financial institutions if they do not acknowledge their responsibility to meet the credit needs of our entire population. Once again, this is not an excessive measure.

My bill recognizes, because it is just common sense, that banks cannot be asked to lend to people who are not creditworthy. They cannot be asked to adopt measures that would place them at a competitive disadvantage. We are just asking them to give people the tools they need to improve their well-being.

I will give you an example. In Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, within our community economic development corporations, these cooperation bodies that were created in the early 1990s, there are micro-credit circles, also known as borrowing circles. It means that people vouch for one another. If someone's washing machine breaks down at the end of the month and that person cannot easily find \$300 or \$400, he or she can have access to this kind of cooperation. If someone wants to start up a business and needs \$300,000, \$400,000 or \$500,000, it is not so hard to find. But when a person needs \$5,000, \$6,000 or \$7,000, it is complicated because financial institutions are not in that market.

These are examples where equity measures on the part of banks could enable them to invest in micro-credit activities. We are not talking here about billions of dollars. There are cases where partnerships could be formed with community groups, which is rarely done. I did not say never because, in Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, one bank gave its head office that had become vacant to a community group called L'Avenue. There is also the Caisse Maisonneuve that gave its head office to the Chantier de l'économie sociale. However, these examples seem to be exceptions in the sad track record of banks and financial institutions.

I will rise again later to conclude this debate, as I am allowed to do under the rules of this House. I hope that the government will agree to make my bill votable and that my bill will find support in each party.

• (1745)

[English]

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to discuss Bill C-229, an act to amend the Bank Act and the Statistics Act. The bill would require banks to report on investments made in electoral districts where unemployment is on par or above the national unemployment rate. It would also require that every individual bank branch set aside 5% of its income to further micro-credit financing in the electoral district where the branch is located.

In essence, the bill is an adaptation of the U.S. community reinvestment act, CRA, that the U.S. Congress passed in 1977. As such, I would like to remind hon. members that the community reinvestment act was enacted in response to concerns that American banks were redlining certain neighbourhoods; that is, accepting deposits but not authorizing loans in low and moderate income neighbourhoods.

I would like to remind all members that in 1998 the task force on the future of the Canadian financial services sector, the MacKay task force, undertook extensive research on this issue. It determined that the conditions that led to the community reinvestment act in the United States were not present in Canada. Both the House Standing Committee on Finance and the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce supported this view.

To quote the House committee, "In an industry that is continually evolving, the application of a Canadian CRA would be extremely difficult and costly".

The Senate committee echoes this stating, "The Committee also believes that the CRA approach would be onerous, costly and a regulatory burden on financial institutions".

Moreover, consumer groups such as the Consumers Association of Canada generally supported this view.

The bill, which on its face may seem reasonable, creates an onerous burden on financial institutions. Every bank will need to report for every branch the amount and the distribution of deposits, loan applications, loans granted and loan recalls. Furthermore, the requirement would entail that each branch break down the numbers into groups of \$10,000 increments. To top it off, the bill would require that the terms and conditions of the loans, a private matter between contracting parties, be reported upon.

All of these measures are onerous and costly to comply with. The result of implementing the bill would, to quote the MacKay task force, "add substantial regulatory burden and cost to financial institutions and government".

I must question what benefit consumers would derive from knowing in \$10,000 increments what the lending practices of the branch had been. Moreover, this type of undertaking would require a lot of time to compile the information. Who will ultimately bear the cost? Consumers.

Private Members' Business

The potential costs to financial institutions are compounded by a proposal that requires every branch to reserve 5% of its income, not profit, but income to fund microcredit lending. That is pre-tax dollars. In this respect the proposed legislation goes well beyond what the community reinvestment act requires and it does not stop there.

The clause is worded such that every designated person who applies for a microcredit loan must be provided with one regardless of the merits of the proposal. This is simply bad public policy.

What is to happen if the applications for micro-credit exceed the legislated 5% requirement? Will banks then be required to take funds from their other investments to attain this legislative requirement? Alternatively, what happens if the sum total of applications is below 5%? Furthermore, on the question of loan quality, will we end up having to force a bank to shift money from prudently sound investments to high risk investments? Do we really want them to do this? What does this mean for the other customers?

• (1750)

I cannot stand here and support the bill. Parliament determined that this type of legislation was unnecessary only a short while ago. Furthermore, the bill would create a very onerous financial and regulatory burden on financial institutions and could lead to a situation where banks are forced to use good money to chase riskier investments to the potential detriment of sound investments.

It is for these reasons that I cannot support this bill, and I urge my colleagues here today not to support it as well.

Mr. Richard Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, the presentation made by the member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve may sound like a good thing to a lot of people but it is fundamentally unrealistic to even consider a bill that would impose upon our banks an obligation for them to do business with people who have either no credit history, very little credit history or even a bad credit history.

Institutions like banks are not in business for that in the same way that other companies like Bombardier, Air Canada, Sears, Wal-Mart and caisses populaire credit unions in the province of Quebec are not in business for that. These companies are in business to make a profit for their shareholders or for the owners of a privately held company. They prosper providing they implement sound administration and financial management practices.

Bill C-229 is very confusing because it says that branches of banks to which this part applies, while respecting sound administration and financial management practices, should get involved in granting loans to people in many cases who would be poor credit risks to pay them back. To get into that type of experience is a conflict of sound financial management practices.

I also feel that this touches on some type of affirmative action where a company is required to do business with certain groups of people who under normal circumstances would not be part of its business day or its business plan.

Private Members' Business

It is simply not the government's place to impose this on a private or public business that has grown. Banks have grown to quite an enormous size by doing business in a sound financial manner. It is not the government's place to penalize them by telling them they have to deviate from the practices that brought them to where they are today. They pay dividends to their shareholders and dividends to pension funds that have invested in them. They cannot be penalized because they are successful and told that they have to do things in their business that they would never consider in a normal business practice.

I take exception to the fact that the member indicated that banks do not, as part of their normal practice, become involved in community reinvestment. Canadian banks and the financial services sector are probably the largest contributors to charities in every community across the country where they have branches. They also make hundreds of thousands of loans to small and large businesses in every community across Canada.

They take that money, expand, create more jobs, contribute to the local economy and improve the quality of life for people who work in small businesses which have been able to expand because they have received loans from financial institutions and have run their businesses well. Some started at zero and built their businesses up through sound financial management.

● (1755)

Banks already invest in communities in a huge way, far more than any other industry sector in the country, I believe. To suggest that they are somewhat lacking as community corporate partners is totally misleading.

I know that in the town of Prince George where I live, the Royal Bank, the Scotiabank, TD Bank and CIBC put tens of thousands of dollars into the community for numerous charities and projects in the city, and they do this as part of their corporate community responsibility. To suggest that banks are the big, bad guys with vaults full of money and that do not care about the communities they do business in is quite wrong.

As well, the member talked about the big, bad banks that closed branches to rationalize their business. Would any company in Canada continue to operate a branch in the event that it was losing money on a continuous basis? I think not. That is how companies become successful. They make good, sound business plans and they stick to them. When things are not working, they do whatever they can to turn it around. If it does not turn around, they have to take other steps, and sometimes that involves closing branches.

As the member pointed out, banks are under some responsibility to give notice and to try to implement whatever relief they can to ensure the impact will be as little as possible.

To suggest that the bank should pay into a special fund an amount equivalent to 5% of its income for the financial year is like another tax. That is totally unrealistic. That takes operating capital out of the bank. Banks are already hit with a capital tax. Unfortunately, the government has still not done away with it.

While the member believes in this bill, and I respect the fact that he does, I find it is quite unreasonable to consider implementing something like this.

Microcredit or microlending is not appropriate for banks. That comes more into the business realm of perhaps smaller financial institutions or companies that may see that as an opportunity. It might even be considered an entrepreneur's dream to someone who had \$25,000 which they wanted to invest and they saw an opportunity to lend out \$500, or \$1,000 or \$300. Given sound financial business practices, that could be an opportunity for someone who wanted to get into that type of business.

However to suggest that our chartered banks get into that business and that if they do and they violate one of the many rules in the member's bill, they would be fined or sanctioned or drawn and quartered in some way is not realistic.

We cannot accept this bill like our friends across the hall. Banks are there for a purpose. They are there to serve their investors. They are there to contribute through their dividends to pension funds. It requires that they be strong, that they be profitable, that they continue to operate under very sound, stable and secure business practices. Quite frankly, lending money to people who may not pay them back does not fit into that criteria.

● (1800)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is pleasure to rise in the House to talk about this very important issue. I too want to clarify this. I do not think that the intent of the bill is to attack banks or their charitable donations in Canada. It is more a debate about commerce in our country, about where we are headed, and about financial institutions in general and what type of role they should play in dealing with some of the problems we have as a country right now. Banks can play a larger role. I think they could and I think it would be a good investment opportunity.

I also want to note that right now with regard to lending practices we know that some of the banks have actually had some very questionable business lending practices to larger corporations and larger institutions, which have actually affected their earnings and profits. They have not been the small guy, so to speak, that has been characterized in terms of this particular initiative.

We need to recognize that this is not just a rural issue. It is an urban issue too. It is a situation that has developed because we have seen banks leave the impoverished urban neighbourhoods. I can tell the House for a fact that in my riding bank mergers have had a direct impact on our urban setting. Because they have consolidated, we see empty storefronts and we have seen a lot of different planning go out the window. They have simply usurped the investment and made one or two choices available to consumers. That has had a detrimental impact, not only just on people's choices in terms of the type of service they receive, but also on the urban landscape they participate in as storefronts are closed. That consolidation also has had a positive impact, I guess, with the massive profits that the banks have been able to recoup through that business development plan, but at the same time there has been an incredible loss of employment.

Private Members' Business

There is one issue in this whole process about commerce that we do not often think about, which is Internet banking, and I will give a good example. Here is a situation that is really interesting. As a consumer, I have to purchase equipment. I pay for that equipment: the computer, the screen, the printer and all those different things. On top of that I pay a monthly service fee to use the Internet. I have to pay to use the access service of online banking. At the same time, I use my own personal time in that process to do the actual physical work. Here is what is ironic. The bank should be paying me for that investment, but I am paying the bank for that service. It is another service fee. At the same time, the bank lays off somebody. It ends up that I take somebody out of a job in my community and I pay for all the infrastructure to do it. I actually physically sit down and do the work.

The big winner in this situation is the bank and the big loser is the consumer and I think we have to recognize that. That is the bank's business plan and that is fine. It is up to the bank to be able to go through it, but we have to at least identify that it is a problem or at least a result of policy directives by the government.

I think there is a connection with regard to the lobbyist suggestion. We can look back in terms of when we had the bank merger. I just came from a discussion on Bill C-15, the new lobbyists bill. One of the expert witnesses identified that \$30 million to \$40 million was used by the banks to lobby during that process. That is a lot of money and a lot of investment in terms of the way the government goes about doing business. Putting forward this bill is a good attempt to address some of the crises that we have in our communities, and the banks do have a responsibility and a role to play. If they can spend \$30 million to \$40 million to lobby public policy, I do not think it is too onerous to have a good debate about it again.

With regard to the summary of the bill, to be specifically clear to constituents, the purpose of the bill is to achieve equity in community reinvestment by providing individuals and businesses with equitable access to credit, and to be very specific, where the unemployment rate is equal to or higher than the national average. That makes reasonable efforts to implement equity in community investments. That is important, because sometimes communities, rural or urban, ebb and flow with regard to a certain stage of development or their length of time as a community. Having banks doing commerce in those areas is very functional for business development.

Being a former member of the City Centre Business Association and Sandwich Business Improvement Association in Windsor, I can tell the House that banks are very important to the whole landscape of the economic development of that community. Their participation on a regular basis is very much appreciated. It is clearly an asset to attracting other businesses. There is no doubt whatsoever about that. We have seen that the closures and some of the consolidations have meant that there has been a price to pay in the general sense.

•(1805)

With regard to the community reinvestment act in the United States, I think there are some interesting points that we should discuss. Its purpose was to encourage federally chartered deposit taking institutions to grant loans to persons living in low and medium income neighbourhoods. It was really a tool to improve the

access point for people who are generally denied mortgage loans. Its purpose was also to study mortgage loans granted under the CRA in order to determine their profitability. There is a monitoring process to ensure that there is a win-win situation and to support small lenders. We often talk about small businesses and their important role in the Canadian economy. This is absolutely magnificent. This is an element to be able to get entrepreneurs up and going and to at least give some access to people who would normally be denied the ability to participate or to chase down dreams, people who often become significant contributors in the larger sense as their companies grow.

There was a survey with regard to the American banking system. Six hundred institutions participated, with 98% of the respondents stating that loans granted under the CRA were profitable. That is a 98% return rate. Imagine if we actually got that in our other investments. That is a 2% failure rate. That is absolutely incredible, and we can calculate all the profits and all the improvements stemming from that.

In terms of the advantages that were perceived, respondents surveyed they said they had an improved corporate image in the community, so they are inclusive, they are building relationships, important and trusting relationships. Another advantage is the help for the community to develop and prosper, so there is a long term vision buy-in by the city. There is the creation of a client group for future products and services, so they are very much integrated.

With regard to the effects, what they found is that for Afro-Americans nationwide their actual mortgage loans shot up by 47.5%, so there was a positive correlation there to a situation that they wanted to improve. Mortgage loans granted to Hispanics leaped by 36%. Mortgage loans granted to low and medium income individuals rose by 22%. What is important to note is that in the version they have, there are different categories for the loans: less than \$100,000; between \$100,000 and \$250,000; and over \$250,000.

Can we imagine how we could tackle some of our crises in affordable housing with regard to this community if people were actually able to access those loans? In many communities, a loan of \$100,000 can buy a home for a decent standard of living within which a family can grow and flourish. I think that is important because we know that we have an affordable housing crisis. We know it is not good for our economy. We know it is not good for Canada.

This is a tool that I think can be profitable for both the banks and the community. I think that is important to recognize. People have a better chance to participate and achieve in a world economy when they have a roof over their head and a sense of security and stability. It could also potentially lead into another boom with regard to housing and would continue a very strong market. I know that in my area we have had a successful housing boom, but it certainly would be nice to see the range around \$100,000 or so take off as well. Affordable housing has not really taken off as it should and getting at those targeted individuals would certainly be a benefit.

Private Members' Business

With regard to whether this is too onerous for the banks or whether it is too costly or the regulations are going to burden them, I do not think that is the case, because we have to look at the fact that 60% of Canadian communities right now have one financial institution to serve them. There really is not a consumer choice there and that is not good. That is almost like a monopoly, because there is predominantly limited exposure for consumer choice. If consumers want to go to something like Internet banking if they are in a setting that only has one, once again, they have to pay for the equipment, pay for the service, pay to do the work and pay a fee. At the same time the bank gets all the rewards of the relationship. That is simply not acceptable in my opinion.

Yesterday, for example, the Royal Bank recorded profits yesterday that are 14% higher than profits in 2001. It reported \$2.76 billion in sheer profit. How can that be a hardship? The TD Bank had a record of \$2.96 billion at one point and \$3 billion in profits. That is generally what is happening right now.

This is a very important bill. I think it is worth debating. What we are talking about is branches working toward equitable community reinvestment and getting branches to analyze their operations, systems and regulations and be inclusive in the community. There are a number of things that will happen after that. Representatives will start to get involved. There will be community capacity building, which will be very popular.

• (1810)

To indicate my sincerity with regard to the merits of this case, in Windsor West right now the unemployment rate falls below the national average. I could see the benefits of this but I would not necessarily receive them. I think all of Canada should look at this because we are certainly going to have some improvements.

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, PC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate on Bill C-229. I begin by congratulating the member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve on his persistence. Initially Bill C-229 was Bill C-289 and then Bill C-428.

The bill amends the Bank Act. It provides that certain branches of a bank must take measures to facilitate access to credit to persons who have a residence or a place of business located in an electoral district where the monthly unemployment rate as established by Statistics Canada has been on at least one occasion during the preceding calendar year equal to or higher than the national average.

Furthermore, the bill provides that certain banks must pay 5% of their profits in certain years into a special fund that would be used to lend to people in districts that qualify.

Also, it provides that certain bank representatives under threat of a \$50,000 fine must meet with community representatives to discuss implementation measures adopted or associated with community investment.

As well, certain banks are to keep statistics on to whom they lend money and they are to prepare an annual report providing information relating to the community reinvestment initiative. In other words, there are requirements on how the banks operate if these amendments are made to the Bank Act.

Equity in community banking is very important. Reinvestment in the community certainly does help attain the balance needed between local residents and their banks. It is important for financial institutions to meet the local community's credit needs in the form of loans granted to individuals, businesses and community organizations.

The principles espoused by the bill are indeed laudable. The overall goal of achieving equity through community reinvestment by encouraging banks to grant loans to persons living in areas having above average unemployment, by studying the loans granted under the act through a reporting system and showing support to small borrowers within the community is a commendable goal to aspire to.

As previously mentioned, making credit more readily available to areas that for one reason or another may be disadvantaged at a particular time is certainly a worthy cause. This is indeed what the U.S. did when it passed the community reinvestment act.

It is also worthy to note that in the housing sector, the U.S. saw improvements. Since 1993 mortgage loans to Afro-Americans have gone up 47.5%. Mortgages granted to Hispanics have gone up 36%. Mortgages given to low to mid-income earners have risen 22%. These are all excellent statistics.

However, one must be careful before adopting any type of wholesale changes to the Canadian legal system and regime. This is what the bill does. It seeks a U.S. style approach to achieve community equity reinvestment by adopting the U.S. community reinvestment act. Sometimes U.S. style reforms may be good or even welcomed, but one must be cautious of exactly what reforms Canadian amendments attempt to adopt.

As noted, the bill is modelled after the U.S. community reinvestment act. However, the community reinvestment act really is an omnibus bill. A major portion of the U.S. bill that brought in the community reinvestment act also amended the housing and community development act of 1974. Perhaps more important, it extended the urban homes program. The United States at the time was suffering from a substantial crisis in urban decay.

Jointly, the community reinvestment act, the housing and community development act and the urban housing program all combined to produce the increased mortgage numbers.

Obtaining statistics like that is something that can be aspired to, but all the legislative tools have to be in place, not just one or two of them.

When we bake a cake we need all the ingredients. We cannot leave out the flour or the sugar and expect the cake to look like the baker's down the street. However, Bill C-229 in proposing the amendment to the Bank Act may not produce the intended results that were indeed attained in the U.S. because it has left out some of the ingredients.

The real estate and financial service sectors in Canada are vastly different from those in the U.S. The regime involved in the chartering of banks is different. The real estate industry is different. There are different players involved in Canada.

Private Members' Business

•(1815)

I realize that this amendment is not votable, however, if it were, the proposed legislation would need a little more work done to it. For instance, the legislation would have to be explicit if it was intended to facilitate just business growth or would homeownership through mortgages like the U.S. also be targeted? If granting mortgages was an intended result, then obviously the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation would play a role.

Leaving the mortgage aspect aside, I note that this is the third time the bill has been before the House. As I mentioned earlier, it has a very good goal in mind. However, if it comes to the House a fourth time, there may be some utility in dissecting not only the U.S. community reinvestment act, but also the housing and community development act and the urban housing program to see if any of the provisions found there might be helpful to Canada.

Finally, there are two brief comments that should be made about the bill as a whole. First, in a time when governments should be trying to reduce regulatory red tape and bureaucratic stifling, the bill seems to add a few more components to the already highly regulated banking sector. Meetings must occur and reports must be written with 13 or more components by bank representatives. These reports must be given to the superintendent. The superintendent must give the reports to the minister. The minister must lay the reports before each House of Parliament.

Sometimes reports and meetings are not needed but it is not to say reports would not be needed in these types of situations if this bill were ever passed. However, if legislation of this type were ever votable, then care must be taken to ensure that the statutorily dictated meetings and reports were properly administered.

The last point deals with the offences and penalties section under subsection 627.16 and 627.17.

If requested, the branch of a bank must meet with community representatives who have requested a consultation concerning the assistance the bank is giving to community reinvestment and any implementation measures developed or undertaken by the bank to achieve that reinvestment.

Paragraph 627.16(2) says that any person, and it is assumed that any person means the bank even though it does not say so explicitly, who does not meet, if requested, is liable to a fine not exceeding \$50,000. Also, banks could receive \$5,000 fines if they do not comply with the reporting requirements. Yet if the banks violate subsection 627.4, which states that the bank shall implement equity community reinvestment, no offence will have been committed.

Therefore, at the end of the day we have this legislation that statutorily directs meetings with community representatives and directs that reports must be written outlining the banks reinvestment strategy, both under threat of substantial fines. However there is no obligation for the banks to actually implement community reinvestment. There is a \$5,000 fine for not writing the report that says they did not undertake any community reinvestment measures.

In closing, this might not be the most helpful way to ensure that community reinvestment gets accomplished. As stated before, the

goals of the bill are commendable but the drafters have not reasoned it out to the point where it could be seriously adopted in the House.

•(1820)

Mr. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary was very articulate and I agree with everything he said.

I would like to go on the record by saying that I have supported business for most of my career. In my riding, a very rural riding, there have been problems over the years with banks providing credit to businesses in very rural and remote areas. I hope they will continue to work toward alleviating that problem, which I thought was disappearing, but recently there seems to be less appetite for providing credit to tourism operations. With low metal prices and post-September 11, this is very critical for my constituency. I hope they will take that into consideration and continue to provide credit for the tourism industry, which is so important to my riding.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Madam Speaker, at the end, I would appreciate it if you would ask for consent to make this bill votable. I think you will find consent.

I thank the hon. members who took part in the debate, but a there were a number of pieces of misinformation. First, a bank is not a private enterprise, to the extent that we, as parliamentarians, vote supply for the operation of the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation. It is important to know that, when a bank grants a loan, the risk factor is virtually nil because, according to the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, 90% of loans come under the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation.

Second, I think parliamentarians must recognize that banks do not operate in underprivileged communities. It is not all charity. Our colleague from Prince George—Bulkley Valley said that banks in his riding were involved in the community. That may be, but the problem is that banks do not operate in underprivileged communities. That is great if they are involved in middle-class and upper-middle class communities, but they are non-existent in underprivileged communities.

Third, I thought for a moment that I was watching an episode of *The Flintstones*, so rock solid was the bias being conveyed. Contrary to what the parliamentary secretary said, the bill does not tell banks they have to grant loans to people if they are insolvent. The bill provides that they will assess loans and how to reinvest in their community. That is what community reinvestment is all about.

Adjournment Debate

This is a reality that works for the United States, and I do not see why it could not be considered for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve and other ridings. We must not put words in the bill's mouth, so to speak. I think that our colleague from the NDP, the hon. member for Windsor West, has understood very well the essence of the bill.

Again, I think that we would be shirking our responsibilities, as parliamentarians, if we tried to ignore this issue. It is true that this is not a recommendation in the MacKay report. However, the fact that it was not mentioned in the report does not mean it would not be worthwhile.

In the early nineties, how many members were opposed to an employment equity act? Banks did not want such an act. Yet, the requirements are the same. They must determine the number of women, the number of members of minorities, the positions held, the salaries. If we let the market operate on its own, it is impossible to have greater equity, to have banks more involved in poor communities.

Yet, the Employment Equity Act did not result in banks having to shut down because they could not make it.

I could provide an example relating to social economy. In Quebec, there is an area about which the hon. member for Yukon said "Banks do not want to get involved in the recreation and tourism industry". This is also true in large cities such as Montreal. Social economy is based on the firm belief that capital money can be used in areas that are neglected by conventional money.

In Quebec, for example, we created a whole support network for the elderly, that is home support services, which are part of the social economy. I clearly remember how, at the beginning, the doomsayers would say, "This is not possible, it will not work. Cooperatives cannot do that. If one cares about the social dimension, one cannot be a good manager". Yet, after a few years, we are finding out that it is possible to have social concerns and, at the same time, be a good manager.

Perhaps the bill can be improved, as the Conservative member said, but I am asking all hon. members to start from the premise that we can work together on it, I am asking that it be referred to the committee and that each political party propose amendments that will make this better legislation.

I cannot imagine how horrible it would be for this bill to die on the Order Paper now, considering that it is before us for the third time and that all parliamentarians agree that banks behave in a reprehensible fashion in their communities.

• (1825)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Do you want to ask for unanimous consent?

Mr. Réal Ménard: Madam Speaker, at the beginning of my speech, I asked you to see whether there is unanimous consent of the House to make this motion votable. If you were to ask for it, I think we would have it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Is there unanimous consent of the House to make the motion votable?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The time provided for consideration of private members' business is deemed to have expired. Since this is not a votable motion, the order is dropped from Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

FISHERIES

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me introduce this topic by saying that over the years, and despite repeated requests, the government has not conducted an environmental assessment of the aquaculture industry. An examination of whether or not it is advisable to use public funds in support of current practices in aquaculture has never been undertaken or debated in this Parliament.

Numerous parliamentary and non-governmental reports support this view. For instance, in February 2001 the Auditor General found that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans was not fully meeting its legislative obligations under the Fisheries Act while participating in the regulation of salmon farming in British Columbia. The Auditor General outlined steps to correct the situation. So far, no action has taken place.

In June of last year the Senate committee on fisheries released its report entitled "Aquaculture in Canada's Atlantic and Pacific Regions" recommending a thorough consultation with all users of aquatic resources before further development of the industry is allowed. Again there has been no action.

Then we have the Leggatt report released in November of last year. Its recommendations include the removal of all net-cage salmon farms from the sea by January 1, 2005, and a moratorium, which actually was recently lifted by the B.C. government, on new farm sites.

In addition, the Leggatt report recommends to remove the promotion of aquaculture from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, to improve monitoring and to regulate salmon farming by federal government regulators. These recommendations have not been implemented so far.

Tonight I would appreciate it if the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans would answer the following questions.

First, when will the government conduct a full environmental assessment of the aquaculture industry and the provisions of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act?

Second, when will the recommendations of the Auditor General be implemented?

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Third, when will the government terminate bad practices in fish farming such as allowing sewage from farms to pollute surrounding waters and allowing the escape of farmed fish, which deplete the native wild fish?

Fourth, when will the government act on the devastating economic, social and environmental impacts caused by the aquaculture industry on first nation communities living along Canada's coasts?

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Georges Farrah (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise tonight in the House to respond to the motion moved by the hon. member for Davenport. I thank him for his continued interest in aquaculture and in all environmental issues.

This issue is a priority for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. The program for sustainable aquaculture, announced in 2000, is an investment that will not only allow the aquaculture industry to grow and become a vital component of the Canadian economy, but it will also allow the government to ensure that this growth does not come at the detriment of our aquatic ecosystems.

Aquaculture is an increasingly important activity, in Canada and around the world. It provides numerous social and economic opportunities.

In the last ten years, the department has established a certain number of initiatives to promote the sustainable development of this promising industry. Since the Program for Sustainable Aquaculture was launched, the department has stepped up its efforts to meet its objective.

I would also like to mention that the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans has, in recent years, demonstrated a great deal of interest in the sector, in terms of its effects on the environment, and its future, from both a social and economic standpoint.

A number of studies on aquaculture have been carried out to date. Despite its relative youth, the aquaculture industry has been the subject of a number of rigorous studies and reviews over the past ten years. These studies and reviews have shown that when properly managed, the impact of aquaculture on the environment is minimal.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans is carefully considering all of these results in order to ensure that the measures implemented today take into account all that we have learned up to this point.

The aquaculture industry is a viable industry that continues to improve its practices. Despite this positive fact, we must continue to better understand the effects of aquaculture on the environment and take measures to improve the confidence of the public in this industry.

Given the extraordinary opportunities that aquaculture provides us with, we must also take appropriate measures to make the industry more competitive on world markets. To this end, DFO has adopted a detailed action plan to support the sustainable development of aquaculture.

I would now like to talk about some of the key features of this plan.

First, let us address the issue of environmental assessment. The department adopted a series of measures to better regulate the industry and ensure the sustainable development of Canada's aquaculture industry.

As Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, I want to stress the fact that the department has always maintained that it must, on the one hand, make sure the industry has all the tools it needs to play an important part in rural development and, on the other, put in place all the audit and monitoring mechanisms necessary to increase Canadians' confidence in the sustainability of the industry.

With respect to effective monitoring of the industry, the government's role is not only to improve the legislation and regulations pertaining to aquaculture. The department is also trying to find ways to better monitor the activities of the industry on a day-to-day basis.

In cooperation with the provinces, the department is reviewing provincial methods of monitoring aquaculture activities. We want to continue to work in close consultation with the provinces to improve these methods and strengthen them if need be.

Let us talk about cooperation. Since aquaculture and environment issues come under the jurisdiction of both the federal government and the provinces, the department is working closely with provincial and territorial governments. This cooperation is taking place under the auspices of the Canadian Council of Fisheries and Aquaculture Ministers and is producing very good results.

Thanks to the council, DFO and the provinces can ensure consistent management of the aquaculture industry all over the country. This prevents the duplication of efforts and resources that are saved can serve other important purposes such as research and environmental protection.

In conclusion, given all the work—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. parliamentary secretary, but his time has run out. The hon. member for Davenport.

[*English*]

Hon. Charles Caccia: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for his elaborate and extensive reply, for his frequent references to the term sustainable development, and the fact that it would appear that his department is applying the basic principles at least theoretically.

The question as to whether the government would conduct a full environmental assessment of the aquaculture industry remains unanswered. The question as to whether the government would implement the recommendations of the Auditor General remains unanswered. The question as to when the government would terminate certain bad practices which I outlined in my brief intervention remains unanswered. Finally and very important, when would the government act on behalf of the first nation communities living along Canada's coasts—

Adjournment Debate

●(1835)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Georges Farrah: Madam Speaker, I think we need more time.

In answer to the first question about the environmental assessment of the developing aquaculture industry, a moratorium, which had been in effect in British Columbia for the last 10 years, was lifted recently. We could not carry out environmental assessments on those sites while the moratorium was in place.

Now that the moratorium has been lifted, every project will be subject to an environmental assessment, in accordance also with the shipping policy in these waters. From now on, environmental assessments will be carried out on such sites.

Where first nation communities are concerned, I do not think there is a problem with developing aquaculture projects in native communities where it is badly needed. For instance, I went to Bras D'Or Lake, in Nova Scotia, not too far from Baddeck and Eskasoni, where first nations have set up aquaculture projects that are very productive and very beneficial for the economic development of their communities.

With any aquaculture project, we need to ensure that it is environmentally friendly—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Madam Speaker, on October 22, I asked a question in the House, and, given the time at my disposal, I will quote it for the benefit of listeners. The question went like this:

—when in doubt about whether or not employment is insurable, Human Resources Development Canada asks the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency to study employment insurance applications.

Workers who wish to appeal the agency's decision can take their case to the Tax Court of Canada. Complainants must wait six to twelve months for their case to be heard. This is ridiculous.

My question is for the Minister of Justice. Will the government hire more judges for the court so that workers can have their cases heard within a reasonable and acceptable timeframe?

Here is the answer of the national revenue minister:

Mr. Speaker, the federal tax court is available to any of those who wish to take their case to that place. I assure the member that the caseload is one which is of concern to everyone and is monitored carefully.

I was rather generous when I talked about six to twelve months, because some said in the House that it could take up to fifteen or even sixteen months.

I will only say that one of the problems is that Human Resources Development Canada itself should decide whether someone is entitled to employment insurance benefits or not. At the moment, people are referred to the Tax Court of Canada, which is the source of the problem because there are not enough judges. This was my question.

Now, this is what the minister answered:

Mr. Speaker, the federal tax court is available to any of those who wish to take their case to that place.

I believe the minister did not hear my question. We know people can go to the Tax Court of Canada; this is exactly what I had said. I said that people who wish to challenge decisions have to go before the Tax Court of Canada and the minister answered that the Tax Court was available to those people.

Hopefully, a month later, the minister has understood the question. I said that there were not enough judges. People have to wait 15 months. This is where the problem lies.

The parliamentary secretary will rise and give me an answer. I hope that the government has considered and understood the question I raised a month ago, on October 22.

I am aware that I may be the member who talks the most frequently about employment insurance in this House, but it is fortunate that, out of 301 members, someone does. People whose employment insurance benefits have been cut, who are without a salary and have no financial means to support their family must, believe it or not, wait 15 months to be heard by the Tax Court of Canada. That is where the problem lies.

I would like my colleague to give us a better answer and tell us what the solution is. What will they do to improve the system? I am only asking the government to improve the system so that people do not have to wait 15 months. I am waiting for the parliamentary secretary's answer.

●(1840)

[*English*]

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst suggests that the Tax Court of Canada is experiencing delays in hearing appeals under the Employment Insurance Act and that the appointment of additional judges to the Tax Court would remedy this. This is an important question and I thank the member for raising it.

The Tax Court of Canada is an important national institution that prides itself on delivering consistently excellent service to Canadians. The stated mission of the Tax Court of Canada is to provide the public with an accessible and efficient appeal process, and to work together to maintain a fair and independent court.

The Tax Court has achieved its reputation for timeliness through a number of innovative approaches, including the development of an informal process for hearing matters under the Income Tax Act on an expedited basis where the amount in dispute is under a specified amount. This has contributed to the overall effectiveness of the system by ensuring that only the most complicated cases are heard.

The court has initiated a system to permit the electronic filing of a number of key documents and is committed to implementing this for all documents over the next few years. Electronic filing will allow a more rapid flow of information between the court and its clients. It will reduce the costs for appellants, facilitate document interchange between parties, and make information more readily available to all Canadians.

The Tax Court, like many courts across the country, has instituted a system of case management to ensure that cases are tracked and handled in the most expeditious manner possible. So committed is the court to ensuring the highest standard of service that it regularly conducts client satisfaction surveys so that it can continue to improve its service to the public.

In addition to these innovative and modern approaches to meeting its mandate the Tax Court is able to rely on a large network of deputy judges across Canada to supplement the full time complement of the court. The hon. member may be interested to note that the province of New Brunswick has two deputy judges, one to hear cases in English and the other in French.

As an element of the important constitutional principle of judicial independence, judicial control over matters relating to the judicial function are the responsibility of the judiciary, in particular chief justices and judges.

I want to assure the member that the Minister of Justice would give serious consideration to any objective indicators, provided either by the chief judge of the Tax Court or a representative of the tax bar, that would allot the court additional resources. I would also point out to the member that there are currently 23 judges on the Tax Court of Canada and four vacancies. The minister wants to act quickly to deal with those vacancies. An important issue has been raised by the member and I thank him for that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Madam Speaker, here are the only comments I might want to make in this respect.

The member said we have a good system and the system is working well. That is the way he started. In the end, the parliamentary secretary said that there are four vacancies. This is exactly the point I raised. There are not enough judges to handle certain cases and to be able to act in this respect.

The minister who answered on October 22 agreed with me when she said: "I assure the member that the caseload is one which is of

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concern to everyone". She agreed that the situation was of concern. She agreed with me. And she added "—and is monitored carefully".

This is exactly the point. I am happy to hear that the government is willing to appoint four more judges, but the problem is the length of time it will take. We are talking about serious cases. I am sure there are banks making billions of dollars in profit that have to wait a year to get their case settled. I do not find it very serious for a bank to have to wait a year. However, when it is a family that has been deprived of income, I find it very serious.

So I am certainly somewhat satisfied by the answer, but now I want to see action. Action is what counts. Words are nice but action speaks louder. And action means that people will be able to be heard without delay so that justice can be done. That is the important thing.

I am curious now to see how long it will take to hire judges and for them to start working to put an end to this cruel wait families have to endure. It is as simple as that.

• (1845)

[*English*]

Mr. Bryon Wilfert: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his comments. As I indicated the government is committed to filling these vacancies of the court in a timely and responsible manner. I am sure the member will appreciate however that we need to find the best candidates. There has to be time for consultations and a review of those qualifications. There is no question that the government is interested in filling those four vacancies. It is important to do so but, again, in a timely manner. By reviewing the appropriate qualifications and getting those positions filled the issues that the member raised could be dealt with in an expeditious manner.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:46 p.m.)

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