



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 139 • NUMBER 037 • 3rd SESSION • 37th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, April 20, 2004
(Part A)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 20, 2004

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[*English*]

PETITIONS

MARRIAGE

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition with signatures collected in my riding by the Broadview Evangelical Free Church addressing the issue of marriage.

The petitioners state that the best foundation for families and the raising of children is that the institution of marriage be recognized in federal law as being the lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

* * *

• (1010)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Roger Gallaway (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 it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, discussions have taken place between all the parties and I believe that if you were to seek it you would find consent for the following motion:

That the recorded divisions scheduled today at 3:00 p.m. be taken in the following order: first, referral to committee before second reading of Bill C-25; second, the amendment to second reading of Bill C-30, and third, second reading of Bill C-246.

The Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have unanimous consent to present this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

WESTBANK FIRST NATION SELF-GOVERNMENT ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-11, an act to give effect to the Westbank First Nation Self-Government Agreement, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: There are three motions in amendment standing on the Notice Paper for the report stage of Bill C-11.

[*Translation*]

Motion No. 2 will not be selected by the Chair as it could have been presented in committee.

[*English*]

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

Having heard submissions from the hon. members in respect of that matter, Motions Nos. 1 and 3 will be debated and voted upon.

[*Translation*]

I will now put Motions Nos. 1 and 3 to the House.

[*English*]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-11 be amended by deleting Clause 3.

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-11 be amended by adding after line 13 on page 2 the following new clause:

Government Orders

"4.1 Despite section 102 of the Agreement, lands acquired by the Westbank First Nation that are contained within the limits of the city of Kelowna, British Columbia, may be transferred to Canada for the purpose of being set apart as lands reserved for Indians under subsection 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867, or as reserves within the meaning of the Indian Act for the use and benefit of the Westbank First Nation, only with the consent of the City of Kelowna."

Mr. John Cummins: Mr. Speaker, the issue here is the application of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms or the failure of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to apply here, and it is to that issue that I would like to address my comments.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms is designed to shield individuals from the arbitrary actions of their government. The charter provides individuals with a tool to challenge their government. All Canadians are covered by the charter.

Yet, while all Canadians are covered by the charter, all Canadians are not equally protected by the charter. Some government actions are shielded from the application of the charter.

Section 25 of the charter acts to shield government actions involving aboriginal rights from challenges under the charter; that is, if an individual challenges a government action involving the exercise of aboriginal rights, the government can shield itself from the challenge by claiming that the arbitrary government action involves aboriginal rights.

Charter challenges involving aboriginal rights trigger the section 25 shield.

What has section 25 got to do with the right of Westbank residents to use the charter to challenge arbitrary rights of the Westbank government?

Section 25 has everything to do with the right of Westbank residents to use the charter to challenge the Westbank government. Section 25 will only be available to the Westbank government to shield itself from a challenge under the charter if it can claim that its actions involve the exercise of an aboriginal right. The Westbank agreement makes invoking the section 25 shield very easy.

The Westbank agreement states throughout that the purpose of the agreement is to "recognize" and "implement" an aboriginal right of self-government.

In establishing the Westbank government as an aboriginal right, the agreement triggers section 25 of the charter. This gives the Westbank government the power to shield itself from the challenges of its own residents. All the Westbank government needs to do when challenged is to point out that it is exercising an aboriginal right. End of story.

That is the problem in a nutshell.

For those who think this is a pipe dream, they should give their heads a shake. In Nova Scotia an appeal was made under the Canadian Human Rights Act that a band government was discriminating against a non-native husband. On appeal to the Federal Court of Appeal, the band argued that it had an inherent right to govern and as such it could invoke section 25 of the charter to shield itself from the prohibition against discrimination found in the Canadian Human Rights Act.

The court said:

...[the band] acted pursuant to its inherent powers of self government...this inherent power...is one of the 'rights or freedoms that pertains to the aboriginal peoples of Canada' shielded from erosion by the Charter through s. 25

That was the band's opinion.

The Federal Court of Appeal rejected the band's argument holding that the band government had not been charged under the section 15 equality rights provision of the charter and therefore it could not invoke section 25 as a shield against the equality provisions of the Canadian Human Rights Act.

The court said:

...the answer to the [the band's] contention is three-fold. First, section 25 of the Charter has been held to be a shield which protects [aboriginal] rights...

Second, the named respondents have complained that the appellant's refusal to pay social assistance to them is a contravention of section 5 of the CHRA. Since they did not allege that the appellant had violated section 15 of the Charter, section 25 of the Charter has no application here. Third, the appellant has not established by evidence the unique right which they are asserting and which they say is included in section 25

Second...Since [the respondents] did not allege that the appellant had violated section 15 of the Charter, section 25 of the Charter has no application here.

Third, [the band] has not established by evidence the unique right which they are asserting and which they say is included in section 25

The Westbank government has a step up on the Nova Scotia band. It will never have to make the argument that it has an aboriginal right of self-government and as such that its actions are shielded from charter challenge. The Westbank agreement does all that. It states clearly and unequivocally that the Westbank government is a representation of the aboriginal right of self-government. Any time it faces a charter challenge it need only point to the agreement with the crown that will have been ratified by Parliament. Its actions will automatically be shielded from charter challenges.

• (1015)

In a recent decision, the British Columbia Supreme Court has ruled that section 25 offers a complete defence, or what it called a "complete answer", to challenges under the charter involving section 7, legal rights of life, liberty and security of person; section 15, equality rights; and section 3, democratic rights of citizenship. It stated:

...Section 25 of the Charter is a complete answer to this argument.

In any case, s. 25 of the Charter itself is as much an answer to a submission concerning sections 7 and 15(1) as it is an answer to the s. 3 submission.

The challenges based upon the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms are answered by s. 25 of the Charter.

Based upon the dangerous wording of the Westbank agreement, it will always be open to the Westbank government to affirm that its arbitrary actions against its own residents are merely an exercise of its aboriginal right to govern and therefore is shielded from a resident's challenge under the charter.

Government Orders

Do members of Parliament really want to create the Westbank government as a charter-free zone where residents will have lost their rights to challenge their own government?

Do members of Parliament really intend to give the Westbank government a shield to protect itself from any and every challenge, no matter how arbitrary its actions have been and how legitimate the challenge might be?

Do members of Parliament really want to create a Westbank government that will have free rein to mistreat its residents and to have that government's actions shielded from any and all challenges under the charter?

The Minister of Indian Affairs acknowledged in the Senate Committee on Human Rights on March 22 that the real and growing conflict between the protection of what he called the "individual rights" identified in the charter, equality rights, political rights and the legal rights to life, liberty and security of person, and what he called the "collective rights" protected by section 25. It acknowledged:

...there is the necessity to reconcile the principles contained in...the Charter of Rights and Freedoms with those contained in section 25, which protects Aboriginal rights...

The Minister of Indian Affairs' acknowledgment of the conflict between the charter rights and section 25, aboriginal rights, differs considerably from his statement on March 10 before the House of Commons committee studying the Westbank bill and agreement. There he said that:

The agreement...recognizes that all first nation members, like all Canadians everywhere, are subject to...the charter.

His statement is patently untrue when an aboriginal right is involved and he acknowledged as much in the Senate Committee on Human Rights on March 22.

All problems in aboriginal governance will not be cured by merely ensuring that everyone has, without question, the right to challenge their government if they believe their fundamental rights enumerated in the charter have been impaired but all problems will be demonstratively worse at Westbank if Westbank government becomes a charter-free zone simply because Parliament has ratified an agreement that expressly identifies the Westbank government as an aboriginal right.

By expressly identifying Westbank government as an aboriginal right, members of Parliament will have, whether intentionally or inadvertently, shielded Westbank government from challenge under the charter and left Westbank residents stripped of their basic constitutional rights, rights that have developed in Anglo-Canadian law beginning with the Magna Carta.

Section 91(24) of the Constitution makes what happens on Indian lands the responsibility of Parliament. Washing their hands, like Pilate, of what happens on Indian lands and at the same time blocking access to the charter by making Westbank government an aboriginal right, will not make members of Parliament less guilty but it will make them impotent to act when problems occur.

Senator Beaudoin, a recognized expert on the Constitution and human rights, said as much to the Minister of Indian Affairs when he

chastized the minister on March 22 in the Senate human rights committee stating:

You say that it is up to the Aboriginals to do this. I do not agree. It is our duty here to do that. There are two orders of government in this country—the federal and the provincial. The Aboriginal people have collective rights, but the power to improve the situation is within the Parliament of Canada and I do not think that we should wait for the existence of a third order of government because the power is with the Senate and the House of Commons

Our esteemed colleague in the other place got it right as he so often does. Let us not get it wrong by establishing the Westbank government as an aboriginal right and therefore outside of and shielded from charter challenge. It would be wrong to strip Westbank residents of their charter rights. Let us not do it.

● (1020)

The agreement never claims that the charter of rights fully applies to the Westbank government. Section 32 of the agreement makes it very clear that the charter has limited application to the Westbank government. It states:

The government of Westbank First Nation and Council in respect of all matters under its authority are bound by the provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms with due regard for section 25 of the Charter—

More accurately, the government of Westbank and its council are effectively bound by the charter when they choose to be bound. When the Westbank government wants to opt out of the charter, it can use the aboriginal rights defence. It need only assert that its actions are merely an exercise of an aboriginal right to govern, as set out in the agreement and put in force by Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I am aware that my time has expired, but if there was unanimous consent, I would like to continue. It should not take me too much longer.

The Deputy Speaker: The member might want to indicate to the House in his request for unanimous consent to extend his intervention, by how many minutes?

Mr. John Cummins: Probably less than five, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the House give its consent to the member for Delta—South Richmond to extend his intervention by less than five minutes?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. John Cummins: Mr. Speaker, simply put, the agreement gives the Westbank government an umbrella to shield itself any time a resident seeks to reign on its arbitrary actions with a challenge under the charter.

The lawyer for the Westbank, Micha Menczer, when challenged in the House of Commons committee studying the Westbank bill and agreement, claimed that critics must not believe in the charter, that their complaint was really with section 25 of the charter rather than with the agreement. He stated:

I think that's a misreading. More importantly, section 25 is part of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Westbank and the Government of Canada have no power to change that, either by an agreement or even by legislation. That is a matter of constitutional change.

Government Orders

A convenient lawyer's trick, but no, the problem is with the agreement's action to make the Westbank government an aboriginal right triggering section 25 and knocking out the protection of the charter for Westbank residents. The problem is not section 25 of the charter.

The problem is the sections in the agreement that state that the agreement is both a recognition and an implementation of the aboriginal right of self-government. It is those sections of the agreement that trigger section 25. It is the aboriginal right of self-government provisions of the agreement that effectively allow the Westbank government to shield itself from the application of the charter any time it wishes to do so.

In a paper entitled "Westbank self-government agreement will strip away fundamental Canadian rights", Tanis Fiss, Director for the Centre for Aboriginal Policy Change of the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation, observed:

This is a disastrous piece of legislation. If Members of Parliament pass this agreement, Canada's elected officials will deny certain Canadians the right to vote in community elections and in so doing will strip the fundamental rights of Canadian citizens.

The proposed Westbank Self-Government Agreement, Bill C-11, will shield the Westbank government from application of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. By doing so, Westbank laws would be immune from a Charter challenge. In other words, Westbank laws could discriminate between residents of Westbank based on their race, religion or gender and the victim of discrimination could not use the Charter to strike down the offence.

Once entrenched in the Constitution based on the premise of an "inherent right" to self-government, this means Section 25 of the Constitution will also apply to the Agreement. The equality rights of the Charter do not apply to Aboriginal communities under Section 25 of the Constitution. This will be the case no matter what is written in the Agreement because the Constitution is the supreme law of Canada.

The federal government plans to use the Westbank self-government agreement as a template for further negotiations. This piece of legislation will set a precedent which other Indian Bands will follow. Clearly, this Agreement will have national repercussions for generations of Canadians.

Incredibly, all parties in the federal parliament plan to support the measure and have supported it through the first two readings. Given the many flaws of this Agreement, Canadians can only hope their elected Members of Parliament come to their senses and vote against the Agreement.

Mark Milke, in an article in the *Calgary Herald* entitled "Native agreement flawed", stated:

One significant problem with the Westbank agreement is that it will deny natives and non-natives some of their charter rights. Defenders already claim that because one section in the Westbank document references it as bound by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that such freedoms are thus secure. No, they are not. The same section of the agreement the defenders will point to also has this caveat about such charter freedoms: "with due regard for Section 25..."

That's a tip-off. Section 25 grants aboriginal and treaty rights immunity from legal challenges launched from other charter sections.

Christopher Harvey, a lawyer who analyzed the agreement, argues that the new Westbank deal infringes on charter rights and does so through a clever (and improper) juxtaposition of aboriginal claims to self-government combined with the Section 25 rights noted above: "It amounts to an abdication of the sovereign law-making and executive authority of the Crown in Parliament. Its effect on the people residing and working in Westbank is to remove many of the fundamental political and legal safeguards that support their freedoms and security. It is surprising to see basic legal rights which have been acquired gradually over many years of political struggles being so abruptly discarded".

If Parliament intends residents to have the right to use the charter to challenge the Westbank government, it must ensure that those sections of the agreement that refer to the aboriginal right of self-government are not brought into law. If Parliament intends to give

the Westbank government an umbrella to shield itself from challenges under the charter, then it should pass Bill C-11, the Westbank law act, into law without amendment.

• (1025)

However, a healthier choice of action dictates that Parliament consider the serious implications of shielding the Westbank government from the charter. Westbank residents, like Canadians everywhere, deserve the protection of the charter. It is the right of Canadian citizenship, yet they will not have charter protection if this bill is approved in its present form.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must begin by saying that I disagree with the previous arguments and I will outline my position.

First of all, the first amendment to the bill is a complete deletion of clause 3. Basically, we cannot delete clause 3. We cannot delete any clause, actually, because this is an agreement between the Government of Canada and a first nation. We have negotiated this agreement for years and to remove an instrumental clause, which of course the Government of Canada has agreed to put into law and which is what we are doing in Parliament, would abrogate the whole agreement and we would be back at stage one.

The effect of this amendment would be that Canada would not ratify the Westbank first nation self-government agreement. With this amendment, members of Parliament are being asked not to approve the Westbank first nation self-government agreement in its entirety. Clause 3 would give the force of law to the Westbank first nation self-government agreement. Clause 3 is the substantive provision of Bill C-11. Without this provision, the Westbank first nation self-government agreement would not be given effect.

Both Canada and Westbank first nation must ratify the Westbank first nation self-government agreement for the agreement to come into effect. Pursuant to the Westbank first nation self-government agreement, Canada's ratification procedure requires that Canada sign the agreement and that Canada enact federal legislation giving effect to the agreement. Canada signed the Westbank first nation self-government agreement on October 3, 2003. Bill C-11, and in particular clause 3, is the proposed federal legislation that would give effect to the Westbank first nation self-government agreement.

With regard to the specific argument that we had in relation to clause 3 and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, basically, in summary, I would say that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms will apply to the Westbank government and to the people of Westbank. The Government of Canada is committed to the principle that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms binds all governments in Canada so that aboriginal peoples and non-aboriginal Canadians alike would continue to enjoy equally the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the charter.

Government Orders

The charter, through section 25, is designed to ensure a sensitive balance between individual rights and freedoms, and the unique values and traditions of aboriginal people in Canada. This is stated in the Government of Canada's federal policy, "The Government of Canada's Approach to Implementation of the Inherent Right and the Negotiation of Aboriginal Self-Government". Section 32 of the Westbank self-government agreement is in conformity with this policy.

It is the view of the Government of Canada that the Westbank first nation government and any Westbank laws passed pursuant to the Westbank first nation self-government agreement will be subject to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in its entirety. One cannot make one provision of the charter apply more forcefully than any other.

With regard to providing Westbank with specific self-government inherent rights, this is a general right that is applied across the country. It is the same in all our self-government agreements. It is not specific to Westbank. It is not a specific right.

The references to an inherent right in the Westbank first nation self-government agreement are general in nature and do not constitute a specific recognition of any specific Westbank first nation aboriginal right to self-government. The Westbank first nation self-government agreement and its references to an inherent right of self-government are in accordance with the federal government's inherent right policy, which recognizes that the inherent right of self-government is an existing aboriginal right within section 35 of the Constitution Act.

In case the people who are watching want to know what we are debating in section 25 of the Charter, I will read it. It states:

The guarantee in this Charter of certain rights and freedoms shall not be construed so as to abrogate or derogate from any aboriginal, treaty or other rights or freedoms that pertain to the aboriginal peoples of Canada including

- (a) any rights or freedoms that have been recognized by the Royal Proclamation of October 7, 1763; and
- (b) any rights or freedoms that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired.

•(1030)

This is a general protection and reference in the bill. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms will continue to apply to aboriginal people across the country and to the people on the Westbank reserve. Of course, the sensitive clause 25 will ensure that rights are acknowledged.

I want to now talk about Motion No. 3 and the clause respecting additions to reserve. The amendment basically suggests that adding land to the Westbank First Nation reserve would require the consent of the City of Kelowna. While land has already been added to the Westbank reserve through our general policy, when additional land is added to reserves, there are consultations and agreements with the provincial and municipal governments. This is already in our policy.

The authority to add land to reserves is a federal authority and that authority is applied across the country, including the Westbank. With or without this agreement, there is authority to add to the reserve. However, the amendment would take away from the Westbank people something that would be available to all reserves across the country, and that would obviously be unfair.

We are not here today to take away or lessen one particular first nation from a power. However, we had a lengthy debate about this section in committee and at that time assurances were given, and that is Canadian policy is that when additions are made to reserve, the municipalities and provincial governments will be consulted. Therefore, this should not be a concern.

The Westbank First Nation, like all other first nations in Canada, may concurrently access additions to reserve policy, which is a national policy. Upon implementation of the Westbank First Nation self-government agreement nothing would change for the Westbank First Nation with respect to the federal government's additions to reserve policy.

The additions to reserve policy requires that the first nation and the municipality in question negotiate in areas such as joint land use planning, bylaw harmonization, tax considerations, service provision and future dispute resolution. In practice Canada has insisted that these matters be dealt with to the satisfaction of all parties. As a result, in many cases lands are added to reserves only after years of negotiations. This has been demonstrated in the addition of what are known as the Gallagher Canyon lands to the Westbank First Nation reserve in 2000, 17 years after the Westbank First Nation first initiated an addition to reserve request.

Any amendment denying the Westbank First Nation the right to access the federal government's additions to reserve policy in whole or in part would set the Westbank First Nation apart from all other first nations, including those that have self-government agreements or those that have concluded treaties. This would place an undue burden on the Westbank First Nation. Further, the additions to reserve policy is within the purview of the federal government's jurisdiction to deal with all matters relating to Indian lands.

•(1035)

As stated above, in practice the additions to reserve policy does not permit the addition of lands to reserve without the consent of surrounding municipalities. In this regard the proposed amendment requiring the consent of the City of Kelowna prior to any further additions to Westbank First Nation reserve lands merely states what is already the case.

Nevertheless, the proposed amendment would cede the federal government's power, expressed through the granting of an order in council with respect to additions to Westbank reserve lands, to a municipal level of government. Additions to reserve, a federal jurisdiction under the Canadian constitutional framework, would no longer be entirely within the prerogative of the federal government.

The additions to reserve are granted pursuant to an order in council by the governor in council. It is recognized that additions to reserve proposals may potentially impact on provincial and municipal governments, and thus the federal government's addition to reserve policy requires that these levels of government have an opportunity to express their interests.

Government Orders

Provinces and municipalities must be advised in writing of an additions to reserve proposal within their jurisdiction and have three months to respond in writing to identify any issues with an additions to reserve proposal. Third party interests must be identified and dealt with before an additions to reserve proposal may proceed.

I will not have time to go any further, so I will just summarize by saying, of the two amendments, the first one basically would abrogate the whole agreement. It is the primary clause that puts it into effect. It basically is yes or no on Westbank. The last one I do not think is necessary. First, the City of Kelowna is already guaranteed under the present policy. Second, we could not take a right away from one first nation in Canada. If people want to change that, they should lobby to change the entire government policy, not just one clause in the agreement.

• (1040)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important bill.

The agreement with the Westbank First Nation occurs after years and years of negotiations between the federal government and the first nation. I recall that last December, before we adjourned for the holidays, the Westbank First Nation was assured that its agreement would be passed by this Parliament. I remember very clearly that in the galleries there was a large delegation from Westbank, which came to observe the conclusion of these years of effort, consultation and tough negotiations.

Instead of recognizing the success of their efforts in December, one Conservative MP refused to give consent for the rapid approval of this agreement. I said to myself then that this was not the right way to reward the work of the first nations who all seek, without exception, to enjoy the inherent right to self government.

This inherent right is not there for us to amend, debate or misinterpret. It is there, either because of ancestral treaties or because the first nations stipulate that it is a right given them by the Creator as the first inhabitants of this land.

I was very disappointed when I saw that these attempts at self-government were not gratified. I remember that, in 1998, the report by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Erasmus-Dussault report, invited us to undertake a vast reform. Over the next 20 years, this reform would resolve everything with all the first nations in Quebec and Canada. It would resolve the issue of self-government, which is the only healthy avenue available to our two communities to ensure harmonious development, and the growth too of the first nations, as well as the immediate resolution of the first nations' numerous needs.

We have yet to take the first step. The Conservatives, both those on the committee and here in Parliament, with all the means at their disposal, are trying to prevent the adoption of this self-government agreement, called a self-government framework agreement. They used dilatory measures in committee. Now, they are continuing by introducing amendments irrelevant to what we intend this agreement to do. They will probably keep it up as long as possible. They will probably also ensure that, if the election is called, Parliament does

not adopt before prorogation this Westbank first nation self-government agreement. This is a terrible shame.

I want to come back to the Conservatives' amendment. I ask members to listen carefully. It is essential to read it carefully to see that it was illogical:

The force of law—

That is good.

In the bill before the House, subsection 3(2) states,

Persons and bodies have the powers, rights, privileges and benefits conferred on them by the Agreement and are subject to the obligations and liabilities imposed on them by the Agreement.

What the Conservatives were proposing was to strike this clause. Striking this clause is essentially abrogating the whole agreement. How can we adopt an agreement that confers no rights, powers, privileges or benefits to the communities identified in the agreement? This is illogical.

We know that 71% of first nations communities across Canada are currently being represented at 80 negotiating tables and that many years of work past and to come have been planned in order to reach a self-government agreement. People from the Westbank First Nation have worked very hard, drawing on a heightened social conscience to liberate the first nation from a position of underdevelopment. When a first nation such as Westbank has done its work well, then we can only disagree with measures such as the ones being proposed by the Conservatives that make absolutely no sense and are completely retrograde.

• (1045)

What is more, other self-government agreements will end here. I have the impression that the Conservatives will make other attempts to undermine these self-government agreements. It is a kind of knee-jerk reaction. They criticize first nations for being underdeveloped, unable to do anything about it, and dependent on the government. However, when presented with a self-government agreement, they object.

What do they want? Do they want first nations to remain utterly dependent, with an Indian Act that dates back 130 years and bears a strong resemblance to an apartheid law, or do they want things to change?

If they want things to change then we must act quickly. Six years have passed since the royal commission report was tabled. That leaves 14 years to settle all the cases if we want to implement the recommendations. There are cases and situations of unbelievable urgency.

With respect to drinking water alone, most first nations territories have problems with their water supply. It is hard to imagine that today, in 2004, in a developed country, there could be a situation where problems exist with the drinking water supply. This situation is pervasive for first nations.

Government Orders

In terms of housing as well, it is quite incredible. I have personally had the opportunity to visit a number of aboriginal communities, and what I have seen is a disaster. At Weymontachie alone, for example, there are 113 houses and all 113 of them are under attack from chronic mould problems. These houses are overpopulated.

This morning, Mr. Fontaine, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, told us that there are currently 93,000 housing units on reserves, but there are 113,000 households. We can see this is an extraordinary shortage, and, in addition, most of the older housing stock needs renovations. Some houses need to be demolished because of the problems I have just mentioned.

At Barriere Lake, it is unbelievable: floors have completely rotted out. Vermin enter the houses, and children have to be put up in hammocks out of their reach.

These are emergency situations. When will the Conservatives understand that we must stop stalling properly negotiated self-government projects, with all the guarantees they may have, even for the municipality of Kelowna, because the time is up? That is not what must be done. The self-government process must be accelerated, and it must be done with enthusiasm. The same should be done with modern treaties so that first nations communities can benefit from economic development.

As you know, I am an economist, so I regularly follow the statistics on the economic development of Quebec and Canada, on employment, increased household wealth, investments in strategic sectors and so on. It has always struck me, particularly in the past two years since becoming the critic on this issue, that there is one segment of the population that cannot gain anything from this economic development.

Now, it has been given an opportunity to do so, and there will be others. The Innu of Quebec are well into the negotiating process. This situation must be addressed head on, with as much vigour and determination as one would use in defending one's own family members. We must be sure that, within 10 or 15 years, there will be no more problems with the first nations, and that they will be able to govern themselves, to develop, and to share in the benefits of economic growth.

There must be no more systematic obstruction on trivial grounds. This is a complete disgrace, and not appropriate behaviour by this Parliament. Nor by anyone else. It is inhumane to leave part of the aboriginal population in abject poverty, with undrinkable water and inadequate housing, with multiple drug use among their youth, and, in certain communities, with over 75% unemployment.

• (1050)

If there is any humanity at all left among the Conservatives, or in other words if even a few members have a social conscience, the only thing that can be done is to step up the entire process of self-government so that we can all develop in harmony.

We will therefore be voting against these amendments.

[English]

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we in the NDP also intend to vote against the amendment put forth by the Conservative Party, a party that is constantly trying to

deny the rights of aboriginal people in this country. Negotiations went on over a long period of time regarding the Westbank bill. A very good agreement was reached and we intend to support the agreement in the House.

I do not want to go into details about this particular agreement except to say that we see many aboriginal people living in third world conditions in this country. The member for Yukon knows that. I have 12 first nations in my own riding as well. One of the big failures of Canadian society over the years has been not making sure that the first nations people, the Métis people, the aboriginal peoples in general, have a better standard of living and have the opportunities that are provided to many other people in the Canadian mainstream.

What we hear is the Conservative Party saying in a very misleading way that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms would not apply to people of the Westbank First Nation.

I spent 10 years as the NDP's constitutional spokesperson during the patriation debate in the formulation of a Canadian Charter of Rights. My friend from Yellowknife was part of two of those five or six committees over the years. She will remember the constant debates. She will also remember her disappointment with the Trudeau government when it first tabled the patriation package in the House of Commons. There was no reference at all to treaty rights or aboriginal rights in the original package tabled by the Government of Canada.

It was because of the NDP and our negotiations that treaty rights were put in the Constitution of Canada. That took a long time. It was a long struggle. Treaty rights in the Constitution of Canada were one thing that our party negotiated at all party committees and elsewhere. We made sure they were provided in the Constitution of Canada. Today there are treaty rights and recognition of the royal proclamation in Canada's Constitution. We have begun a long, long process of trying to evolve treaty rights in this country.

The Conservative Party member from Vancouver has suggested in his amendment that the charter would not apply to the people of the Westbank First Nation because of the agreement. I want to assure the House that this is totally and absolutely untrue. The charter applies to every Canadian citizen. This is really ironic coming from the same party that kept the House going day and night for several days a few years ago, forcing the House to vote hundreds of times on amendments to stop the Nisga'a treaty. It was one of the most disgusting performances I have seen in the House of Commons since I was elected in 1968.

The Conservative Party is really the alliance party, which was the reform party, which was the social credit party. In my province it is called the Saskatchewan Party. At one time it was the progressive conservative party, now minus the progressive side, so it is now the regressive conservative party. It was also the conservative-reform-alliance party, or CRAP. That party goes on and on as it changes its name, trying to hide from its true values of conservatism, which is a very unpopular ideology in Canada.

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Once again that party is moving an amendment that is striking away at aboriginal rights, striking away at aboriginal people. That is the same party that wanted to lead our country into Iraq, to have Canadian troops go into Iraq following George Bush very blindly. That is the Conservative Party of Canada, on the extreme right, the republican party north in this country. That party is at it once again.

I do not know if those members know anything about the charter, but section 25 states, and I quote:

The guarantee in this Charter of certain rights and freedoms shall not be construed so as to abrogate or derogate from any aboriginal, treaty or other rights or freedoms that pertain to the aboriginal peoples of Canada including

- (a) any rights or freedoms that have been recognized by the Royal Proclamation of October 7, 1763; and
- (b) any rights or freedoms that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired.

We are very proud to have some aboriginal rights and aboriginal guarantees in our Constitution. We are also very proud that the charter applies to aboriginal people, to all Canadians, to every Canadian. It is very important that we do this.

• (1055)

I should also point out that some of these more extreme Conservatives say we should not just rely on the charter being interpreted but we should use the notwithstanding clause on certain issues where a problem overrides the charter and overrides the fundamental freedoms of this country. We have heard them say that before on a number of issues. Some raise it on abortion. Some raise it on same sex marriage. That is the history of the Conservative Party, not the Progressive Conservative Party but the alliance-conservative-reform party. That is its history: extreme conservative positions that do not stand up for minority rights. These are not the values of the Canadian people.

The Canadian people want aboriginal rights in this country. The Canadian people want aboriginal self-government. The aboriginal people certainly want—

Mr. John Cummins: Explain. What does it mean?

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: The Conservative member across the way says to explain the Westbank agreement. The Westbank agreement is very clear. I happen to know a fair amount about the charter. I spent 10 years working on constitutional issues in all the committees and I have already explained to him that the charter applies to every Canadian citizen. No act of this Parliament can trump the Charter of Rights and Freedoms unless the notwithstanding clause is invoked or unless there is a constitutional amendment.

Mr. John Cummins: Explain what it means. You don't have a clue.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, those members do not have a clue as to what they are talking about. If we want to amend the Constitution of Canada so that it does not apply to a certain group of people, we must have a constitutional amendment passed. That takes at least 50% of the provinces representing two-thirds of the people and a resolution that passes in the House of Commons and passes in the Senate. That is how the Constitution of the country is changed.

Now if we wanted to exclude another provision from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, we could use the notwithstanding clause.

There is nothing in this agreement that trumps the charter. We will not find any constitutional lawyer who will agree with this hocus-pocus argument being put forth by this alliance-conservative group of extreme people in this Parliament. Nobody agrees with them except a few of their own folks.

Once again what we have here is an example of the Conservative Party standing up against the evolution in this country of first nations people and their rights, standing up against the right of self-government like they did against the Nisga'a treaty. Let us look at the history of some of these folks elected in Saskatoon—Humboldt in the last election, including a member who has taken a stand against the basic fundamental rights of aboriginal people. That is the kind of people who have been elected.

If we ask aboriginal people what they think of the reform-alliance-conservative party, they know where they stand. Once again, on the eve of an election campaign, those members come in here and want to defeat an agreement on self-government, this one for the Westbank First Nation people.

I must say that I want to compliment the Conservative Party members for at least being so honest and so direct about not believing in aboriginal rights. They have fought this tooth and nail for the last 20 or 30 years in this country. I have mentioned already the Nisga'a treatment and that disgraceful performance we had here in the House of Commons a few years ago when the Nisga'a people sat in the gallery and the Alliance—or Reform in those days, as their name keeps changing so often—forced the House to vote time and time again, wasting hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money in a procedural fight, making us sit day in and day night in a fight against the Nisga'a treaty.

The Nisga'a treaty went through with the support of four of the five parties in the House, including that of the Progressive Conservative Party, not this regressive Conservative Party we see today. It was supported not just by the aboriginal people, but by the people of this country.

Loudly and clearly I wish to say to aboriginal people what they already know: that the Conservative Party over there is not a party that pushes their rights but a Conservative Party that will fight tooth and nail every day against the inherent right of self-government for first nations people in this country, against the rights of this minority group that has not had its full share in the development of Canada as a nation.

I hope we vote down this amendment in overwhelming numbers.

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to speak to Amendment No. 3, which of course is my amendment and deals with section 102 of the agreement.

Section 102 of the agreement is about the additional reserve lands. What this basically states is that:

subject to Canada's policy for additions to reserve, as amended from time to time, lands acquired by Westbank First Nation may be transferred to Canada for the purpose of being set apart as lands reserved for Indians—

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My amendment requests that this clause include the specifics and recognize the reality that Westbank is contiguous with, adjacent to and across the floating bridge from the city of Kelowna. The city of Kelowna, although it is very supportive of this Westbank agreement, the Westbank government and the Westbank community and wants the community to fully prosper and succeed, also wants some certainty that should Westbank acquire lands within the community of Kelowna, it would have the ultimate consent as to whether or not those lands could be put into reserve status under the federal umbrella, because that would have the effect of taking them from taxable status into non-taxable status.

The city just wants to be able to control that. It is clear from the committee minutes and the appearance at committee of the mayor of Kelowna, Walter Gray, that this is not to say, even under current political leadership in both communities, which is very cooperative and very happy with the status quo, that there might not be a circumstance where Kelowna would be quite willing and happy to comply with reserve status, such as if Westbank would be, for example, building a museum or some other such building, an institution or public place that would bring economic benefit to the community.

I have had discussions within the committee, outside of committee, and today again with the parliamentary secretary. This is a very interesting dynamic, because there were times in these long negotiations with Westbank where the federal government probably did not appreciate how much was being done by the municipal level of government in British Columbia in this area of the Okanagan to keep these negotiations and the self-government agreement on track and to make sure that it reflected the pragmatic things the municipal level of government wanted to see which would make this a workable agreement.

There has been a lot of behind the scenes, volunteer, dedicated work done by many people at the municipal level, either at the regional district or within the city of Kelowna, which has been very proactive on this. They are at the point where they are asking for one thing. I hear the parliamentary secretary basically saying that we cannot cede power to a municipal level of government. I do not see it that way. This is not ceding power to a municipal level of government; it is recognizing a legitimate stakeholder.

• (1100)

When we brought this general discussion to committee, the chief of the Westbank First Nation was clearly on side with the concept. I will quote Chief Louie from the standing committee evidence of Wednesday, March 10:

I can assure you very clearly that the self-government agreement would apply to reserve lands and if we were to look [at] downtown Kelowna, let's say, look to you and say to you, Mayor, council members will you agree to give us 10 acres of reserve here in downtown Kelowna, I would expect, as you've clearly indicated, that your answer would be no. What would happen is we would need to approach the province of British Columbia. The province is required to give their consent and according to the additions to reserve land policy, they would be required to come to you and to the city and to local government, the community, to ask whether or not you would agree. If you did not agree, I think the answer would be very simple; there would be no reserve in downtown Kelowna, as simple as that. That's how we see the agreement and that is clearly enunciated in the agreement context itself.

Chief Robert Louie of the Westbank First Nation was speaking at committee to Mayor Walter Gray of the city of Kelowna via the committee process.

I think the intent there is all we need is certainty that goes beyond the current edition of the reserve policy of the federal government. Policies can and do change. The leadership at Westbank can change. The leadership at the city of Kelowna can change. The federal government can change. A number of things can change.

There was a suggestion by the parliamentary secretary that somehow adding this kind of clause to section 102 would dilute 102, but I refuse to accept that as a reality. If there was any suggestion of that, we could certainly work that out.

The other suggestion is that somehow we cannot have one statement in this agreement that is different from the ATR policy for the rest of the country. I beg to differ. We are creating individual self-government agreements for individual bands. Presumably that means we could have as many as 633 agreements throughout Canada. If we can have 633 separate agreements that are contemplated by the government, then why can we not have more than one agreement when it comes to municipalities?

We have the seeds of a problem here that go back to the old federal-provincial arena. Reserves are a federal creation under the Indian Act and under the Constitution. Municipalities are a provincial creation. Rather than add to that divide, this very straightforward and simple amendment could be utilized to bring the parties together.

Despite the fact that we now have committee evidence from the House of Commons all-party committee studying this legislation where the parliamentary secretary is on record as saying this would never happen without the city of Kelowna's consent, we have the chief's agreement. We have now entered that into *Hansard* through this exercise. I would still suggest that the certainty of having that in the agreement itself would be simple, straightforward and quite agreeable.

• (1105)

Another thing I want to briefly touch upon is Motion No. 1 by my colleague on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The intent of the agreement is that the Charter of Rights applies. Any difficulties that come in the way of pre-empting that would be a problem that we have with the Constitution. I do not want to see the Westbank agreement become the whipping boy for problems we have with our Constitution.

Although I appreciate the fact that we have shone a light on some of the problems of section 25 of the charter in terms of protecting collective rights as opposed to individual rights, that is not something that is brought to us because of the Westbank agreement.

• (1110)

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a number of issues are related to this. The amendments themselves have to be considered and also the broader question.

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I want to say at the outset of my remarks that I appreciate the fact that we can have an arena of open debate. The NDP may be surprised to hear my comments on this particular piece of legislation, but when I hear the type of remarks I have heard from the NDP, when members diminish this debate to name calling, to questioning people's most basic and fundamental intents and beliefs, it does a disservice not only to the people in this chamber, but certainly to the people in my constituency and across Canada. When the NDP raise the bogeyman, the ominous picture of someone who is fundamentally against a group of Canadians, aboriginal or non-aboriginal, it does not do a service to this debate.

I want to be on the record as saying that I reject that type of approach. The arguments of people on either side of the equation need to be heard. However, I will not diminish other people and their basic respect for human beings based on where they stand on this particular agreement.

I recall when I was first in the constituency and met with the chief of the Westbank First Nation. It was not Chief Robert Louie; it was another gentleman. I was running into this type of accusation that we hear from, not all, but some of the people in the NDP. There were accusations about my accepting other people as basic human beings.

I appreciated the remarks made to me by the chief. He said that he did not believe that I was anti anyone. He said that he did not believe that I was anti-aboriginal. I said that of course I was not, but in the light of some of these baseless accusations, I was interested in why he had that positive view of me. The chief said it was because when I was the minister in Alberta responsible for aboriginal affairs he had talked to the chiefs there. The chiefs had said that I was a man to be trusted and a man who respects them. I appreciate that evaluation. I have the same evaluation of the present chief and council. We may agree or disagree on some of these items. However, I have that evaluation of them and I stand firmly and proudly on that.

There are feelings in our country about particular rights that have been given to us. There are feelings about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and what it says. Pros and cons have been expressed. The fact of the matter is that we have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Some may think it is a good thing and others may think we are stuck with it. At the very minimum we are stuck with it and we will live with it until there are certain changes.

For instance, I have heard the claim that there is this mass abrogation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms because of this agreement. Let us suppose that a person were to walk into a group of people and make that claim, and those people were already sensitized about the charter, as I am, and I have some problems with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, if those people were already sensitized and on edge about the charter and a person were to simply walk into a room and say that the WFN agreement gave no protection at all to people under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, there would be an immediate and quick reaction. There would be people who would be very upset and would say that there was no way that we should support this agreement.

We need to look at some of these in light of the amendments that we have. It is very clear here that the charter applies to the band and to the non-band members living at Westbank in the same way. We

might not like this analysis, but this is the fact, whether under the Indian Act or under the WFN agreement and this is a direct quote:

The government of Westbank First Nation and Council in respect of all matters under its authority are bound by the provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

People might not like the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The fact of the matter is, they are bound by that. The WFN and its council members are bound by that.

Section 25 of the charter has some specific limitations related to that bundle of aboriginal rights that are available to them under the charter. In the Westbank agreement there is a necessity on their part, and I understand their concern, to simply restate what the charter says. Section 25 of the charter cannot be changed or avoided by legislated action. It would require a constitutional change.

• (1115)

They reiterate and repeat that. It is a repetition of what is in the charter. If I had written this agreement, there may be words I would have crafted and phrased differently, but I do not accept that the WFN agreement gives the WFN and council carte blanche exemption from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It simply does not. That is just plain and obvious.

People who moved onto these lands years and years ago realized and recognized that as non-natives they had limitations, and they accepted that. Over the years, why would some 7,500 people and some 200 businesses move onto an area of land if they felt they were hanging on a precipice and that at any moment their rights would be gone and they would lose their homes and businesses? What could attract 200 people to invest their businesses and lives on an area of land unless they had some sense of credibility of the people there and some sense that their rights would be respected? They moved there knowing they did not have taxation with representation, in the sense that we have it on non-native lands.

I am a fierce protector of taxation with representation. Revolutions have been fought on the issue of taxation without representation. I sometimes look at the way the federal government taxes people and say that if they think taxation without representation is bad, they should look at what we have with taxation with representation. We can go either way on that.

Obviously, I support and vigorously fight for taxation with representation. When people moved onto those lands years ago and even recently, they knew they were going on those lands without the same representation that we had on non-native lands, and they accepted that. In spite of that, WFN looked at that. The agreement does not say that they have the same full rights as non-natives who live in other municipalities. However, it is wrong to suggest there is no avenue now for them under the agreement to be represented or for them to have opportunities to challenge WFN rulings.

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As a matter of fact, and this is somewhat precedent setting, section 54 of the agreement requires the Westbank First Nation to pass a law that provides non-members living on Westbank lands or having an interest in Westbank lands, that is with a business, with mechanisms through which they may have input into proposed Westbank law and proposed amendments to Westbank law that directly and significantly affect them. That was not there before the agreement. They have more access with the agreement.

Another concern that has been raised, one which I believe is a red herring, suggests that people will not have protection under British Columbia law. I will read from the charter and the Westbank agreement. There is continuing charter protection and the agreement provides that any prosecutions under Westbank law, and this could include a non-native, will be heard in the provincial court of British Columbia. Any person charged with a violation of Westbank law will have his or her case heard in the B.C. courts.

Areas of concern which we are still pressing to have addressed, and we are still talking to the government about these, are areas raised by the mayor of Kelowna. I still want some further analysis. As we are debate this today, I still want some further discussion on this. I suggest the amendment proposed by my colleague is not detrimental to the rights of the aboriginal people on the Westbank First Nation or in other possible bands. I do not think it abrogates their rights in any way.

I also have concerns, which I will present at the third reading stage, related to native members on the Westbank First Nation who want to ensure that the diversity even of spiritual beliefs in that particular area are fully recognized. We have the diversity in our Canadian Constitution which recognizes the supremacy of God and allows for diversity of cultural tradition as well as religious belief and practices. That has been raised, and I want to pursue that issue further.

On these broad questions of charter rights, taxation rights and rights available under the courts, this gives non-natives even greater protection than they had when they chose to move there earlier because they had good faith in what existed then. This is an enhancement which some members of the native community probably would say of the WFN people that they were going too far. However, the chief, the band and the people who are advancing this are taking extra steps to show their good faith and goodwill by allowing this extra added layer of democracy to non-natives who are living there.

I look forward to future ongoing debate on this, and also the remarks at third reading.

• (1120)

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to enter the discussion on Bill C-11 and the amendment currently before the House. I certainly support the amendment proposed by the hon. member.

With regard to Bill C-11 and the implementation of the Westbank self-government agreement, I would like to make it clear that I have the utmost respect for the current band council and its chief. They have done an exemplary job of developing and managing the band. I

have had many occasions to talk with the chief and work with him. He is doing an admirable job. He is the current chief, but there has been a succession of good management in the Indian band.

That however does not mean I am in complete agreement with the provisions of the Westbank self-government agreement and Bill C-11, which gives effect to the implementation of that agreement.

The major concern I have is with the representation of those governed by those who are governing. Away back a president of the United States defined democracy as by the people, of the people and for the people. There is a provision within the Westbank self-government agreement that differentiates between those who can vote and those who cannot vote. The government structure is such that a group of people will govern the people on the Westbank lands who have not elected by all the people being governed.

Therefore, there is an element of disparity and inconsistency between what we have commonly accepted as the democratic principle; that those who are governed ought to have a voice in determining who will be charged with the governing of that group. My hon. colleague just pointed out that there is a provision for the advisory council. I will get into that in a little more detail later on.

Before I do that, I want to indicate clearly that those who are allowed to vote in this provision of the self-government agreement are those who are on the membership roll. To get on to the membership roll, it is absolutely important that we recognize that these people are "registered" as Indians under the Indian Act. Thus any and all residents on Westbank lands who are not on the membership roll are disenfranchised. They cannot vote. This means there are about 8,000 residents on the Westbank lands, about 500 of whom are Indians and 7500 who are not. Therefore, essentially 500 people will elect those who will govern the 7,500 as well as their own 500.

The practical impact of this is that any law, regulation, administrative action or band council decision is determined without electoral representation on that council of about 93% of the residents. In the day to day operation of the Westbank self-government agreement any law regarding property taxes, licensing fees, user fees, development cost charges, development permit fees, community infrastructure and local services are all without representation on the council. Yet that council determines all the issues with regard to these.

While there is a provision for that advisory council to provide consultation, and that is the word that is used, on behalf of the non-members of the Westbank Nation, it has no authority or power to make any decisions regarding the Westbank Nation governance affecting them. Yes, it can give advice and yes it can study the issues, and I think it is a wonderful provision, but it has no authority to do anything.

It is very interesting that yesterday I was given a copy of a document entitled, "Westbank First Nation Advisory Council, March 2004", and there are a number of subsections in it. It was given to me with the understanding that it was the law that would cover the advisory council. There is a lot of very useful work in it, and I do not want to disparage it in any way, shape or form. However, my only concern is that it is incomplete.

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●(1125)

I think we are moving in the right direction, but it is incomplete so I would like to perhaps get into some of the details as to what is in the document.

The creation of the advisory council is not part of Bill C-11 nor is it part of the Westbank self-government agreement. The constitution pertaining to that agreement really is all part of Bill C-11. The advisory council would be created after that agreement and subject to whatever the council at that time felt it wanted to do.

I have complete faith, but I have a dilemma. We have an excellent band council and chief, and I believe he will do this. However, I also know that Bill C-11 does not cover it. This is a result of actions taken by the council itself subsequent to the agreements if Bill C-11 is passed.

There is no description for example of the composition of the advisory council, how its members will be determined, what resources will be provided to them or what the advisory council relationship will be with the band. Yes, the general statements are there and there is provision that certain things will happen, but there is no guarantee that will be the case.

Some of these things are addressed in the document, however, the document is incomplete and its official status is unclear. Even if the advisory council were to function exactly as outlined in the document before me today, the advisory council would not meet the requirement of a democratic form of government. It is advisory only and really does not represent the electorate as such. It really does not have any legislative power. In my view, that is sufficient reason for the Government of Canada to recognize the excellent work that has been done in establishing the agreement thus far and recognize that we are moving in the right direction. However, at the same time, it must recognize that the work is not finished.

We need to go further. We need to explore some of the issues. The amendment with regard to the concerns expressed by the mayor of Kelowna is only one example. I have given another example of why we probably should take the bill off the agenda and look at it again. Probably a lot more work needs to be done so we can come to grips with and recognize the democratic principle to which we all adhere.

I have a lot of material and I obviously do not have time to cover it all. Therefore, I will move to the last part of my speech which has to do with the prohibition.

It is very interesting that section 220(a) of the Westbank self-government agreement provides for the prohibition of the sale, barter, supply, manufacture or possession of intoxicants. However, section 220(b) allows the Westbank natives to make exemptions with regard to any of the above. On the one hand, we have prohibition of intoxicants and on the other hand, we have exemptions. In practical contemporary terms that means that marijuana could be exempted. Persons on Westbank lands would be able to grow, possess and supply marijuana in direct conflict with the current laws of Canada.

In the light of the forgoing, however, it goes even further. Section 221 states:

—in the event of a conflict between Westbank Law in relation to prohibition of intoxicants and federal law, the Westbank Law shall prevail to the extent of the conflict.

●(1130)

This agreement will create, if it is allowed to proceed as it is currently before us, a third level of government which gives to the Westbank nation the right to legislate in areas that are really under the authority of and the power of the federal or provincial government.

Our Constitution does not see any other powers. We are governed by the Constitution of Canada which clearly differentiates between federal and provincial law, and there is no other power. How can it now give power to another group—power which has already been given either to the federal or provincial governments?

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if this bill were ever to pass through this House, it would provide a livelihood for lawyers for decades into the future.

We hear disagreement just in this House among those of us who have actually read the agreement. I wonder if the NDP member who had a rant in here earlier, calling people's names, had actually read the agreement. If so, he would have seen that there are plenty of areas for disagreement. Certainly, among the legal profession there is huge disagreement about how much of the charter applies and how much it does not.

One thing that everybody seems to be agreed upon is that this bill, if it were to pass, would establish a third order of government in Canada, and with that would come tremendous problems. This is a country that argued actively against apartheid in South Africa which had race-based governments. Here we are talking in this House about perpetuating a system of government that does not treat everybody in Canada as equals. It treats people separately based upon their race. That is a fundamental problem that I see with all of the legislation that has been coming through this place to do with aboriginal affairs.

I will not accept it as the right thing to do, to separate people based upon their ethnic background and create governments based upon ethnic backgrounds. I know that many of my constituents feel the same way and I simply cannot vote for things that would do that.

I will stand up for the equality of all Canadians at all times in this place. We should be working together with governments to provide services for everyone in Canada. For example, in the underlying agreement of this bill, there was one thing that jumped right off the front page at me. The regulations that would be created under this legislation by the band are exempt from scrutiny.

If we were to extend this to a number of other bands in B.C.—if they were to adopt the same sort of approach and get it approved in this House—we would end up with dozens of different governments completely isolated from one another, all passing regulations which are not open to scrutiny and cannot be challenged in any way whatsoever. That is a fundamental problem with this agreement as well and I have a major problem with that.

We can talk all day in this place, using legalese which many of our constituents may not understand. I would like to reduce this to a little bit of plain language. Perhaps one of the best ways to do that is to read into the record an article that was written by Gordon Gibson in the *Vancouver Sun* on March 22, 2004. It gives a very good description from a layperson's perspective of what is wrong with this bill.

Hon. Ethel Blondin-Andrew: He is not a layperson.

Mr. Ted White: One of the government members yelled out that Gordon Gibson is not a layperson. I agree. That is correct and my comment could have been interpreted incorrectly. What I meant was that for a layperson to read this article, that layperson would get a really good feel for what this whole thing is all about. Mr. Gibson wrote, and I agree with his first line wholeheartedly:

Ottawa continues to blunder its way into the future in its British Columbia operations.

There is absolutely no sensitivity whatsoever to the fact that in British Columbia we have more native Indian bands than anywhere else in the entire country. We have a huge issue in the settlement of land claims and treaties here. It is simply not good enough to do this one by one, with different procedures creating different governments.

A study that was released yesterday by the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation described the problems on reserves despite the huge amounts of money that have been pumped into the system. In the decade since I have been here, I have heard so many promises from that side of the House, from the members sitting opposite, about how things will be improved, that we just need more money, we need another program, and we need to do more of this. The problems have gotten worse. The things we have done have made it get worse.

Australia has just abandoned part of its aboriginal strategy. It is cancelling the commission on aboriginal affairs in Australia, after spending billions of dollars and having the problems get worse. We should be learning from these examples in other countries and from our own example. It is a disgrace that in Canada, right in my own riding in the third largest city in all of Canada, the living conditions on reserves are disgraceful. It is not for lack of money because the band earns more than \$30 million a year from its investments, right in the third largest city in Canada.

• (1135)

By passing this type of legislation, all we do is perpetuate the problems. We do not fix them. We do not help people get jobs on the reserves. We do not help them be part of Canadian society. We cause them to live separately and to perpetuate the problems.

I had my own little rant there, but I am going to return now to Mr. Gibson's article. The latest example of blundering, according to Mr. Gibson, is the Westbank first nation government act. He states:

At first glance, this is a minor piece of legislation for a small community outside Kelowna. But in fact it cements the legal basis for a constitutionalized parallel system of Indian governments across the country. It also means that much of [the Prime Minister's] promised fundamental review of Indian policy is dead on arrival.

The legislation also has important negative implications for the democratic and Charter rights of the 8,000 non-Indian citizens of Westbank who, voteless and denied self-government for themselves in this allegedly "Self-Government Act," will be ruled by the roughly 400 members of the band.

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In the agreement implemented by this bill, Ottawa, for the first time, explicitly "recognizes that the inherent right of self-government is an existing right within section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982".

Then, astonishingly, the legislation declines to define what the "inherent right" means or contains, and indeed states that "the parties to this agreement acknowledge that they may have different legal views as to the scope and content of an inherent right of self-government".

That was the point I made right at the beginning. This is fodder for lawyers for decades to come. We will not know where we stand on this agreement for decades because of the disagreement of what it truly means in terms of charter rights. He goes on to state:

Think about it. We all have an "inherent right" to govern ourselves, each of us. But to collectivize this on the basis of ancestry?

That is what this bill does.

Section 35 is the part of the Constitution which protects aboriginal rights.

By virtue of section 35, the Supreme Court of Canada has displaced Parliament as the final maker of Indian law in Canada. The word "displaced" is used intentionally. The framers of the 1982 constitutional amendments avowedly intended nothing like the judicial adventurism which the courts have shown in making Indian law since then.

But most unusually in this Westbank agreement, Ottawa has moved farther out into left field than the Supremes have yet dreamed.

He goes on to describe a single court case in British Columbia where Justice Paul Williamson of the B.C. Supreme Court found, and he is the only person, any basis for a third order of government of the kind stipulated in this agreement.

That particular judgment involved a case that was brought by the Liberal Party of British Columbia prior to it becoming the government in British Columbia. It was related to the Nisga'a agreement under which the Liberal Party was challenging the constitutionality of that agreement. Unfortunately, when the Liberal government was elected in British Columbia, it decided not to appeal this rather unusual and alarming ruling. The unusual finding was never appealed, but no other court in Canadian history has found anything like this. Indeed, a century of jurisprudence disagrees, including the B.C. Court of Appeal, which in the Delgamuukw decision found exactly the opposite concerning a third order of government.

As I started out saying at the beginning, the real problem with this bill is the third order of government. The establishment of an order of government that can set its own legislation and regulations, which are not open to scrutiny, and extrapolating that to the total number of Indian bands in British Columbia and giving them all the same structure would be a nightmare in British Columbia. There would be multiple governments all operating independently with their own sets of regulations, uncoordinated in any way and not open to any scrutiny or challenge by anyone.

It is wrong. We should not be passing a law like this. We should be concentrating our efforts on improving the living conditions for aboriginals on reserves by helping them become part of Canadian society, not by isolating them and consistently making them different from mainstream Canada. It is unacceptable to me and I could never vote for a bill like this.

Government Orders

● (1140)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise this morning and address the amendments at report stage to Bill C-11, an act to give effect to the Westbank first nation self-government agreement.

I would like to make a couple of statements at the outset of my remarks. To begin with, this bill is only some six pages long. It is quite a concise bill. There is not a lot to it. I think any member of the public could understand what it is that we are talking about today.

Specifically, I would like to address Motion No. 1 in the name of my colleague from Delta, which basically amends Bill C-11 by deleting clause 3 which is the implementation of the bill itself.

In consultation with my colleague from Delta, he was disappointed that his amendment dealing with the charter provisions was not allowed to proceed and instead, this amendment was the only one that he had submitted that was allowed to stand. He would have liked to have debated the issue of how the bill relates to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Indeed, we are not prevented from doing that within the confines of the existing amendments and I will refer to that a bit later.

During some remarks earlier in the debate, the parliamentary secretary for Indian Affairs and Northern Development said that if someone wanted to change this bill, they should lobby to change the entire government policy, not just one clause in this act. While I would agree with him, obviously, that is not the basis of the debate today. Indeed, that debate will be taking place probably fairly quickly. Whenever the Prime Minister calls the election, we can have a debate about replacing this failed government's policy in connection with aboriginal people.

I also want to make some reference at the outset to the NDP member for Regina—Qu'Appelle who used his 10 minutes to launch a vitriolic rant against Conservative members in the House of Commons and really did not address the bill or the amendments before us today whatsoever.

As my colleague from Okanagan—Coquihalla said, I do not think that adds to the debate for someone to stand up and just go on a personal rant against one member or a party, based on misinformation, I might add. I do not think that helps us with this debate.

To say that this issue is controversial would be stating the obvious. Last weekend I was in my riding as were the majority of MPs. I had the opportunity to man a booth at a trade fair in my home town in the City of Fort St. John where usually somewhere between 8,000 and 10,000 local citizens attend that fair over the three days of the weekend. A number of them expressed some great reservations about this bill. As their member of Parliament, I would like to raise those concerns in the debate today.

The first thing, as has been said by a number of speakers, are the deep concerns about the whole business of taxation without representation. When we look at the bill, we see that 8,000-odd non-native residents who are currently or will be living on a reserve will not have a say in the governing and in the passing of bylaws by that body that will govern that piece of property.

● (1145)

Something is inherently wrong when an act takes away people's right to vote for their own representation and to have some means to affect those who govern over them.

As has already been noted, there is provision for an advisory council but the key word there is "advisory". This council would only be providing advice. I would argue that it certainly does not take the place of people having the right to mark a ballot. Just to make that point, I do not think too many Canadians out there would trade their right to mark a ballot in either a municipal, provincial or federal election for the right to appear before and make comments and suggestions to an advisory board. I do not think too many Canadians would willingly give up their right to cast their ballots for that type of process.

The second issue, to which a number of MPs on both sides of the House have spoken, is that the bill would institute an unconstitutional third level of government. I am reminded that I was one of those MPs who was quite active prior to my election to this place in 1993. We had a constitutional amendment called the Charlottetown accord in 1992 that was voted on by the people of Canada and resoundingly defeated.

While we all recognize that there were a number of reasons that people voted either yes or no, those who voted no to the Charlottetown accord might have picked different things that they opposed in the agreement. A lot of people in my particular riding in northeastern British Columbia opposed the Charlottetown accord because of the undefined third order of government that would have been instituted in the Charlottetown accord.

Yet now we have the government moving forward with the act for the Westbank First Nation that would effectively do that. It would enshrine in law another order of government that would have considerably more powers than do municipalities, whether it is power over language and culture, natural resources, agriculture, the use of intoxicants on their property, education, medicine and the list goes on, this governing body would have the power to bring forward law which a municipality does not have.

As I said, I know, in speaking to a lot of my constituents, that they have a problem with the government moving ahead to institute a third level of government without the approval of the people of Canada.

One of the things we hear from both sides of the House is that there is a force in our country today that wants to see fundamental change to the way in which we interact with the aboriginal peoples in Canada. One of the things I have heard, not only from our party but from other parties and, indeed, the governing party, is that we should do away with the Indian Act. We should get away from this archaic system of paternalism and move into a new era of how we deal with our aboriginal peoples. Our party, the Conservative Party of Canada, supports that wholeheartedly.

Government Orders

It seems rather ironic to me that at the very time that we should be questioning the way in which we structure reserves and the way in which we devolve power to reserve governments to hold the property unto themselves in commonality rather than in fee simple, to prevent the average aboriginal person in Canada from enjoying the pride that comes from owning his or her own home and property, that we seem to be moving away from that with this act. We seem to be moving away from what I would consider to be the inherent right to property.

I know we do not have property rights in Canada enshrined in our Constitution. It is one of the problems I have with our Constitution. I think we should have property rights and those property rights should be just as relevant for aboriginal people as they are for non-aboriginal people.

• (1150)

It seems to me that the legislation would move the aboriginal peoples of the Westbank First Nation further away from enjoying the same rights and privileges that other Canadians have.

For those three reasons I am voicing the concerns expressed to me by many of my constituents in Prince George—Peace River who have some very deep reservations about the bill.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill C-11, the Westbank first nation agreement.

My frustration with the entire bill and the debate is the fact that most of the discussions that centre on aboriginal affairs really do not deal with the fundamentals or the basic principles involved.

I would like to thank both the MP from Delta and the MP from Vancouver Island North for promoting discussion on this issue. I have noticed that it is primarily the Conservative Party that is discussing the pros and cons of it. However I think we need a bit more discussion on some of the basic principles that have to form the foundation for our dealings with aboriginal people.

The Prime Minister made some grand pronouncements in the last day or two about the need to address aboriginal concerns but he still refuses to get the basics right. I would like to explain what I mean by that.

Before I go ahead with that, I would like to read a bit of our party policy because it forms the basis for what I am going to say today.

The Conservative Party of Canada believes that self-government must occur within the context of the Constitution of Canada. To ensure fairness and equality, a Conservative government will ensure that the charter will apply to aboriginal self-government. Aboriginal self-government must not create a sovereign, third order of government.

The Conservative Party of Canada believes giving aboriginal government the power to raise their own revenues will reduce the cycle of dependency; and that the performance and accountability of aboriginal self-government is enhanced when those who receive services contribute to the cost of those services.

I will discuss the amendments put forward by my colleague from Delta in regard to that.

One amendment was disallowed, and that is primarily the one I want to discuss today. It was an important amendment and we should have taken another look at it.

Our policy statement says that the charter should apply and that aboriginal governments should have the power to raise their own revenues. We need to reduce the cycle of dependency. Let me focus in on that.

It is quite obvious that anyone who has been involved in this debate today cares about the aboriginal people. That is why we are here and that is why we are debating this. Except for some personal slurs by the NDP, I think we have stuck basically to the issues, and I appreciate that.

The point was made previously that there is within the bill the wording that the charter applies with due regard to section 25. That is a major concern for many of us who have looked at this.

I want to focus on the fact that our Charter of Rights and Freedoms is flawed because it omits one of the key essential rights needed in Canada and especially by those who are caught in the cycle of poverty and those who are living on reserves.

Poverty on reserves across Canada is a huge problem. I lived on a reserve for a couple of years so I have firsthand knowledge of how devastating this is to our aboriginal people.

The Department of Indian Affairs spends between \$7 billion and \$8 billion. If we were to divide this amount of money by the number of aboriginal people covered, it would likely come to more than \$15,000 for every man, woman and child. What we need to know is where the money is going.

Aside from that, do we have the fundamental principles, on which these agreements should be based, right? I would argue that is not the case because we have omitted a very key element from our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. What is that key element? We have not included property rights in the charter. In 1982, when Mr. Trudeau brought the charter in, he intentionally omitted it. I think that is a huge flaw and I will explain why. I am going to explain how important that is.

• (1155)

In arguing my case, I will turn to one of the world's leading experts on this issue who, by the way, has the support of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister underscored the fact that the principles enunciated by this man needed to be brought to Canada and implemented in Canada. This man is also supported by another prominent person in the western world, Mr. Bill Clinton. So these principles are not to be dismissed quickly as principles enunciated by someone of a certain partisan persuasion.

The man's name is Hernando de Soto. He is head of the Peru based Institute for Liberty and Democracy. He has authored some excellent books which I would recommend people read who are involved in the discussion on this Westbank agreement.

Time Magazine and *The Economist* have all explained and pegged Mr. de Soto as one of the emerging voices of influence and someone whose ideas will form the basis for future agreements. His ideas are having a huge influence on the world. It is about time we got some of those principles right here in Canada.

Government Orders

In simple terms, Mr. de Soto argues that property conquers poverty and it is the poor people who benefit most from property rights. "A poor person's land assets should be identified and should be registered", he argues, "and then they would have the assets on which to build wealth".

I do not have time in 10 minutes to explain that in detail but if members would like to get more information on this, I would suggest people who are arguing this issue do that because they will see that what I am saying is essential in getting our fundamentals right.

Mr. de Soto's ideas have been called innovative but they have been around for a long time. I think they are innovative simply because they fly in the face of traditional ideas about battling third world poverty. We see that third world poverty on our aboriginal reserves. The notion, for instance, that capitalism is a bad word and that the market economy is the enemy of the disadvantaged is something that he clearly disputes and shows that is not the case.

Mr. de Soto's ideas have been tested in his native Peru. They helped to enact property registration laws and systems in the Peruvian government during the 1990s. He still oversees that whole program in Peru. It is a very successful program and one that we should take a close look at.

Let me read some of the things that he has said.

Mr. de Soto said:

These people should be able to produce wealth. It means that you've got to ask, like we ask, what happens to the property rights, have they really got the tools to produce capital? What can we do about getting banks, which are not interested in them, interested in them—not because their hearts are going to palpitate for the poor, but because they're going to become a lot more interesting.

So much of traditional aid programs rest on paternalism and condescension...

That would describe what is happening in Canada today.

Mr. de Soto went on to say:

The traditional thing, Canadian aid, is about saying, 'Oh my God, there's four billion starving out there, let's go and make a difference among 10 million of them.' In other words, nothing that's really leveraged, nothing that really allows you to bring in anything new.

I would like to say that we should take this man's ideas and build some proper agreements on which to deal with the aboriginal situation in our country.

I want to conclude by saying that about 30 aboriginal women visited Parliament Hill recently but, unfortunately, there was very little media attention or coverage of this event. However one of the things they said is that property rights was one of the key issues that needed to be addressed in Canada.

Dawn Harvard, who was the Ontario president of the Native Women's Association, questioned whether the cases would get more attention about abuse of aboriginal people if they were not poor, drug addicted or working in the sex trade.

● (1200)

A key thing she said was that provincial property rights that govern fair distribution of assets during divorce disputes are not enforced on the more than 600 reserves in Canada. I would argue by extension that we need property rights right across the reserves. It has to happen.

In conclusion, other MPs have made it clear that this agreement is a lawyer's dream because we will turn over to the courts the big issue, such as defining self-government and inherent rights. Before we pass this piece of legislation, let us get our Charter of Rights and Freedoms right. Let us include property rights. It is the most important right needed for our aboriginal people.

Mr. Andy Burton (Skeena, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address this very important issue.

I come from British Columbia and probably have a different view on the whole situation with regard to treaties, land claims and agreements. The B.C. situation is quite different from that in the rest of Canada. Elsewhere treaties have been in place for a lot of years. In B.C. there were only two very small treaty areas prior to the Nisga'a agreement of some years ago. B.C. is wide open and subject to setting a lot of precedents for the future perceivably right across Canada.

I want to say right off the bat that I am very much in favour of resolving this whole land claim and native agreement issue. It is something that is seriously impeding progress especially in British Columbia where any project now has to be vetted by the local aboriginal group. I do not have a big problem with that, except that the vetting process should not be a veto process, which it tends to become from time to time. Resource development projects, which is usually what they are in my part of the world, affect people who live in the area and it is only right that they should have input. I am very concerned when that input for all intents and purposes becomes a veto. This is a huge concern.

Bill C-11 is intended as an act of Parliament to give effect to the Westbank First Nation self-government agreement. The Westbank First Nation is an Indian band within the meaning of the Indian Act. Its principal reserves, IR 9 and IR 10, are located in an area known as Westside adjacent to the city of Kelowna and the unincorporated community of Westbank. The population of the band is 594, 383 of whom lived on the land as of December 2002 but there may be a few more now.

The land is about 24 acres and is partially developed prime residential and industrial land. There are about, and I think this is a really important matter, 7,500 non-Westbank First Nation people who either live or own businesses on the land.

The purpose of the bill is to incorporate by reference the agreement, approve it and give it the effect of law. The agreement is defined as including any future amendments to the agreement. Thus, the bill incorporates by reference and gives the force of law to a document, part of which is not yet in existence. That has to be a major concern. How can we put something into force of law when we do not know how it will be worded or implemented?

This is known as Westbank law. It is to be enacted from time to time by the Westbank council. Westbank law on numerous subjects may be inconsistent with and will prevail over laws passed by Parliament.

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The Westbank First Nation has all the attributes of a self-governing enclave. Canadian citizens, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal, living or working there will be subject to a form of government that for most of them is not elected by them and is unrestrained by any of the checks, balances and safeguards that apply to other governmental institutions in Canada.

I quote lawyer Mr. Chris Harvey, who did a fairly significant in-depth review of this agreement:

The substance of the act is contained in the agreement of some 84 pages which is referentially incorporated in the act. This is a remarkable piece of legislation. It amounts to an abdication of the sovereign law-making and executive authority of the Crown in Parliament. Its effect on the people residing and working in Westbank is to remove many of the fundamental political and legal safeguards that support their freedoms and security. This is completely out of character in a modern liberal democracy committed to equality of opportunity and individual rights. It is surprising to see basic legal rights which have been acquired gradually over many years of political struggles being so abruptly discarded.

Many of the provisions of this legislation are contrary to accepted norms of parliamentary practice in Canada. Some of the provisions are so clearly inconsistent with such norms that they may be said to be unconstitutional in law.

• (1205)

Every citizen of Canada, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike, is entitled to be governed by laws which are passed or authorized by a democratically elected parliament, provincial legislature, or town council for that matter. Law-making authority may be delegated down to subordinate institutions, but it is not acceptable in such an arrangement that the subordinate institutions be authorized to supplant Parliament and Parliament's laws by passing laws that are inconsistent with the laws of Canada and prevail over them.

The municipal style government is obviously very successful and is the closest form of government to the citizens of Canada. I was the mayor of a small town for a number of years and was on council for 24 years. I certainly understand how answerable to the people municipal style government is. It is the most direct and closest form of government. It is still delegated down from the province and the federal government.

It has long been held by the highest court in Canadian law that constitutional powers in Canada are wholly and exhaustively distributed between the federal and provincial governments. The concept of a third order of government, though much discussed in economic and political circles, has never gained recognition in Canadian constitutional law.

The academic debate as to whether there exists in law an inherent right of self-government is reflected in section 1(a) of the agreement which provides:

The purpose of this agreement is to implement aspects of the inherent right of self-government by Westbank First Nation on Westbank lands based on the recognition that the inherent right of self-government is an existing aboriginal right within section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

The inference in this statement is that such a right was an existing aboriginal right when the Constitution was passed and that Parliament has been asked merely to recognize that fact in this section of the agreement. This is plainly incorrect.

In a recent case the Newfoundland Court of Appeal again affirmed the sovereignty of Parliament. In *Dawe v. the Town of Conception*

Bay South, the judge stated that Parliament and the provincial legislature are established by the Constitution as the supreme and only legislative bodies and given that all power must be founded on the Constitution there is no remaining room for inherent powers of government.

A concern with the Westbank agreement is the protection under the inherent clause that basically would set aside any right for non-aboriginals to make any sort of claim or go to court based on a constitutional matter. That is a big concern.

Although the agreement is expressly not a treaty, it is brought within section 35 of the Constitution Act by the government's recognition of the inherent right of self-government, as I have already said.

It must be remembered that all those living and working on Westbank lands, approximately 90% of whom are not aboriginal or members of the WFN at present, have their full rights and freedoms guaranteed under the charter. Section 15 of the charter provides:

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and the equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability.

The charter further provides:

Notwithstanding anything in this charter, the rights and freedoms referred to in it are guaranteed equally to male and female persons.

Without altering the legislative authority of Parliament or the provincial legislatures or the rights of any of them with respect to the exercise of their legislative authority, Parliament and the legislatures, together with the Government of Canada and the provincial governments are committed to promoting equal opportunities for the well-being of Canadians.

Although I have a lot more to say on this issue and hopefully will have the chance, I will close by saying that these fundamental rights which have been developed in Anglo-Canadian law and reach back to the Magna Carta are today more or less all grouped together in the charter. Rightly or wrongly, they are referred to as charter rights.

This is why Bill C-11 and the agreement need careful scrutiny. A simple amendment is needed to remove reference to the inherent right of the aboriginal right of self-government and to section 25 of the charter, so that all citizens would have unimpeded access to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

• (1210)

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to take this debate in a slightly different direction than it has been so far this morning and comment on clause 16 in the bill before us which is a related amendments clause. It says:

Subsection 13(3) of the Access to Information Act is replaced by the following:

(b) the council, as defined in the Westbank First Nation Self-Government Agreement given effect by the Westbank First Nation Self-Government Act.

Government Orders

Well, Mr. Speaker, section 13 of the Access to Information Act requires the government to keep in confidence information it has received from either a provincial government, or a foreign government, or an aboriginal government. Mr. Speaker, this section basically denies public access, particularly as we read here, to the debates, the exchange of information with the council of the Westbank nation.

The reason why section 13 exempts foreign governments is obvious but the reason why it exempts provincial governments from the application of the Access to Information Act and the requirement for transparency that is therein contained is that provincial governments, that other order of government, all have freedom of information legislation of their own.

Municipal governments across the country are subordinate to provincial governments. It varies from province to province, but if provincial governments want to require municipalities to have freedom of information or access to information legislation, then the provincial governments can impose it. Indeed, if I may say so, in some cases provincial freedom of information and privacy legislation is better than the federal law.

However, what we see here is an instance where the federal legislation is creating an exemption for all aboriginal governments. We can see the problem. For some reason the federal government has decided that aboriginal communities and aboriginal governments will be excluded from the requirement for transparency and accountability that is required of every other order of government and indeed just about every other institution that is subordinate to government in the country.

So we have this again, Mr. Speaker, and I think it is something that every Canadian should be very concerned about, we have a situation where because it is an aboriginal community, it is given, shall we say, a benefit of secrecy that is not accorded to non-aboriginal communities and non-aboriginal orders of government.

We need to be very concerned about this. We know from our own experience, anecdotally perhaps, that those institutions that operate without transparency, those institutions that have money to spend and influence to use, to apply, in order to benefit friends, to benefit people who should not be benefited, where transparency does not exist in these groups, abuses do occur.

The difficulty is that I think most of us who have had any experience with aboriginal communities at all know that some of the problems that exist in aboriginal communities have to do with the fact that the leaderships of those communities are not accountable and do not have requirements of transparency.

The previous Liberal government attempted to address this problem in a broad sense by something called the corporate governance bill. That bill would have required aboriginal communities to meet standards of governance, standards of transparency, standards of election and disclosure that were at least parallel to the same standards that we would find in the municipalities across Canada, that we would find in school boards and in any other political or quasi-political institutions in the land.

●(1215)

I regret to say, Mr. Speaker, and I really regret to say that the current government, under this Prime Minister, has not carried forward on that important legislation. Many of us who have long experience on the aboriginal affairs committee and many of us who have had experience with aboriginal communities in our own ridings know that one of the fundamental reasons for poverty and distress on Indian reserves and in Indian communities across the country has to do with the fact that there is not the level of transparency, there is not the level of accountability, and the money is getting to the leadership in too many cases and not getting to the people. It is a management problem that could be addressed by transparency, which would lead, I think, to increased efficiencies.

Really, we should not, anywhere in this country, want to see any kind of political entity operating without the legislated requirement of transparency. If there is an inherent right of all Canadians, it is the right to be able to see how we are governed, to see how those who govern us spend our money.

What we have done in this legislation, in this Bill C-11, is that the federal government, on its initiative—on its initiative, Mr. Speaker—has excluded the Westbank nation from coverage under the Access to Information Act, even though everywhere else in the country provincial legislation applies to municipalities. Those municipalities or school boards that do not have adequate transparency regimes are still subject to provincial law and could have them, but in this particular case aboriginal self-government is entirely subject to federal law and we have this instance where the federal government has chosen—I do not like to say this—chosen based on race to exclude a government from the proper regime of transparency that we expect of all other Canadians.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think this is a major flaw in the bill. It is very, very disappointing. Because of other circumstances my attention has been diverted in the last month and a half or so, but I am very, very sorry that I do not have an opportunity to move an amendment, because what we really ought to see in this legislation is that we ought to see the Westbank First Nation subject to the Access to Information Act.

I should tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the Access to Information Act is an act that provides protection for all kinds of confidences. The federal government, this federal government, operates very effectively under the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act, and so there is no reason why an aboriginal first nation government could not operate under the Access to Information Act.

So it is a disappointment, Mr. Speaker, and I think it does have to do with a weakness in the charter. I tend to agree with many of the speakers who spoke before me. It is too bad that the charter basically exempted Canada's first nations, Canada's aboriginals, from the application of the charter. It does so in section 25. I will read it, if I may, because I think it is important for Canadians to know what section 25 says. The rest of the charter describes all the protections that Canadians have, freedom of speech and democracy and so forth, and then section 25 goes on to say:

The guarantee in this Charter of certain rights and freedoms shall not be construed so as to abrogate or derogate from any aboriginal, treaty or other rights or freedoms that pertain to the aboriginal peoples of Canada—

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In other words, what the charter does is put aboriginal rights, as defined by treaty or other means, above or beyond the charter. This is precisely the debate that we are carrying on today. Is it right, is it proper, for any aboriginal community or any aboriginal government to be able to operate outside the charter?

So, Mr. Speaker, I really do think that what is really necessary is not to repeat this type of situation over and over again. What is really necessary is for the government to rethink its entire strategy with respect to Canada's first nations and treat them in law like other Canadians.

• (1220)

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this morning to take part in the report stage debate on this bill.

The member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot has made his points very clear. He basically said that this bill is very important and could set a precedent ruling for further aboriginal governance formed down the road.

This Westbank agreement may become a threat to Canadian values. As Canadians, we hold these qualities very dearly, that is, as Canadians across the country we should all be treated equally, certainly under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms is designed to shield or, in other words, protect individuals from the arbitrary actions of their government, irrespective of which level of government, whether it be band councils or municipal councils, provincial governments or the federal government.

My colleague spoke about the two levels of government, saying that basically the child of the federal government is the Indian Act, the band councils and their regime, much like the provincial governments which in essence created the municipalities. The municipalities really are not entities unto themselves; they are governed by the provincial government.

Like my colleague, I believe that access to information and transparency are ultimately important. I come from the constituency of Dauphin—Swan River, which has 13 aboriginal reservations. At least 13% of the population is aboriginal. The same problems exist in Dauphin—Swan River that exist in other parts of the country. The problem is not the money that comes into the riding. The problem is governance. The problem is about transparency of governance, about the aboriginal community having better access and accountability as to how the money is spent. Some of the conditions my aboriginal citizens live under are unbelievable, even though we know that the federal government annually spends \$7.5 billion under the aboriginal file.

The problem with the bill is that section 25 of the charter acts to shield government actions involving aboriginal rights from challenges under the charter, that is, if an individual challenges a government action involving the exercise of aboriginal rights, the government can shield itself from the challenge by claiming that the arbitrary government action involves aboriginal rights. Charter challenges involving aboriginal rights trigger the section 25 shield.

What does section 25 have to do with the rights of Westbank residents to use the charter to challenge arbitrary actions of the

Westbank government? Section 25 has everything to do with the right of Westbank residents to use the charter to challenge the Westbank government. Section 25 will be available to the Westbank government to shield itself from challenge under the charter only if it can claim that its actions involve the exercise of aboriginal rights.

The Westbank agreement makes invoking the section 25 shield very easy. The Westbank agreement states throughout that the purpose of the agreement is to recognize and implement an aboriginal right of self-government. In establishing the Westbank government as an aboriginal right, the agreement triggers section 25 of the charter. This gives the Westbank government a power to shield itself from a challenge from its own residents. All the Westbank government needs to do when challenged is to point out that it is exercising an aboriginal right. In other words, that is really like an opting out clause. That really is the essence of the problem.

In other words, those who are paying taxes who live on the reserve really do not have a say. We even can go back to a long time ago, 200 years ago, when the 13 colonies in the United States said “no taxation without representation”. What are we doing today? In essence, we are doing the same thing the British did to the 13 colonies. I think we need to move beyond that.

• (1225)

The Westbank government actually has a step up on the Nova Scotia band that challenged the federal government under the Canadian Human Rights Act. It will never have to make the argument that it has an aboriginal right of self-government and, as such, that its actions are shielded from charter challenge. The Westbank agreement does all of that. It states clearly and unequivocally that the Westbank government is a representation of the aboriginal right of self-government. Any time it faces a charter challenge, it need only point to the agreement with the Crown that will have been ratified by Parliament. Its actions will automatically be shielded from charter challenges.

In a recent decision, the British Columbia Supreme Court ruled that section 25 offers a complete defence or what it called “a complete answer” to challenges under the charter involving section 7, legal rights of life, liberty and security of the person, section 15, equality rights, and section 3, democratic rights of citizens. It stated:

...Section 25 of the Charter is a complete answer to this argument... In any case, s. 25 of the Charter itself is as much an answer to a submission concerning sections 7 and 15(1) as it is an answer to the s. 3 submission...The challenges based upon the Charter of Rights and Freedoms are answered by s. 25 of the Charter.

Based upon this dangerous wording of the Westbank agreement, it will always be open to the Westbank government to affirm that its arbitrary actions against its own residents are merely an exercise of its aboriginal right to govern and are therefore shielded from a resident's challenge under the charter.

There is a question that needs to be raised. Do members of Parliament really want to create the Westbank government as a charter-free zone, where residents will have lost their rights to challenge their own government? Do members of Parliament really intend to give the Westbank government a shield to protect itself from any and every challenge, no matter how arbitrary its actions have been and how legitimate the challenge might be?

Government Orders

There is another question that needs to be asked. Do members of Parliament really want to create a Westbank government that will have free rein to abuse its residents and to have that government's actions shielded from any and all challenges under the charter?

Sometimes it is too easy for non-aboriginal folks to say that people moved to the reserve because they wanted to, but does that make it legitimate to abrogate their rights as citizens of this country? In other words, the charter should really come first, regardless of the voluntary choices that people make on where they live and do business. Wherever they live and do business, they need to have access to being represented fairly, certainly if they pay taxes, and if one lives in a residence or operates a business, one pays taxes.

The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development acknowledged at the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights on March 22 the real and growing conflict between the protection of what he called the "individual rights" identified in the charter, which are equality rights, political rights, and the legal rights of life, liberty and security of the person, and what he called the "collective rights" protected by section 25. He acknowledged:

There is the necessity to reconcile principles contained in... the Charter of Rights and Freedoms with those contained in section 25, which protects aboriginal rights.

The acknowledgement by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development of the conflict between charter rights and section 25 aboriginal rights differs considerably from his statement on March 10 before the House of Commons committee studying the Westbank bill and agreement. There he said that:

The agreement... recognizes that all first nation members, like all Canadians everywhere, are subject to... the charter.

His statement is patently untrue when aboriginal rights are involved, and he acknowledged as much at the Senate Committee on Human Rights on March 22. We know that females living on reservations do not have property rights. We know that as a fact.

In fact, I will close by stating that the government of Westbank and its council are effectively bound by the charter when the Westbank government chooses to be bound. When the Westbank government wants to opt out of the charter, it can use the aboriginal rights defence. It need only assert that its actions are merely an exercise of its aboriginal right to govern as set out in the agreement and put into force by government.

Simply put, this agreement would give the Westbank government an umbrella to shield itself with anytime a resident seeks to rain on its arbitrary actions with a challenge under the charter.

● (1230)

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we are speaking to the amendments to Bill C-11, the Westbank agreement. I have some concerns with the bill, and I am in full support of the amendments.

I often read as much as possible about what is happening in Canada. I read a headline in an article stating, "Ottawa continues to blunder its way into the future in its British Columbia operations". This was an editorial regarding the Westbank legislation, and it raised concerns with me.

First, we were sent here to draft the best legislation we possibly could for the benefit of the Canadian people. I decided to look a little

farther. With regard to the Westbank agreement, the Westbank members themselves were very split on this legislation coming forward. I want everybody to realize that there were grave concerns among the Westbank people about the agreement. It actually took three votes by the Westbank members to agree to this.

It took three votes and it was successfully passed on the third vote because they reduced the required majority to a simple majority vote. Of the 430 eligible Westbank voters, 195 voted for and 170 voted against. That should be enough to raise concerns in the House right now. We are talking about an almost even split. To put it in another perspective, we have a divided community on this.

Another large concern is 7,500 residents were not allowed to cast a ballot on this. That native population is not registered on the band registry as eligible to vote. This also raises a major point. We are talking about people who will now be living on these lands, who will be subject to taxation for services, but who absolutely have no say in the matter.

I want to make it clear that the present band administration in Westbank is very progressive, and that is a good thing. They have a reputation as being excellent managers. They are not the first band members in the Westbank to be so acclaimed. Previous band administrators have also been so acclaimed.

In this party we believe that aboriginal people have a right to self-government, but not under the level of government we are trying to set up here. We have grave concerns, concerns which we hear from the people.

My learned colleague from Okanagan—Coquihalla is not concerned about the rights under the charter, but it is a concern with a number of us. I have concerns with how far the protection of the charter will apply under this agreement, and it is of grave concern to the public. I have had a number of calls, e-mails and faxes in regard to what will happen if this is allowed to go through without being properly addressed.

The fundamental right of all Canadians is protection under the charter. I also believe that we would not be in this mess if we had been more insightful in the past in regard to private property rights. I strongly believe that all individuals have the right to own private property, either on reserve or off reserve, which includes individual members on reserve.

● (1235)

I know I will have disagreement from all sides of the House on that and there will be disagreement from natives who live on and off reserves as well. Some will agree with me and there will be some who definitely will not agree with me. That is the way it is, but I strongly believe that all individuals have that right.

I also believe that it is the fundamental principles of a democratic government that those governing must represent the people to the extreme with regard to laws. That means that those who govern are elected by the people in most cases. That principle should apply to all government levels, as it does federally, provincially and municipally. That right will be taken away by this agreement, and that concerns me.

Laws and regulations apply to those who are elected. They must be Canadian citizens and be 18 years or older. They must not have a criminal record even though criminals are allowed to vote now in Canada, which I find highly distasteful.

The Westbank self-government agreement divides residents on Westbank land into two groups: those who are on the Westbank membership roll and those who are not. Those who are on the roll may vote and the others may not. To be on the roll, one must be registered as an Indian under the Indian Act. Any residents on Westbank land who are not on the membership roll are disenfranchised, in my opinion. Of the approximately 8,000 residents who live on Westbank land, about 500 are on the roll and 7,500 are not.

The practical impact of this is that any law, regulation, administration act, or band council decision is determined without electoral representation on that council or about 93% of the people who reside there. I find this hard to accept as I would imagine the people who live there do as well.

In the day to day operations of any self-government or any band, laws will be made and implemented with regard to property taxes, licensing fees, user fees, development cost charges, permit fees, infrastructure and local services. Those who live there for the large part have no say on those matters, and I find that highly questionable.

We should look at Motion No. 3 very carefully. I would like to read this motion to the House because it is important for people to understand the concern that this agreement is causing local communities. It reads:

That Bill C-11 be amended by adding after line 13 on page 2 the following new clause:

4.1 Despite section 102 of the Agreement, lands acquired by the Westbank First Nation that are contained within the limits of the city of Kelowna, British Columbia, may be transferred to Canada for the purpose of being set apart as lands reserved for Indians under subsection 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, or as reserves within the meaning of the *Indian Act* for the use and benefit of the Westbank First Nation, only with the consent of the City of Kelowna.

That is an excellent amendment. It would offset many concerns with regard to portions of land sitting within the city of Kelowna and how the bill impact on that area of land within the city. It has many people concerned as it would apply to those people who live on that land within the city limits.

• (1240)

I urge members of the House to take the amendments into consideration. They are good amendments and should be looked at very carefully. As I said at the beginning of my speech, the Westbank community itself, the aboriginals themselves who reside there, are almost evenly divided on this issue.

Mr. Rick Laliberte (Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to discuss a very historic agreement with the Westbank first nation.

The Westbank First Nation is of the Okanagan nation and it is a region of Canada that has unfinished business in terms of creating treaty. I want to focus on this because it should be put on record that Canada was created as a treaty nation. It was not taken in any other way. All the agreements that the Crown entered into were peaceful, friendship treaties to ascertain the territories.

Government Orders

If we checked international law, no country or state can be without a territory. This territory in the country was secured by treaty and those treaties were taken in a sacred context. The aboriginal indigenous nations of Canada hope for the sharing of this land, of creating one country to live among each other, with certain assurances. Different treaties have different assurances.

For the record, the Westbank region has no treaty, so the relationship it has with the government is the self-government agreement. It is continuing negotiations with the provincial and federal governments. Hopefully, in the future a treaty will be signed for that region.

The entire province of British Columbia was the unfinished business by treaty. The Hudson's Bay Company played a significant role in ascertaining that territory. There is a whole history of which the country needs to be aware. We as members of Parliament have more treaty rights flowing from those treaties than the indigenous nations do. They had sovereign right to this land, its resources and sources of life. They had all these relations before the crown negotiated these treaties. Those rights were with sovereign nations.

We see countries of the world where there is conflict. There is conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan. There are regions there where people want to put in their level of western democracy. There is a self-government model that is being negotiated by their people. They see a vision of how they can govern their community in the hope that their country will engage by treaty for a future of certainty and security.

I ask my colleagues to please have patience. This is an evolution of a country. We are still growing. We are still very young. We have lots to learn from our indigenous nations. They may make mistakes, as we may make mistakes in the House or in the provincial legislatures, but we will correct those mistakes because we are governed by human beings. Humans make mistakes. However, there is a sacred context when we enter these treaties.

I have Treaty No. 6 and Treaty No. 10 in my area. Those treaties were secured in a sacred context, using the pipe and a sacred instrument to enter a future. As an example, I would like to share this with my colleagues. In Treaty No. 6 there was a vision by the chiefs that a medicine chest be provided for their people. This medicine chest was a public policy and a public vision for all Canadians. It was not only for the Cree, the Dene and the Sauteaux children. Why can we not look at the indigenous people, the aboriginal first nations as contributing to a vision of the country, not only for their sake but for the entire nation?

I also beg that the Westbank, through its affiliation with its nation, the Okanagan nation, could some day sit here in Parliament. I have shared a vision that this is a house, a House of Commons. We also have another house called the Senate. Maybe a third house should be created where the aboriginal nations could sit and help govern the country as one. We have to come as one country. We cannot be debating from one side to the next. This is one country, flowing as one.

Government Orders

•(1245)

That is what the vision of those treaties was: that the aboriginal nations would not be left alone, or that the Crown went off and administered the country in isolation of those aboriginal nations.

Let us bring the aboriginal nations into this fold. Let us treat the aboriginal leadership as parliamentarians. The chiefs should be accountable and transparent to all of Canada. Keep them here. This House that I speak about exists. There is a building at the back of these Parliament Buildings called the Library of Parliament. It is a sacred symbol. It has a medicine chest and a medicine wheel. A medicine wheel is embedded right in the floor plan. It survived the fire of 1916. When all these other buildings, the square buildings, all burned down, this round building, a symbol of unity, survived the fire. It survived the major test. It was negotiated and built 128 years ago. That library was envisioned by an architect.

One hundred and twenty-eight years ago, our elders in Treaty No. 6 were negotiating treaty. Maybe there was a sacred and spiritual intervention with their prayers to build that building here for a greater purpose. Maybe it is now, in 2004, a year of an indigenous decade in which indigenous issues throughout the world are to be addressed.

Maybe it is time that we welcome our nations, the original nations of this country, the Inuit, the Mi'kmaq, the Okanagan, the Cree, the Dene, the Haida, and the Stó:lō, as nations to come and help us govern this country, because there are many gifts that these nations have, which they cannot give away but they can share, which they have to hold in trust, just like their languages.

I was born with a first language: nenehiyawan, nehiyawewin. I speak a Cree language, nehiyaw. I speak a Cree world view because from that view I see a vision of the world. That is what all these nations carry. They are distinct nations. They are not all one generic first nation. They are unique nations. Let us unfold those nations as to who they are and let us show the world. Let us listen, really listen with our hearts and our minds, to what they see as a vision of this country so that for all the children who come here, no matter where they are from, we live together as one country.

That is why I have shared a vision that we should have a motto of Canada. The motto of Canada says "from sea to shining sea". I would like to change that motto. It should be "a nation of rivers and a river of nations". There are many nations that flow here, even in this House, and there are our ancestors. We have to be proud of our ancestors and the gifts that our ancestors gave us, the prayers they give that we survive.

However, there are distinct responsibilities to the land and, as we say, all our relations: the four-legged, the winged, the ones that crawl and the ones that swim, all the little beings of this planet, all the plants, the medicines, the little gifts that we have the consciousness to be careful for. As human beings, we carry that will here in these houses, in these political institutions.

But what is missing is the aboriginal nations. They are not in Parliament. They are not here directing this vessel into the future. This vessel was envisioned with the two row wampum, where the original vessel of the original people can flow together with the newcomers and their vessel. This vessel came from Britain. This is a

British parliamentary system. Maybe that parliamentary library that I talked about is the original vessel for the original people. Those two vessels can flow together to create one country and one Parliament.

I commend the people of the Westbank, who are willing to create a government structure to live among their people and the people who live with them in rules, policies and bylaws that will affect their people, but who have a greater vision and a greater respect for the Okanagan nation as a whole. That nation should be welcomed here so that the country can be governed together as one.

I share that with the House at this time because this is a year in the indigenous decade of indigenous people worldwide. I think it is time that Canada opened its arms and welcomed the true meaning of friendship and peace.

•(1250)

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak to this bill today and to the amendments that have been proposed, which I support fully. I listened intently to the last speaker from the Liberal Party, who obviously speaks from the heart and, in the tone that he spoke, means things for the good of the country. There is no doubt in my mind about it. I believe that he is very sincere about this.

The entire debate has been troubling to me for a number of reasons. I would like to point out some of these things in regard to why the Liberal government of today would be so willing to push this bill through so quickly and bring it to an end.

These are the things that bother me the most. First, it is my understanding that on the reserve the vote was 195 to 170, so obviously there is a split feeling on the reserve itself as to what direction we should be taking. I find it difficult to understand why the government would immediately side with the 195 and why it would not be willing to say, "Wait a minute, there are quite a few people on that reserve who are opposed to this direction", and then ask itself what it knows about why they are opposed and what they could suggest that would make this thing better. I do not hear that debate happening.

I think we are having a debate to try to draw out all the pros and cons of this bill today. I think that my two colleagues who proposed these amendments have some serious concerns, which I think are reflected in the hearts of a number of Canadians. We are looking for that change to come, but why have we not considered what is happening on the reserve itself? It does not appear to me that we have. It does not appear to me that the Liberal government has, because it is willing to ignore the 170 people against 195, which is a very close vote. That does not make sense to me.

Something else also troubles me. I do not know what the real relationship is between this bill and what was proposed in the Charlottetown accord. I do not remember the particulars of the Charlottetown accord, but it almost appears to me that these documents are very much the same and that this bill is proposing what Canadians rejected in a big way through the Charlottetown accord.

Government Orders

A number of people in my area indicated to me that they were opposed to the Charlottetown accord because of what the elites had done in trying to correct the situation with treaties and first nations and all of that. Yet that was rejected, not only by people of one race, but by all groups. The natives themselves rejected the ideas that came out of the Charlottetown accord.

Why does the government want to move so quickly on getting this bill processed, completed, to third reading and into law without considering the fact that there are quite a few people out there, including natives themselves from that reserve, who are not quite happy with what is going on? What is the rush?

Is it not better to have a good, open debate about this issue in the House, on the reserve and in the communities in order to get a good feel for what we need to do—if we are going to do anything—and at least make every effort that we can to make it right? Obviously it must not be very right because of the great debates that are taking place not only in Canada as a whole but on the reserve itself.

Why is the government so adamant about pushing forward legislation when obviously, in the minds of a number of people in this country, we are not ready for it without further discussion? I do not mean the kind of discussion that the fool from the Regina area gave us from the NDP in his speech when he did not refer to the bill at all but just went into name calling and did not contribute anything whatsoever to the debate. I wonder if he feels the same way about the 170 people on the reserve who are opposed to this bill as he feels about the Conservative Party members who are opposed to this bill.

• (1255)

I wonder if he feels that way. Would he have the guts to stand up somewhere in this country and tell those 170 people what he tried to tell us this morning? What a bunch of nonsense. People like that should be left totally out of the debate. They contribute nothing.

I am really fearful that we are moving in this direction when there are too many people, including natives, who are not satisfied with this Bill C-11. Why are we pushing it so quickly? Is it not better to keep the debate going, open it up more broadly and, if we are going to do something, when we do it, we do it right? Is it not better to take the feelings of this Liberal member who just spoke into account, along with those of all the other people who are involved and concerned about it? Then we can put it together and see if we cannot come up with a decent package. Obviously the government now does not have a package that is very acceptable.

Why do the Liberals want to support it when so many people are speaking out against it? Never mind just the Conservative Party; let us talk about the other folks as well.

The member from Vancouver North made a very strong point this morning. For 50 years now, we have watched poverty grow and conditions worsen on the reserves to the point that they are in third world conditions. We still have not fixed that problem. Over the last 10 years it has been no better. In fact, it has become worse on many reserves.

I was assigned by Preston Manning, our first leader, to go into the reserves and do a study on this issue. For nearly two years, I visited people in their homes, their huts and their tepees, you name it. I know what those conditions were. If the government over there has

such brilliant ideas and is so wonderful, then why has there not been some improvement in those conditions? Why have we not made accountability on the reserves a very major concern in the country?

Lo and behold, it is starting to come to light. When the government does not even have accountability in its own cabinet and we must have hours and hours of debate in committee about the accountability of this government, how can we expect anything good to happen outside the government when it is in control?

It is time for us to really sit back and say that there is something totally wrong with the big picture. This big picture needs to be addressed and we are not doing a very good job of it when the reserves that I went into in 1994 are worse off in 2004. Unemployment is higher. Homelessness is higher. Addiction and abuse rates are higher. Crime rates are higher. And this government wants to brag about all the wonderful things it is doing?

Now it wants to shove through a bill that 170 people, an almost fifty-fifty split on the reserve itself, are not satisfied with. What in the world is the rush? Surely the government should take a serious look at the amendments and ask if they improve the situation. Maybe it should go out and ask the people on the reserve what they think of the amendments and ask what else we can do to make it better.

No, that outfit over there is going to have a vote on the bill very soon. It wants to get it passed. For what reason? For all the wrong reasons, as far as I am concerned. Until we get a lot more support for the action that we are taking in this building, why do we want to be in such a rush? I am really puzzled by all of that.

Last, but certainly not least, why would we ever want to live in a country where 93% of a population in an area is being taxed without representation? Why would we want to live in a country with a democracy of that type? Have we forgotten the number of countries in the past—let us talk about the history of the world, as a matter of fact—whose citizens fought and died on the bloody grounds of war, fighting for representation? Taxation without representation in Canada? Whoa, I am not sure I like that at all. Those members over there should think about it. They should think about it before jumping up to support something that would allow such a thing to happen. Where do we live? I say, let us give this some considerable thought. I ask them, in the name of democracy, to give it some serious, considerable thought.

• (1300)

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-11 on the Westbank agreement.

I want to comment on some of the heartfelt remarks that my colleague made and the good work that he did for the party. We went into the aboriginal communities and talked to the people who live there to find out the situation and what they thought, rather than just taking the views of representatives of the aboriginal community who make a living out of lobbying the government.

Government Orders

As representatives of the people in this place, we are their only voice when it comes to government legislation. We often forget that role. We get taken in by the government bureaucrats' position. We are presented with a finished product and we either approve it or reject it. We forget that we are here to speak for the people out there who will have to live with the legislation.

I spent 15 years in Canada's north living with the aboriginal community. I have some very real experiences of the differences between the aboriginals who happen to be registered with the government and those who for whatever reason were never registered. The difference in the way they are treated is incredible. Members of one part of the aboriginal community, and many of them share the same bloodline, are given almost everything they require and the others are given nothing.

I was employed by the government of Alberta for a period of time to bring self-government to that aboriginal community that was not registered with the Government of Canada. It was part of my responsibility to prepare that aboriginal community for self-government, how to run its own community, how to handle the ownership of property, because the Alberta government did give ownership to a community that had squatted on Crown land for generations.

There is a lot more to it than just a piece of paper and writing things in a statutory way. There are cultural differences. There are lifestyles. There are expectations and emotions. They all become part of being ready for self-government.

My hon. colleague from Wild Rose mentioned that not all of the aboriginal community agree with the direction in which the government is taking them, but they have lost their ability to express their concerns. We forget that it is our job to represent those concerns here before the bill is passed. We try in whatever way we can to say there are concerns and problems but once it is written in statute, it is very hard to undo, to change.

It is going to be very difficult for the people who find themselves somehow left out of this agreement. They are not going to have the same rights as all Canadians. They are not going to have the ability to own land. Many of the people who live on that reserve are not going to be able to vote for the taxes that they are going to be asked to pay, or for the representation that is going to supposedly represent their interests. How are they going to address some of the outfalls of this legislation? It is very important at the end of the day, whether we win or we lose, that this enter into the debate.

It is unparliamentary for members of any party in this House to think or to accuse that there are other motives when an individual, representing whomever, raises issues. Our job is to bring up all the issues and represent all sides of the question.

I would like to express some concerns that I have. Once again, the federal government, as my colleague from Wild Rose said, is rushing to sign on the dotted line to make something statutory. We are not looking far enough down the road and the what direction we should be taking with all Canadians, aboriginal communities and non-aboriginal communities. We should be looking at the broader, bigger picture of equality of all Canadians. We should be making sure that

we do not have communities, whether they are aboriginal or non-aboriginal, living in poverty.

•(1305)

I have hands-on experience of the situations about which the member for Wild Rose spoke. I went to communities that I could only fly into. In the wintertime maybe they could drive, if the ground was frozen thick enough. These communities had a health nurse that came maybe every two or three weeks, if the nurse could get in.

I remember arriving at an airport in one community and a man was waiting for a ride out, if he could hitch one. Up in the north people hitch airplane rides, not car rides. He had a gash on his face that was taped together with Scotch tape. It was a deep gash that required stitches, but the health nurse would not be back for another couple of weeks. These people do without the help that we all assume is our right.

I brought potable water into the communities, and treated the water that they used for drinking and cooking purposes. These communities had high incidences of sickness because people were drinking the water from the lakes. In these communities all the houses are built around the lakes. For years, garbage and sewage and whatnot have been going into the lakes. The people drink the water from the lakes or rivers which is a problem.

In trying to deal with their health issues, we were trying to bring them services which we take for granted. Many of these communities do not have roads to connect one community to another. This is what the people want. They want to be able to contribute their opinions and run their communities.

I think the majority of them really do not care about the statutory framework that is being developed by government to allow them to run their communities. These people want to know that they can vote for their representatives. They want to know that they can own property. They want to know that they can develop their communities, develop a fire response team, develop a recreation board, develop good services. They want to be part of that.

They do not want a statutory document stating the parameters, that they will not be able to own their own homes; that we are not going to protect their charter rights, because for whatever reason we might be leaving them out of the charter; that we are not going to guarantee them a democratic government where they get to vote; that we are not going to guarantee any protection for the non-native people who live on the reserve.

I have had first-hand experience where people who had lived on a reserve for 50 years, for two or three generations, automatically overnight were kicked off the reserve for no good reason. No one protected them. It happens. It happened in Musqueam in Vancouver. Situations change overnight and affect the residents.

A statutory declaration or document is not going to protect the people. It may prevent them from developing and growing and running their own community in a natural course of events with people helping them to get to that level without it being a statutory document that encumbers them.

Government Orders

I want to share a story with the House. Senator Walter Twinn represented the area where I spent a good number of my adult years. Walter Twinn's success depended on his finding a loophole in a statutory document that allowed the aboriginal community to get its funds and decision making abilities out from under the control of the federal government. He went on from there to grow his community, to make an income, to hire them to create business and to take his reserve out of poverty. He did it because he found a way to get out of the statutory confinements that were created by the Government of Canada.

I would encourage the government to stop narrowing its thinking by one contract to another and to start looking at the big picture. What do we need to do to free our aboriginal people? I will not make the distinction between registered aboriginals and non-registered aboriginals. To me they all deserve an opportunity to become part of the mainstay of the Canadian population.

● (1310)

I urge the government of the day to think broader, to look longer term and to stop restraining communities through statutory documents.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to speak to these amendments that have been brought forward. I want to address most of my remarks to Motion No. 3 which was brought forward by the member for Vancouver Island North.

The amendment asks for some clarification in legislation that had been asked for and referred to by the chief of the Westbank First Nation and also by the mayor of Kelowna. As we get into debating the relevance of the bill and the whole aspect of what this would bring to the table and what it will do to governance right across the country, we have to deal with this amendment very closely. We need more debate and analysis and some more time to look at what the ramifications would be of what is being proposed in Bill C-11.

There are other issues. One that is really important to note is that the member for Vancouver Island North brought motions to committee to have the committee travel, to hold hearings in Kelowna, in the Westbank area, to allow people closely associated with this issue the opportunity to appear in front of the committee to allow their thoughts and ideas to be heard. That is what hearings are about. It is to allow Canadians a chance for input on the issues that are being debated. That was refused. I feel that is very unfortunate because that could have served as a very useful platform to allow many people on both sides of this debate to bring forward issues and to clarify their positions. Without that opportunity being made available in the area where this issue is going to have the most effect was a wrong decision by the government.

The people who did come to committee in Ottawa brought forward some ideas and some issues. Some of the testimony that was brought forward at committee by the mayor of Kelowna and also by Chief Robert Louie is what prompted the amendment by the member for Vancouver Island North. We can zero in on the last sentence. It has to do with the expansion of reserve lands and the governance of the band regarding purchase of land in downtown Kelowna and that it can only be turned into reserve land upon the consent of the city of Kelowna.

In referring to the presentations made at committee and in response to a question from the member for Vancouver Island North, the chief responded:

I can assure you very clearly that the self-government agreement would apply to reserve lands and if we were to look [to] downtown Kelowna, let's say, look to you and say to you, Mayor, council members will you agree to give us 10 acres of reserve here in downtown Kelowna, I would expect, as you've clearly indicated, that your answer would be no. What would happen is we would need to approach the province of British Columbia. The province is required to give their consent and according to the additions to reserve land policy, they would be required to come to you and to the city and to local government, the community, to ask whether or not you would agree.

If the city of Kelowna did not agree, then the province of British Columbia would not agree. This is a roundabout process where this kind of approval would be necessary. What the chief and the mayor of Kelowna are asking for and what the amendment would bring to the bill is the certainty that the consent would have to be given by the city of Kelowna. Without that, it leaves too much in the air. There is a good relationship now between the chief and the mayor, between different levels of government, but as we know, and as some of us hope, governments do change from time to time.

● (1315)

Councils change, mayors change, bands and chiefs change through the electoral process. An agreement that may be here today—a gentleman's agreement or an agreement amongst all parties—could quickly go away if there is a change at any one of those levels. If it gets to be an adversarial approach after that, instead of working together, then there has to be something in the bill to deal with that issue because that is a huge concern to people on both sides of this debate.

I want to put into the record what Mr. Gray said in response to what the chief had to say. He said:

I hear Chief Louie, and of course we know one another. He has a lot of credibility,—

I refer back to the fact that these people understand and appreciate each other's assets. He went on to say:

—we certainly have no issue with the current chief or council, but as elected officials, we all know that elections and people come and go. What we're looking for is some sort of certainty.

Here we have it from both sides. They want some clarification on the issue. This amendment would give that clarification. I hope it is supported when it is brought to the floor because it is exactly what has been asked for

The mayor of Westbank First Nation said:

We certainly don't want to stand in the way of progress. In fact, the contrary is true. We want to cooperate.

Why will the government not consider an amendment to a bill that would allow that cooperation to take place, allow that certainty to be embedded, and allow this mutual respect and this mutual working together for the mutual good of both areas so this issue is clarified? I am going to quote again from the committee:

—the point we want to make is that there has to be some assurance, whether it's within this agreement or some other way, that we would not be creating two classes of property owners in the city of Kelowna—

Government Orders

That is the mayor's concern. This means that property owners who pay taxes, all of those property owners who currently exist, face the possibility at a future date of a property owner with Westbank first nation reserve status becoming a non-tax paying property owner. He went on to say:

I am not entirely sure that we get to tell the province or the federal government or the federal minister that we don't want something and therefore it won't happen.

The mayor is asking for that certainty. He is unclear at this point in time whether his position would be accepted by other levels of government.

There are a lot of issues that need to be addressed. It would help put aside a lot of the debate that is going on, particularly on the property rights issue, if this amendment were looked at for what it was intended to do.

The members for Vancouver Island North and Macleod, and I had an opportunity this past winter to meet with native people at the Friendship Centre in Lethbridge. We had two days of informal hearings where we heard a lot of very interesting and sometimes very troubling testimony from grassroots natives. Some would not appear because they were afraid to do so, and that says a lot about some of the situations that these people face.

One of the issues is the property rights issue and the ability for people on reserves to own their property, to have equity in that property, and to be able to engage in financial situations that the rest of us are entitled to. The other issue was the rights of native women. We heard a lot about these two issues, but I am not sure that Bill C-11 would deal with them in a direct way.

If we have an opportunity as a legislative body to bring some clarity to a controversial issue, then why would we not? I believe we should. I believe the government should look at this amendment and accept it in order to bring certainty to the people involved so that in the future when this issue does arise, it will be clearly stated that permission would not be granted to have reserve land in the middle of the city without the consent of the City of Kelowna. It is clear and plain, and it is something the House should support.

• (1320)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to stand in this place to debate a bill that I think is possibly not as well known in this country. It is a bill about which a lot of people have a lot of questions, and a bill of which many people are unsure.

I would say that with Bill C-11 there is a certain hesitancy among some to even come to this place to debate it for fear of what the political ramifications and consequences may be. Sometimes good, healthy debate is held back because we become afraid that we might be painted in a way that certainly no one wants to be.

First, I would like to say that over the last two weeks I have had the privilege and the opportunity to travel around my constituency, not talking necessarily about politics, but more about our country, about what our country is and what makes it the great place that it is. Mainly, I do this at schools at the grade six curriculum and the high school curriculum. We talk about the issues, but it flows down to talking about what this country stands for. Who are we? What do we want to become? Where have we come from?

Certainly, I have noticed that there are a number of different categories of people within the schools. There are those who are complacent about who we are as Canadians and what our country stands for. They think this is a place, a boundary, where we live that is simply a place where we can find a job and go about the exercise of earning enough money for food, clothing and shelter for those we support or those in our family.

There are others who believe that the country is something they like. There are certain things about this country that they like. Many of the students said they like the fact that they have an education system. They like the fact that there is a health care system here that they can count on when they need it. Others talked about some of the freedoms that they enjoy.

I met a couple of young Canadians, Sara, Alyssa and Matthew Olafson. Although they are very young, they talked about what their country is and why they enjoy living where they live. When we went into the high schools, many of the students talked about the fact that we can have different ideas, we can believe something different, yet we can be heard. They talked about freedom, the freedom to choose, and the freedom to become whatever they may want to be.

They talked about equality of Canadians. They talked about having a country where, regardless of skin colour, regardless of social status, and regardless of the size of the bank account, there are some absolute givens that we can appreciate. They like the fact that this is a democracy. They love the fact that we can choose who supports us. We can choose the government that will lead us. We can choose the MP, the MLA, the county councillor who will represent us in that place where decisions will be made. Those are some of the fundamental ideals in which Canadians believe.

Now we have the federal government coming forward with a piece of legislation that establishes a self-government agreement with the Westbank Indian Band of British Columbia. I would submit that much of what has become so important to young Canadians is indeed threatened in this type of legislation. So much of the freedoms, so much of the democracy, and so much of even, yes, equality is put into question in Bill C-11.

• (1325)

This legislation is divisive. So many times in this place we come and we debate certain pieces of legislation that would take a constitutional change. I recognize that this piece of legislation may not take a constitutional change because of section 25 in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. There may be certain things, section 35 and other sections, that may not take a constitutional change, but this legislation is divisive.

We have debated issues here that, until provinces come forward and say they need change, I do not even think we should be debating until we know that it is not just an exercise that is going to divide people. This legislation has become very divisive, not only among the greater part of the country, but among every part, aboriginals included.

Government Orders

This piece of legislation that we have before us would shield the Westbank government from the application of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This piece of legislation says that those 500 aboriginals who live on the land in question would have the opportunity to select a level of government and that they would have the ability to choose who would represent them, but the other 7,500 non-aboriginals on the piece of property would not have the ability to choose who would represent them.

One of the fundamentals of democracy is no taxation without representation. That principle is thrown out the window with this piece of legislation.

This piece of legislation sets in motion many different governments. We talk about expecting accountability within government and we talk about transparency in government. When we have so many different governments—629 different governments could be set up if this becomes a precedent—certainly, the idea of accountability and transparency is put into question.

This would be shielding the Westbank government from the charter by saying that it would not have to adhere to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Section 25 of the charter states:

The guarantee in this Charter of certain rights and freedoms shall not be construed so as to abrogate or derogate from any aboriginal, treaty or other rights or freedoms that pertain to the aboriginal peoples of Canada...any rights or freedoms that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired.

Basically, it says that the laws made up in that third level of government supercede all other laws. The people living there do not have to adhere to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms which was given to all Canadians. We believe that this is simply wrong. I want to quote from a paper that I have here. It says:

A Westbank Law, for example, which discriminates between persons residing or working in Westbank on the basis of their race, or some other analogous ground, could not be struck down as a contravention of the Charter.

So much for the idea of equality. So much for the idea of certain freedoms that would be allowed.

Debate is good. Our country is great. One of the outstanding values and one of the outstanding rights that we have is to be able to stand and debate pieces of legislation; however, let me again say that we must be careful before we enshrine a new third level of government.

Self-government within the parameters of a municipal government is something that we would certainly encourage; however, a third level of government is something that we must be very cautious about approaching.

Members should cast aside the political considerations and consider what is right for our country. Let us consider what is right, given the principles of freedom, democracy and equality.

● (1330)

Mr. Reed Elley (Nanaimo—Cowichan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak today to Bill C-11 and the amendments that have been brought forward by members of the official opposition.

By way of preamble to what I have to say and for the benefit of those who may be listening in the gallery or perhaps on television to

the debate in the House of Commons, I would like to state where I as a person am in this whole thing.

Over the last 25 years my wife and I have been foster parents. We have actually been foster parents for 32 years but 25 years ago we brought into our house a native child. He is almost 25 years old now and he is on his own. He is working his way through a degree at a college and is a very fine young man. He is part of the first nations community on the west coast of Vancouver Island.

After that we fostered a number of other children, among them a number of native children. We now have three native children in our family. One is a 19 year old daughter who is part of the Blood Tribe from southern Alberta and another is a 17 year old daughter who is part of the Siksika nation from around Gleichen in Alberta.

Because of our involvement with first nations children, we were drawn into involvement with the wider aboriginal community in Canada and have continued over the years to keep very current on what was happening with our aboriginal brothers and sisters across the country.

At the present time, after 32 years of fostering, we have a three year old native child who has been in our home since she was six months old.

I am also the member of Parliament for Nanaimo—Cowichan. Because of that role, I have sometimes struggled with the native and non-native communities as they try to come to agreement over the treaty process that is in place in British Columbia. We have the Snuneymuxw First Nation in my riding that is attempting to hammer out an urban agreement with surrounding neighbours in the Nanaimo area.

For a year and a half I was the senior critic for Indian affairs for my party and in that role I touched base with a lot of native people across Canada. Before that, I had been part of accountability groups that had sprung up across the country where native people were coming with their concerns about what was happening on reserve. I do not come to this in a vacuum. I come to it with a lot of heartfelt tugs because of my native children and I come to it with some pretty practical observations of what I have seen happen on reserves and with our native population across Canada.

Then we come to a treaty like this, the third major treaty that will be struck in British Columbia since the 1870s when we only had the Douglas treaties on Vancouver Island. How do we balance the need to free up our aboriginal people to manage their own concerns in a way that brings economic prosperity and stability to them and which helps to bring them into the mainstream of Canadian life in some kind of equality? I am not talking about assimilation. That is something that will or will not take place depending upon people's individual choices.

Government Orders

•(1335)

However, how do we get over the hurdles that are in our native communities where in some native communities in my riding there is 80% to 85% unemployment? When I walk down the street of one of the major shopping areas in my riding I see many native children, teenagers, young adults simply lounging around on the streets with an aimless look in their eyes because they have no hope for the future. They have been hit by some of the social problems that invade native communities and non-native communities as well. I think of alcoholism and fetal alcohol syndrome which, incidentally, is troubling two of our children. We know the effects of that and what parents go through. We know the pain that it brings to people's lives.

How do we get rid of those problems for our native people, let alone the non-native population? We have to do something. We have to move forward with our native brothers and sisters so they can start taking control of their own destiny and not have it in the hands of government all the time.

I come to an agreement like this and I am torn. I see within the agreement steps that can be taken to move aboriginal people forward in terms of economic prosperity, where they can take charge of the economy and create jobs for their people to get them out of this cycle of social welfare dependency. Yes, that is what we need to see take place on reserves. We need to see that take place for urban aboriginals who often are a forgotten people within the whole context of the native situation in Canada.

At the same time, in this particular agreement, we do have some problems, and they are not just problems for the Westbank or for the city of Kelowna. They are problems for the whole of Canada as we move forward with trying to bring a resolution to the treaty process and to bring prosperity to aboriginal communities.

Therefore we have proposed some amendments to the bill today that would, for instance, remove references to inherent right of self-government, which I know we talk a lot about but which has never been settled as to what it means. We do not really know what that means.

In all its years of negotiating with native people, the government has never been able to come up with a real definition that would help move this across the country so we would not have this kind of uncertainty at the end of the treaty process.

It does bring uncertainty. It is bringing uncertainty into the Snuneymuxw agreement that is being hammered out in the Nanaimo area where it is just natural that non-native people wonder what will happen to lands that may be available under fee simple purchase in the centre of Nanaimo or the centre of Gabriola Island. Unless these things are very carefully hammered out and there are good applications of both law and justice in this process, we will have lingering festering problems after treaties are struck for a long time.

There is a need for certainty, transparency and for clarification around some of these issues so that we can truly go forward together.

I do not think we should be rushing into things that would cause us more problems in the future than they have in the past. If, at this point in our history, we are here debating this simply because there is

an election coming and it has to be rushed through to be put up on the Liberals' trophy wall some place as another accomplishment, then that is wrong.

I want this treaty to go forward. I want native people to have economic prosperity but I want all of us as Canadians to have equality and justice before the law and before each other.

•(1340)

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a serious challenge in front of me today. There are, presumably, some 170 Liberals in the House who are listening intently to the arguments being made from this side today. My challenge is to somehow persuade them to favour the amendments that are being proposed so that we avoid disasters in the future.

I often think of the analogy of being a chess player. I have always enjoyed that game. It is a game that requires forethought. It is a game where one does not look just at the present move because if one does, one will almost certainly lose, unless one is playing with an opponent who also only looks at the current move. One must look at the second move and the third move and at what one's opponent may or may not do. In order to pass good laws we have to look at the consequences of those laws after they have been enacted to see what actually will happen.

The plea that I make to the members opposite today is to listen carefully to what is being said from this side and to actually, regardless of what their minister says or what the Prime Minister says, use their own judgment and carefully judge the impact of passing this law unamended.

I want to be a little more specific here. We have in our society a number of arrangements for how we live together. It used to be in our family, when we had all of the children still at home, that I as the dad often got my way, but just as often I did not. As a matter of fact, I was outnumbered four to one when it came to a family conference. I had to use arguments of persuasion if I wanted the family to agree on a certain task.

I also live in a little community. We happen to live out on one of those little acreage developments where there are 16 neighbours on a 40 acre or 80 acre parcel of land. I am not exactly sure how much it has extended beyond. For 17 years I was treasurer of our residents association. We had different rules that regulated what our association could and could not do. We agreed on those. We had meetings where we set up, in essence, a charter. That charter said what was permitted and what was not. When the neighbours came along and said that they wanted to have a big party and that the association should pay for it, I was the treasurer who said that we would not do that. I said that if they wanted a party they would have to collect from each of the people who came to the party and that would pay for the expenses of the party. I told them that they could not use our association money for that because it was to be used for other things, such as grass cutting, running the lights in the community and those types of things. We had those rules.

Government Orders

We also lived in a municipality and there are all kinds of rules in a municipality. I cannot build my garage any closer than four feet from the boundary of my property. I must put my garbage out on Tuesdays or they have no obligation to pick it up. I must pay my municipal taxes, which, by the way, I must pay with money that I have already paid tax on. That is why I have a private member's bill that says that property taxes should be exempt from federal income tax. One should not have to pay tax on money earned for the sole purpose of paying tax. However that is what we get in this federal government.

Beyond that, I am a member of the population of the province of Alberta, so I have to comply with provincial rules and regulations. One of the rules is that I must drive on the right side of the road, with which I comply most happily. Another rule says that on the road from my house up to the main highway I shall not exceed 80, with which I also comply very happily.

● (1345)

I believe we have rules that regulate us in that society. Now we get to the crunch. We are also Canadian citizens. Every one of us who calls Canada home is subject to the rules and laws of the Government of Canada. Those rules include a whole bunch of things, like the necessity of paying income tax, EI, CPP and complying with different aspects of the criminal code and other things. Of course the laws of Canada also provide us certain protection.

There is a myth going around that unless it is in the charter it is not necessarily a right. I disagree with that. There are many items and aspects of our lives which I believe we all have in an inherent right. It is not granted by the charter. It was not granted by Pierre Trudeau and his crew way back in 1982. In some instances the charter simply articulates rights which we already had. We have to ensure that we remember that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is simply an articulation of some of the rights that we have, but at any rate it is a rule that we have to live under.

If Bill C-11 is passed without amendments, I am very concerned about the application of the Charter of Rights under the bill. It is tremendously troubling.

I can live in my county and have all the rights of the charter that apply to me. If I were to live in the Westbank, suddenly I would not have some of the rights or at minimum it would be questioned whether I could apply those rights. I would have to go to court, as a citizen of that part of the country, to demonstrate that the charter applied to me. That is a very serious error, and I beg those 170 some Liberal members over there who are patiently listening to this to think like a chess player. Think about what will happen after the bill passes and somebody gets up to challenge it.

I know we want to trust the natives. Of course we do. We want to all trust each other. The purpose of the law is to restrain those who prove not to be trustworthy by themselves. The present government seems to be doing fine in the Westbank. However, some time in future the Westbank government may decide to do certain things which are deemed a violation of someone else's rights who live there. In fact one could even argue right now about the demand by it to collect property taxes, which it is already doing. That demand is one of the things which it presumably can carry on with, yet we find

that the people from whom it is collecting taxes have no right to vote in respect to that municipal-like government.

Is that not a violation? Why would we put into law the ability of that local government to have a serious violation of our country's laws in terms of the ability to vote for the government that has control over our lives and property? That is a serious error. Why would the government want to pass the bill unamended and allow such a potential error to come in to part of the governance of the country?

In conclusion, this is a very serious matter. It is not one to be rushed through suddenly before Parliament prorogues and we have an election. It is one that requires serious thought. We need to look at the moves beyond just the passing of the legislation. We need to look at the consequences. I persuade, I beg, I cajole the members who are in majority in the House and who have the control to act wisely and to make wise decisions as our prayer says every morning.

● (1350)

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the debate today. We could look at all the political ramifications of the bill, whether it will be tossed through before an election. However, I do not think that is the point. We are in this place to make good legislation. That has to be uppermost in our minds, regardless of whether the House prorogues.

What we need to do is look at some of the pros and cons. There is never anything totally wonderful about any particular bill. There is also never anything totally wrong about a bill either. We need to weigh the pros and the cons. Although, there is a lot of good stuff in this bill, there are some concerns, and I would like to address a few of those.

I too, like my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan, have lived on a reserve and have been a foster parent of many native children as well. I probably bring a somewhat different perspective to the table. I am somewhat familiar with that culture because I have lived in it and, of course, had children as well.

What we need to do, first and foremost, is realize that these are real people who have real concerns. I know the Westbank area is a tremendously prosperous area. The people have done a really good job in ensuring that businesses operate well and effectively. As some people have brought out, it is a concern that this will be a template for other agreements across the country, and there may be areas where business wise they are not as prosperous.

We need to ensure that whatever template we set in place that it is productive, useful and effective for any other group or area across the country.

As this debate rages, there has been talk about whether the people will be protected under the charter, or whether they will have a right to vote or have a say in matters. We know that about 8,000 people resident there, with only 430 members, I think it is. I believe the vote to go ahead with this was 195 to 170. This is not exactly what I call a screaming endorsement of something by any stretch. However, 50% plus one always wins. If children are playing soccer in recess in grade three, the guys with the most points always wins.

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We know though that this agreement has been endorsed. However, if I were either a resident of Westbank or had a business there and if I were paying taxes, I would want to have a say. I have always said that about people and elections. People grumble and gripe about whoever is in power, and they go on a rant. When I hear that, I ask them if they voted. If they say no, but they say that they still have their opinion, I tell them that they do not have that right because they did not vote or participate in the process. We can understand the flip side of that also, if people are paying taxes and running some very successful businesses there.

It seems to me that if I were one of those people, I would want my say. I might not get my way, but I would certainly want to have my say and be included at the table. I think there are some questions about the bill and whether that will happen.

In terms of the charter and what jurisdictional area is in place or what the powers are, if it is a municipal government or a provincial or federal government, I think there are some concerns from legal experts. These concerns are certainly not from me because I am not that familiar with the situation. I have however alarm bells that go off and I want to ask particular questions about things, such as would that law supercede federal law. Of course we have people on both sides of the issue saying whether it will or not. However, before we pass legislation, we ought to know the answers to those questions first and foremost, so we know exactly what we are getting into.

In terms of people having rights or if there is taxation do they get representation, I am reminded of something else that we went through in the House several years ago, with people who owned homes on the Musqueam reserve in Vancouver on the UBC grounds. If a long term lease is taken out or if there is a commercial operation and people enter into that lease, they have the right to say they are going to quadruple or multiply by 10 that lease. There was a long term lease in place and when people signed it, they thought they would be safe. It looked like there would be some retirement income for them as an investment. However, what happened was pretty frightening for many of the people who had very expensive homes.

● (1355)

We need to have some of these questions answered before this gets rushed through the House. We should not put something through and then ask later if we made a mistake. It is better to look at it ahead of time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The hon. member will have five minutes after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada Economic Development is taking part in a fish culture station project in an unused section of the Robert-Bourassa power plant operated by the Radisson Economic Development Corporation.

The aim of this three-year pilot project is to experiment with the controlled breeding of Rupert-strain brook trout using waste heat from the hydroelectric dam.

The Radisson Economic Development Corporation is to be applauded for its efforts to stimulate local entrepreneurship.

This fish farming project is eloquent testimony of the region's creativity and daringness when it comes to proposing promising new avenues of development.

It is also a good way to generate greater economic spinoff from the operation of hydroelectric power plants in James Bay.

* * *

● (1400)

[*English*]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, spring is here and the land is coming to life. After a long, hard winter, the people of Cypress Hills—Grasslands are going into the fields.

Calving is done for many. Seeding is about to start. And, in spite of the tough times on the farm, people are looking forward, forward to better days for them and their families.

However they need help from the government. They need a government that helps on trade issues rather than is helpless; that allows freedom to do business rather than restricts it; that encourages farmers rather than discourages them; and especially, they need a government that will keep its word and deliver on the programs that it has promised.

Why is it so hard for the government to keep its word? It is not just the contracts, the advertising, the phoney excuses, the ridiculous lines and the lack of good leadership. There is something far more wrong with the government and it needs to be replaced. Until it is, Canadians, including our farmers, will be left without the help they need.

* * *

CANADIAN SIKH COMMUNITY

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this month, Sikhs in Canada and around the world are celebrating *Vaisakhi*, the 305th birthday of the Sikh nation, Khalsa.

The founder of the Sikh nation, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, preached equality, truthfulness, tolerance, honesty, brotherhood and human rights. Thus, it is the duty of the Canadian Sikhs to come together in the footsteps of Sikh gurus and continue these efforts for social justice.

Canada's Sikh community and myself are deeply grateful to the Prime Minister for his continued involvement at the *Vaisakhi* celebrations on Parliament Hill, which he annually attended when he was finance minister and which he attended this morning as Prime Minister.

I am sure all members will join me in congratulating Canadian Sikhs on the birth of the Sikh nation and in recognition of their tremendous contributions in all spheres of Canadian society.

* * *

INFORMATION RIGHTS WEEK

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that from April 16 to April 23 the Canadian Library Association is celebrating Information Rights Week.

Information Rights Week is an annual activity designed to bring attention to the importance of information issues and policy in Canadian life.

This year's theme, "You Have the Right to Remain Private", demonstrates the CLA's priority to protect user privacy and confidentiality. The library profession has a commitment to an ethic of facilitating, not monitoring, access to information.

Libraries across Canada will be playing a leadership role in their communities by planning promotions and hosting programs highlighting confidentiality of user information.

We would like to thank the public libraries for their efforts and wish them success in this year's Information Rights Week.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's foreign policy priorities include eliminating violence against women and helping women become empowered decision makers.

To assist in these goals, the 2004 budget provides an additional \$248 million for foreign aid. This is in addition to the \$500 million Africa fund and is in keeping with our goal to double international assistance by 2010-11.

We have done this in Senegal, for instance, where CIDA supports a network of organizations that escort and protect women victims of violence, run literacy campaigns and hold legal information clinics.

Canada will maintain its commitment to reduce global poverty and strengthen democracy, justice and social stability, all of which will contribute to improving the situation of women around the world.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a suspected war criminal who entered Canada illegally is now living comfortably in Windsor, over the protests of many Canadians.

An 18-year-old Kosovo woman, Saranda Bogojevci, has travelled to Canada in hopes of reversing Canada's refusal to extradite this man, Dejan Demirovic, to be tried in Serbia.

Demirovic is accused of the massacre of Saranda's mother, two brothers and 11 other family members. Demirovic's alleged partner

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in this murderous crime has already been convicted and given the maximum sentence.

Saranda Bogojevci says, "I want to know why the Canadian government failed to send Demirovic to Serbia to face justice".

That is a good question. The students of Bowness High School in Calgary also want an answer.

On behalf of Bowness High School students and other concerned Canadians, I urge the government to stand with the victims of this unspeakable crime. It will send an important message about the value we place on the pursuit of justice.

* * *

● (1405)

CANADIAN PROSTATE CANCER RESEARCH INITIATIVE

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men. In Canada, at least one in eight men will develop the disease in their lifetime. One in four will die.

The Canadian Prostate Cancer Research Initiative is an alliance comprised of representatives of Health Canada and national cancer organizations that strives to stimulate new efforts in prostate cancer research across Canada and to strengthen existing efforts.

In a co-operative effort, I encourage Health Canada to give consideration and priority to the \$10 million funding request to sustain the vital research activities of the Canadian Prostate Cancer Research Initiative.

Research is the key to a cure and the Government of Canada has a critical role to play in ensuring that Canada remains a world leader in health research.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, in Forestville, I took part in a march by over 2,000 people from the Upper North Shore, Charlevoix and Manicouagan.

In solidarity, most of the businesses had closed for two hours to once again ask the Liberal government to amend the unfair employment insurance system, particularly with regard to workers in seasonal industries.

Not a single Liberal member of Parliament had the courage to represent the government at this demonstration of solidarity. For months now, attempts have been made to meet with the minister responsible, who systematically refuses to meet with the victims of this government's mismanagement.

S. O. 31

I invite the Liberal government, which likes to create endless committees and task forces, to stop beating around the bush and implement a real universal employment insurance system. For the men and women of Charlevoix and the Upper North Shore, this is first and foremost a matter of respect, dignity and survival.

The solutions are obvious. The Liberal government must stop campaigning for votes, and this injustice must be resolved before the next federal election. The people of the North Shore and Charlevoix want the legislation changed now.

* * *

[English]

VOLUNTEER AWARD

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to welcome here today, Ms. Margaret Norquay, a constituent of Beaches—East York and one of this year's recipients of the Therese Casgrain Volunteer Award.

She has been an active and dedicated volunteer for more than 50 years. An advocate for women, children, immigrants and seniors, Margaret Norquay has spent her life working to create a more just and equitable society. I rise today to applaud Margaret Norquay for her invaluable contributions to our community and to the advancement of social justice.

This award is presented every year to two individuals from across the country whose pioneering spirit, social commitment and persistent endeavours have contributed significantly to advancing a cause and the well-being of their fellow citizens.

I ask the House to join me in thanking Margaret Norquay for her contribution.

* * *

INCOME TAX

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker:

Sit down my friend and just relax
It's time to pay your income tax.
For whether we are great or small
They call us one, they tax us all.
They tax the collar on the dog
And tax the nose-ring on the hog.
They tax the wing badge on the hen
And tax the feeder in her pen.

They tax the baby in his crib
They tax his shirt and tax his bib.
They tax the diaper on his seat
They tax the booties on his feet.
They tax the mattress in his bed
They tax the bonnet on his head.
Thank God he cannot comprehend
That they have taxed him end to end.

They tax the coffin where you sleep
Enough to make the angels weep.
They tax the grave where you are laid
And make damn sure the tax is paid.
They tax the flowers friends sent for you
Because they need the revenue.
They tax you all the way through life
When you are gone they tax your wife.

To all taxmen I wish you well
May each of you wind up in—well.
Down there no doubt you can relax
For the devil needs no income tax.

* * *

● (1410)

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I, along with others in the Winnipeg Jewish community and members of the larger community, were present on the grounds of the Manitoba legislative buildings to commemorate the Holocaust Memorial Day, Yom ha-Shoah.

It was a day of much significance. It was the first national Holocaust Memorial Day, a day that came about because of the efforts of all parties in the House of Commons.

We know that between 1933 and 1945 during the Nazi regime, the shift of anti-Semitism moved from speechmaking to policymaking, from policy to persecution, to ghettoization, and to the systematic mass murders at the camps. It was a process fed by many factors, not the least of which was what one historian described as "upon the collaborators far beyond the German border, and...upon the indifference of bystanders in every land".

It is imperative that we remember that hatred of Jews and the resurgence of anti-Semitism at home and abroad is a malignancy that ultimately encompasses all vulnerable groups. It is the responsibility of all us to fight this anti-Semitism, intolerance and racism wherever and however it is manifested.

* * *

SOUTH AFRICA

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on April 27, South Africans will celebrate 10 years of freedom and an end to apartheid in their country.

The African National Congress and Nelson Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki, have just won a third landslide victory. And another reason to celebrate: almost 33% of South African parliamentarians are women.

South Africa faces daunting challenges, devastating poverty, the ravages of HIV-AIDS and an enormous gap between wealthy elites and the rest of its citizens but they are determined and courageous people.

Like Canada's honorary citizen, Nelson Mandela, South Africans inspire us with their commitment to justice and reconciliation.

Canada's New Democrats stand in solidarity with proud South Africans on their historic achievements.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

SUDAN

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, is history repeating itself? Ten years after the genocide in Rwanda, the international community continues to sit passively by as the situation in Sudan deteriorates. The situation continues to grow worse in Darfur in western Sudan for one million refugees who are in the grip of a humanitarian disaster that may spin out of control. Famine and epidemics threaten the region and the upcoming rainy season has people fearing the worst.

According to the UN, this situation is the result of the ethnic cleansing strategy engaged in by the Karthoum-backed Arab militia as they commit murder and rape, force people to relocate, and destroy villages, food and agricultural resources.

Violence has also resumed in the Upper Nile region, where 50,000 people have fled their villages in the past month because of systematic attacks against civilians by the government-backed militia.

“Never again,” we said after the Holocaust and after Rwanda. Canada must ask the Security Council to address this issue.

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[English]

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week, as Canadians remember the horrors of the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, we also understand the evil consequences of remaining silent when hate confronts our society.

As the Prime Minister rightly said, “hate-motivated crimes are an assault on all Canadians”.

Last week the hon. Minister of Justice visited my riding of Thornhill. He met with members of the community, religious and elected leaders. He visited both the Jaffari Islamic Mosque and Temple Har Zion next door.

These two religious institutions have set a concrete example of the Canada we want. The mosque and the synagogue share their driveways and parking lots. All those who stood on that driveway made a commitment. There will be no acceptance of bigotry, racism and hate in this country. We are taking action together. We will not remain silent. We have learned from the lessons of history.

* * *

VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, volunteering is one of the most noble acts of citizenship and philanthropy in our society. It is offering time, energy and skills of one's own free will to the betterment of others without any presumption of return or reward. Volunteers impact virtually every aspect of society including health, education, social services, youth, sports and recreation, culture, the arts and the environment.

While their contributions are undeniable, volunteers are rarely adequately recognized for their deeds.

Tonight the city of Port Coquitlam will host its annual volunteer awards dinner as a gesture of appreciation for all the hard work that volunteers have contributed to making Port Coquitlam one of the greatest places to call home. I regret that duties here in Ottawa will prevent me from attending tonight's event, where mayor Scott Young and the city will say, on behalf of all of Port Coquitlam, “thank you” to all the volunteers who have contributed to strengthening our community.

I want to personally thank all volunteers for helping build our strong community. Their efforts are greatly appreciated and are examples of what fine citizenship in a country like ours really should be all about.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

CANADIAN YOUTH

Mr. Claude Duplain (Portneuf, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join with my colleague, the member for Brome—Missisquoi, in acknowledging the presence of 12 young students from the riding of Brome—Missisquoi who have distinguished themselves in various ways.

Some were winners in Expo-Science Bell, including Élodie Nora-Gemme, who took the top prize for the Eastern Townships region; others won distinction in a literary competition, “Le français, un passeport international”, including the national winner, Sabrina Coupal Harnois; and finally, Kate Gasser, who won the Governor General's Medal.

My heartfelt congratulations go out to them all. They are a fine example of the drive and excellence of our young people. Their success is to their credit and their future is very promising. Canada can be proud of its young people.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the documents obtained today show that this Prime Minister gave contracts to his political friends while he was Minister of Finance. The Prime Minister had the gall to tell Canadians that he saw nothing and knew nothing. Not only did he see everything and know everything, he was the one who created the precedent of breaking the rules.

How can this Prime Minister look Canadians in the eyes and imagine that they trust him?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the contract to which I believe the Leader of the Opposition is referring was awarded by the Conservative government before we came to power.

In addition, once in office, we asked to have an open tendering process, which we eventually obtained, after a year.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister told us that he saw nothing and that he knew nothing. The documents we have today show that the finance department was the first to break the contracting rules, to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars, to benefit the Prime Minister's political allies at Earncliffe before 1996, laying the groundwork for the sponsorship scandal.

Does this not show that the father of this scandal is not Jean Chrétien, it is this Prime Minister?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not clear to me what documents the hon. gentleman is referring to, but in fact, any of the documents that have thus far been referred to in the House or in the committee show indeed that the rules were not violated. As the hon. gentleman will know, beginning in December 2002, those rules were changed in a dramatic way to increase competition and to eliminate any potential political role.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be happy to share documents with the minister later which reference his own attempts to get sole source contracts.

A public works memo from Warren Kinsella dated July 24, 1995 documented rule breaking by the Prime Minister. It said that finance department contracts "were conducted...contrary to cabinet-approved guidelines. This is simply unacceptable".

The Prime Minister himself was actively engaged in a contract scheme, so why did the Prime Minister tell Canadians he knew nothing about this practice?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier in this House there have been references made to memoranda from the former minister's staff. That memoranda clearly indicated that the minister's office was arguing for more competition, not less, and arguing for it sooner, not later. That in fact is the case.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not the case but I would sure like to debate it with the Prime Minister himself.

The Prime Minister told us he was mad as hell, yet Chuck Guité told him in July 1995 about his own contracting practices the following: "if escalated, it could become an embarrassment to the government".

How can the Prime Minister claim to be mad as hell now about this practice?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, the reference is incorrect, but the fact is that the Earncliffe contract was one that was inherited by the new government. When we took office, we inherited it from the old Conservative government of which the Leader of the Opposition was a member. As soon as we took office, we asked to have open tender contracts. That is eventually, about a year later, what happened. We followed the rules.

• (1420)

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Guité's memo indicates the scope of the work was written in a way that favoured the incumbent Earncliffe. The scope was biased to one firm. The Prime Minister did no such thing. In

memos from Chuck Guité, David Dingwall, Warren Kinsella back nine years, and these are the Prime Minister's own people, they indicate he did not just sign the cheques. He knew the rules were being broken. He participated in their being broken and he made sure his friends got the contracts.

Why should Canadians trust anything he says on this now?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, open public tenders may be broken rules according to the opposition, but that is the way that an open and transparent government ought to operate and that is the way that we operated.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the watch of the now Prime Minister, the Department of Finance deliberately favoured Earncliffe, a company with close ties to the Prime Minister, contrary to cabinet-approved guidelines. The executive assistant to the Minister of Public Works spoke out against this in July 1995.

How, under these circumstances, can people have any confidence in the Prime Minister, when he claims to want to do things differently, yet the rules for awarding contracts were bent to benefit his buddies, on his watch at Finance, exactly as they were in the sponsorship scandal?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, documents have already been tabled in this House that clearly indicate what my office called for, namely open and transparent bids.

This is a contract inherited from the Conservative government. The first thing we did afterward was to call for open bids, and we got them a year later.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, openly transparent it was, but also custom-made for Earncliffe. That is how it was done. Since the present Minister of Finance wanted Earncliffe, and the President of the Privy Council wanted Everest, the three ministers arranged custom-made contracts for their friends.

Does this not mean this is exactly like what was going on before? This is a Liberal pattern, for this Liberal government as well as the previous one: giving preference to friends of the regime.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the information before me indicates that in August 1994 finance in fact requested a full competition. In October 1994 a request for proposal was issued. In December 1994 Earncliffe won that bid in an open competition. Earncliffe again competed in 1996, 1998 and 2001.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the contract with Earncliffe was cancelled as soon as a new finance minister replaced the old one, now Prime Minister.

Does this not clearly demonstrate that the contract was in place with the PM's consent, when he was finance minister? He could have put an end to it, but he did not. His successor is the one who did.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again I fail to see the hon. gentleman's point. It has been indicated, as I indicated in my previous answer, that all of the rules throughout this process were indeed followed. When the new minister arrived on the scene, he preferred to rely upon different information or different advisers. That was his option. That was his choice. He too followed the rules.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the sponsorship scandal is still with us. Nothing has really changed: ministers prepare tailor-made invitations to tenders that are likely to match the specifications of a single company. That was the case with Earncliffe. The contract is awarded, and then we are told the rules were followed.

The fact is that this was the company of a bunch of buddies of the present Prime Minister, and he never terminated the contract. It took his departure, and the arrival of a new finance minister for the decision to be made that enough was enough. That speaks volumes.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my recollection of the analysis of the polling activity that the Government of Canada had undertaken by the Auditor General and included in her most recent report is that she found, with very few exceptions, the polling activities of the Government of Canada were properly conducted and that there was a wide basis of competition with indeed tens of companies being able to participate.

• (1425)

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to say that it comes as no surprise to us that the Prime Minister is not an incarnation of innocence when it comes to contracts.

I have another question for the Prime Minister, welcoming him back from the campaign trail, where he is out there re-announcing Chrétien policies at the same time as he is trying to put distance between himself and the former prime minister. I want to give the Prime Minister an opportunity not to campaign but to govern and not to re-announce but to actually renounce a policy of the Chrétien government.

Will he stand up in the House today and tell us that the contract with Lockheed Martin to conduct the Canadian census is going to be dropped?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the contract referred to was won through a fair, open and transparent competition. The Government of Canada has no intention of cancelling that contract.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): It was probably about as fair and open as the way that Earncliffe won its contracts, Mr. Speaker.

We understand that there is concern now about the public reaction to Lockheed Martin conducting our census. There is concern about the effect of the patriot act and the fact that this information may well have to be shared with the United States, given the relationship between Lockheed Martin, the Pentagon and the United States.

Is the government not concerned about the effect on the Canadian census and public opinion? Is it not in fact reconsidering this contract? Will the Prime Minister kindly address this issue?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the terms of the contract with Lockheed Martin Canada provide for complete confidentiality and security of Canadian census information. If there is any suggestion that this strict condition of the contract cannot be fulfilled, then of course the government will look at reviewing it.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's indignation does not really change his sorry history of ripping off taxpayers to help his friends at Earncliffe. Let me quote from the memo of July 24, 1995, from Warren Kinsella to Chuck Guité: "I require an immediate explanation as to how the department in question"—the finance department—"was permitted to breach the guidelines in this way".

How can the Prime Minister deny his role in this whole sorry mess, this contract scandal, when he was the first one in the pool when it came to breaking the rules?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, referring to the documents that have been brought before the public accounts committee, the memorandum of May 30, 1994, and then the memorandum of December 22, 1995, neither of those documents indeed support the proposition that the hon. gentleman is talking about.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister should get up to speed because we have documents that show this Prime Minister was directly involved. We have a smoking gun. The Prime Minister has been fingered as being directly involved in breaking all the rules in the book. He used his influence to help his friends at Earncliffe. That is unethical and that is un-Canadian.

Why should Canadians have any faith in a Prime Minister who has played such a direct role in lowering the ethical standards of government in Canada today?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the record of the Prime Minister and his staff in dealing with these matters is to argue for more competition, not less, argue for it sooner rather than later, and to defend the proper processes of contracts.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a new document has come to light that blows holes in the Prime Minister's cover story on ad scam. The 1995 internal memo shows Public Works questioning why advertising contracts had been given out under the authority of the finance minister, now the Prime Minister, and I quote, "contrary to cabinet-approved guidelines".

Oral Questions

The Prime Minister has been telling Canadians he did not know about advertising rules being broken. This damning memo exposes the Prime Minister as a rule breaker. How can Canadians possibly trust him after this?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a document tabled in the House, and in fact tabled by the member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, I believe, which demonstrates very clearly that what my office said was that it wanted an open competition and it wanted a number of firms and as many firms added to the list as could possibly be done. It wanted competition for the advertising contract, and that is the way it should be.

• (1430)

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is nonsense, because this is what the memo really says. They want to know why the finance department, with the current Prime Minister then in charge, and I quote, “was permitted to breach the guidelines in this way”.

Yet now the Prime Minister sputters about being mad as hell and he wants to find out how rules were broken. Now Canadians have found out how they were broken. They were broken by the Prime Minister. The truth is coming out. Why does he not now just give up this whole pretense of innocence?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on issues related to advertising in that period in 1994 and 1995, the documents that have indeed been tabled in the House, the memoranda that flowed from the minister's office, indicated very clearly that he was arguing for more competition, not less, and he was arguing for that competition earlier and sooner rather than later.

Indeed, on the matter of polling, the Auditor General has reviewed that matter. The hon. member will know that in the chapter in the most recent report the review from the Auditor General is essentially favourable.

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[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, even Pierrette Ringuette, vice-chair of the Liberal committee studying the issue of employment insurance, finds that the threshold of 910 hours imposed on new entrants into the labour force is too high and prevents many people from obtaining benefits.

Does the Prime Minister agree with Ms. Ringuette's rather harsh opinion?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that Ms. Ringuette is studying the shortcomings in the employment insurance system. It must be noted, however, that, while there are still shortcomings causing problems, there is also good news. The good news is that the unemployment rate, the number of people without work in Quebec and in the whole country, is still declining.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to Ms. Ringuette, the legislative amendments needed to change the employment insurance system will take at least six months. Meanwhile, the people fleeced by the

EI system are living in great difficulties and expressing their discontent, as they did yesterday in Forestville.

How can the government justify the fact that it has waited so long before acting on the unanimous recommendations of a committee, when all the necessary changes were identified by that committee three years ago? Will the government admit once again that all it is doing is stalling for time at the expense of the Sans-Chemise?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, there is a much broader perspective. Obviously the hon. member wants to point out problems. However, the truth is that, in the past, the government established a partnership with the regional authorities and thus also with the provincial authorities. The government has transferred \$597 million every year, in part to deal with these problems.

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HEALTH

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in support of their report on the introduction of mega-hospitals in Montreal, former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and former Premier Daniel Johnson reiterated yesterday that what the health care system needed was money from Ottawa, with no strings attached.

How can the Prime Minister make his share of funding for health care conditional on doing what Ottawa wants? Even former Prime Minister Mulroney admits that what the health care system needs is money, nothing else.

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Health, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that was not even the opinion of Bernard Landry, the real leader of the chapter here in the House. When he was finance minister, he recognized that simply making funds available for health would not ensure the real long term sustainability of our health care system for Canadians.

This very morning in Toronto, I gave a speech outlining the plan for health that we are developing with the provinces. This plan—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew: It seems to me that the Bloc prefers to howl, as usual, instead of listening to real answers.

• (1435)

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health represent Montreal ridings. It seems to me that they should be better able to understand the health problems of this population.

How can the Prime Minister blackmail the Quebec government by making his share of health care funding conditional on Quebec agreeing to allow the federal government to dictate how care is delivered from now on? Is it not disgraceful for Quebec to have to put up with this sort of blackmail in order to obtain funding for health?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Health, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. What our government is determined to do is ensure the long—

Oral Questions

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew: I know that the Bloc loves to howl, but what interests Canadians now is knowing that this government will work with the provinces. We are going to work with the provinces. I had the opportunity to work with Minister Couillard again on Friday, and I saw him again this morning in Toronto.

The members opposite really do not like this, because we want to work with the provinces to renew the health care system for future generations.

* * *

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to a memo from Warren Kinsella, Mr. Guité specifically said that the process for awarding a contract worth more than \$200,000 to Earncliffe had been rigged. He said, and I quote: “The scope was biased to one firm, so why waste time and money on a bid that had no chance of winning?”

How can Canadians trust this Prime Minister when he himself is at the centre of this scandal?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, it is very unclear what specific reference the hon. member is making. From the documents that are before the House and before the committee, the memoranda from the office of the former minister of finance, those documents indicate very clearly that the minister's office was arguing for more competition and arguing for that competition sooner, and eventually that argument in fact prevailed.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister knows the facts. In a memo to Warren Kinsella, Mr. Guité specifically said that the process of awarding a contract in excess of \$200,000 to Earncliffe was rigged. He said that “the scope was...bias[ed] to one firm, so why waste time and money on a bid that...had no chance of winning”.

This is clear, direct evidence and the Prime Minister knows what we are talking about. The Prime Minister was involved in the scandal. How can Canadians have any faith that this Prime Minister will clean up this mess when it was this Prime Minister himself who was involved in this scandal?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is in fact no evidence before the House or before the committee that would indicate that any contracting procedure was either wired or rigged, which the hon. gentleman alleges.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the record is clear about this Prime Minister's involvement in sole sourcing contracts to his friends at Earncliffe. In the memo to Warren Kinsella, Chuck Guité properly assigned blame where it belonged. Quoting from the guidelines, he said that if a department or agency fails to follow the contracting policy, the responsibility lies with the minister.

The Prime Minister clearly breached the rules. Why is he not accountable and responsible to Canadians for doing that?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed he is, and as the evidence before the House indicates, the consistent arguments made by his staff were in favour of competition and competition as quickly as possible. In August 1994, the finance department requested the full competition. In October 1994, a request for proposals was issued. In December 1994, Earncliffe won the bid in an open competition.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister knows the evidence that we are talking about and this is all about accountability and responsibility. The Prime Minister has been attempting to explain away his conduct, conduct that goes back nine years. He cannot explain it away.

I ask the Prime Minister to give Canadians the whole story. Why will he not admit that not only did he know about the breach of the rules, but in fact he was involved in breaking those rules?

• (1440)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, never has a particular transaction been more thoroughly ventilated than this one, and not just now in the last number of days or weeks, but indeed back in 1994 and 1995, at the time. At that time, it was abundantly clear that the rules were appropriately applied and that every argument made by the then minister of finance was in favour of more competition and more openness in the process, an argument on his part which eventually prevailed.

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INTERNATIONAL AID

Mr. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the government tabled its amendments to Bill C-9, the Jean Chrétien pledge to Africa act. This legislation will enable the flow of inexpensive drugs to African countries to combat HIV-AIDS and other life threatening illnesses.

While the original legislation tabled last fall demonstrated Canada's leadership on this issue, it was the first legislation of this kind introduced anywhere in the world. I would like to ask the Prime Minister to describe the key changes that were necessary to improve this critically needed legislation.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this was and is indeed a groundbreaking piece of legislation. However, because it contained the right of first refusal, it meant in fact that the export of inexpensive drugs to the poorest of the poor would have been impeded and in fact the guarantees of security in terms of new supply also would have been impeded.

As a result, what the government has decided to do, in conjunction with the parliamentarians on the committee, is to in fact eliminate that right of first refusal. As a result, not only will inexpensive drugs now be sent to these poor countries, but what is even more important is that Canada has taken the lead. We have established—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Churchill.

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HEALTH

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order. I know hon. members are always enthusiastic when the Prime Minister answers a question, but he has finished. We are now dealing with a question from the hon. member for Churchill and we will have a little order.

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister and the Liberal government have spent the last 10 years working to destroy the health care system in Canada.

Now they continue their destruction with yet another plan that will allow even more for profit health care services in Canada.

If the government is truly committed to the public health system Canadians want, will the minister stand today and tell Canadians that the government will not use taxpayers' dollars to fund for profit health care services?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Health, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased this morning, in Toronto, to explain to Canadians the very plan to which this Prime Minister is totally committed.

We will have, with the first ministers' meeting next summer and following the work of the health and finance ministers, a solid 10 year plan that really ensures that Canadians will have their health care system long into the future.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the defence minister was the chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs, he supported an all-party recommendation that stated very clearly that any new or replacement vessels for Canada's navy will be built in Canada's shipyards.

Now, as the defence minister and a member of the cabinet, can he assure the House and all Canadians, and especially those people in the shipyard industry, that those new vessels for the Canadian navy will indeed be built in Canada?

Hon. David Pratt (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the announcement that was made last week and the details which I provided in Esquimalt last Friday are I think important to people on both coasts in terms of the shipbuilding capabilities that we have.

These state of the art ships will be built in accordance with the current shipbuilding policy which states that if the competitive environment exists in this country, they will be built in this country.

It is important to keep in mind as well that, in fact, these will be the largest ships ever designed and constructed—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Southeast.

* * *

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's credibility gap is growing by the day. First, he was shocked to hear about corruption in the Liberal government. Now he

is shocked to hear the suggestion that he broke the rules to funnel tax dollars to his cronies at Earncliffe.

I have here a 1995 memo from one Chuck Guité which says that:

—it is felt that immediate action must be taken to correct the situation...it could become embarrassing to the government and certainly our Minister who is, according to the policy, the only contracting authority for Public Opinion Research.

Therefore, I have a simple question. Why did Chuck Guité have higher ethical standards than the Prime Minister?

• (1445)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would refer the hon. gentleman to the most recent report by the Auditor General. It indicated that, from her examination of the polling activities of the Government of Canada, in fact, those activities were by and large handled quite properly.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about 1995, when the Prime Minister was finance minister, and when he broke the rules to shovel tax dollars to his political cronies at Earncliffe. Everybody on that side knows about the special relationship between the Prime Minister and Earncliffe.

How does he expect us to believe that he did not break these rules and why is it that he would not even listen to the advice of Chuck Guité, when it came to ethical standards for government contracting?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again the hon. gentleman refers to a particular piece of paper. I would ask him to refer to the memos that were sent by the minister's office. Those memos from the minister's office argue for more competition and argue for it faster.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a confidential memo in 1995 to Warren Kinsella, then chief of staff to David Dingwall of public works, outlined how the Department of Finance twisted the rules to award contracts to Earncliffe. That same memo stated that the Department of Finance was not the only one breaching the guidelines.

We know that the present Minister of Finance, when he was the agriculture minister, dictated that Earncliffe be sole sourced as well.

How could the Prime Minister entrust a key position in his recycled government to the member for Wascana, when he clearly has a history of breaking these contracting rules?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Finance has the floor.

The hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster I know wants to hear the answer. He is not going to be able to if everyone is yelling.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed, I am glad the hon. gentleman asked the question. I have reviewed the record and an appropriate procedure was followed.

The subject matter was a crucial matter for western farmers flowing from the 1995 budget. A payment of \$1.6 billion had to be made and it had to be done properly and quickly. The situation was urgent. The work got done and the payment was made. After the fact, the program's administration was given a favourable review by the then Auditor General of Canada.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only thing we are sure of is that two out of three Liberal finance ministers put the “earn” in Earnscliffe.

In a 1995 secret letter from David Dingwall to the minister of agriculture, Dingwall, as public works minister, stated that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has demonstrated a pattern of non-compliance and avoidance of the rules for awarding contracts. It is the same old thing.

How does the Prime Minister justify promoting the member for Wascana, when his own cabinet colleagues of the day were attacking him for breaking the rules to benefit Earnscliffe?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman should know that the argument in the particular case that he is referring to was an argument based on urgency.

The urgency was obvious, as the hon. gentleman will remember the circumstances of the time. At that time, the minister of public works indicated that it was satisfactory.

* * *

[Translation]

FISHERIES

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the situation for groundfish fishers in the Lower St. Lawrence and Gaspésie is not rosy and many of them want the government to buy back their fishing permits. A buyback program would better protect the resources and the remaining fishers would then be able to hope for a quota increase.

Will the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans take action and promise right now to buy back permits from the fishers who are having difficulties?

Hon. Geoff Regan (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I am aware of the fact that there are fishers in his region who are worried about this situation. I cannot say whether permits will be bought back as he has asked.

• (1450)

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for 10 years now, groundfish fishers have been suffering from the effects of the cod moratorium and the decrease in quotas for other species such as turbot. These fishers held a demonstration this morning in front of the offices of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in Sainte-Anne-des-Monts.

The Prime Minister recently went to Sainte-Anne-des-Monts. Is he finally going to listen to the groundfish fishers and ensure that they have a decent income?

Hon. Geoff Regan (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again I would like to thank my colleague for his question and for his concern regarding this matter. I must say that we

have had numerous programs to address the situation of groundfish fishers. These programs have ended. We are aware of the fact that this is a matter of great importance for these people. We are going to continue to monitor this problem.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister is spending a lot of time trying to protect the Prime Minister. However, he should be protecting himself.

In that secret letter in 1995 from public works minister Dingwall to the minister of agriculture, who is now the finance minister, he laid out the violations of contracting policies carried out by Agriculture Canada. This included issuing contracts through Agriculture Canada instead of having them go through public works as the policy required.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Why should Canadians trust a Prime Minister who employed a minister like that in his cabinet?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to answer the question. First of all, the Minister of Finance has answered in terms of the approvals that were given.

If the hon. member wants to know why this member should be in place, it is because he was an outstanding minister of agriculture. He was an outstanding minister of public works who began the clean-up. He is an outstanding Minister of Finance who brought down a budget that the opposition did not have the courage to ask one single question about. That is why.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister defends him, but listen to this. The contracting policy clearly stated:

Departments and agencies must use Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) to contract for all public opinion research or advertising services.

The rules were clear. However, the present Minister of Finance when he was agriculture minister broke the contracting rules.

Did the Prime Minister appoint him to his cabinet because he had the same expertise as the Prime Minister in breaking contracting rules?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the opposition may well think that standing here and repeating specious innuendo is what this House is all about. But what it really is all about is proper public policy so that this country can push ahead.

The fact is that the minister brought down an outstanding budget and that opposition members did not have the guts to ask one question about it. The fact is that the former minister of public works began the clean-up.

The Minister of Finance, when he was the agriculture minister, was an outstanding minister. He worked with the current Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to bring down one of the most important agricultural packages ever and the opposition is afraid to talk about it.

*Oral Questions***STATUS OF WOMEN**

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite many advances, women still have a long way to go before they reach true equality.

I would like to ask the Minister of State for the Status of Women, what is our government doing to advance gender equality in Canada?

Hon. Jean Augustine (Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has undertaken many initiatives to address our commitment to gender equality. Let me speak about a few.

Status of Women Canada provided over \$10 million in funding to women and other organizations to ensure technical assistance to their work to advance women's equality.

As part of our commitment to end violence against women, we have pledged \$1 million over the next four years to aboriginal women's issues.

We also gave an additional investment of \$15 million—

The Speaker: The hon. member for St. John's West.

* * *

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 1995, the then agriculture minister, now the Minister of Finance, got his knuckles rapped for allowing his department to continuously break the rules of awarding contracts.

The minister tried to sole source contracts to the Prime Minister's good friends. His officials limited who could bid on the contracts. He funded contracts through contributions instead of the tendering process required by Public Works.

How could the Prime Minister appoint such a finance minister? He says he was outstanding. Does it mean he did an outstanding job in awarding contracts to his friends?

• (1455)

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we are now dealing with is the quality of question period and whether in fact the public interest is being advanced.

Let me just take a look. What opposition members have done is to repeat the same question time and time again because they cannot ask any other questions.

Let us take a look at what happened yesterday. The opposition objected to government spending. It objected to government spending on a water treatment system in Killarney. It objected to government spending on a water system in Warren, Ontario. Opposition members stood and objected to contributions to 23 projects in Montreal to combat homelessness.

The fact is, the opposition is opposed to everything that is in the public interest.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we would not have to repeat our questions if we would just get one honest answer to our questions.

Forget about us. Let me quote David Dingwall, the former minister of supply and services, when he said to the now Minister of Finance that "Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada officials have demonstrated a pattern of non-compliance and avoidance during the year the regulations have been in place. Contracting has been undertaken by Agriculture Canada instead of by Public Works—"

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, the Minister of Finance has answered that question time and time again.

Let us again look at what happened in this question period. Five minutes ago I stood, on behalf of all parliamentarians, and announced that we had eliminated the right of first refusal so that cheap drugs could be sent to Africa and other poor countries relieving people of HIV-AIDS.

What did opposition members do? They bayed like a bunch of hounds in heat. That is what they did. They refuse to accept that this country is in the lead. They refuse to accept, in fact, what all other parliamentarians in this House are in the process of doing. They are making this a mockery of what Parliament ought to be.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of the Environment was asked yesterday whether Canada would soon be defining its position on chrysotile, he treated us to such a confused answer that it is impossible to know with any certainty whether Canada plans to include or exclude chrysotile asbestos from the list of products banned under the Rotterdam Convention.

Can the minister give us a clear reply to confirm that there is no question of Canada supporting any kind of chrysotile ban under the Rotterdam Convention?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I indicated to the hon. member yesterday that our consultations have just been completed.

The departments of the Environment, Foreign Affairs, International Trade, and Natural Resources now have the information available to them, and we will review it and make the appropriate decision soon.

* * *

SHIPBUILDING

Mr. Christian Jobin (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the Canadian government indicated its intention to acquire three new supply ships for its fleet, at the cost of \$2.1 billion.

Given Canada's huge shipbuilding potential, I would like to hear the Minister of National Defence tell this House whether he intends to give precedence to Canadian companies for the construction of these three ships, or whether he plans to go to international tender.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Hon. David Pratt (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in response to an earlier question, the government is absolutely committed to building these state of the art supply ships and doing so in Canada on the basis of the existing policy, which is that a competitive environment should exist.

Having said that, our analysis of the situation is that there is significant shipbuilding capability in Canada, and it is likely that a number of companies will come forward and express interest in this.

Generally speaking, this is a great announcement for the navy, a great announcement for the Canadian Forces, a great announcement for the security of Canadians and a great announcement for the Canadian shipbuilding industry.

* * *

● (1500)

*[Translation]***OLYMPIC GAMES**

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is all very well for the Minister of State for Amateur Sport to consult all over the place, but the situation remains unchanged: first it was Karine Sergerie, and now it is the turn of Dominique Vallée, Alain Bolduc, Marie-Christine Rossy, Benoît Gaudet and Jean Pascal to be cut out of the upcoming Olympic Games in Athens, without the minister ever standing up for them.

If elite sport is really one of his priorities, will the minister commit to bringing pressure to bear on the Canadian Olympic Committee to get it to set criteria that will allow these athletes to take part in the next Olympics?

[English]

Hon. Stan Keyes (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Sport), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that there are agreements that take place between the Canadian Olympic Committee and the federations of sport, no matter what sport it is. These agreements are between two parties. They work together, and they work to ensure the rules and regulations are followed.

Our interest is in being fair to athletes. If athletes have problems, they can always go to ADR, the dispute resolution mechanism, with their complaints.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP): Mr. Speaker, avian flu in British Columbia has now entered its third month. It has exploded from a small number of farms and a small number of birds in a small geographic area in the Fraser Valley to beyond the Fraser Valley, and 19 million birds to be destroyed.

The top CFIA vet concedes this enormous increase has been caused by humans unknowingly carrying the disease from barn to barn. Obviously, biosafety protocols have not been adequately followed. My question for the Minister of Agriculture is, why has that happened?

Hon. Bob Speller (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. In fact we have seen

the number of cases of avian influenza in British Columbia grow. We are working with the processors, the producers and the government of British Columbia to get information out to farmers and all people in British Columbia who have contact with them to ensure that they know the importance of biosecurity in this instance.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during question period, the Prime Minister referred to some of the hon. female members of this chamber as baying like hounds in heat. I do not bay like a hound. A baying hound is a bitch, and I am not a bitch.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me assure the hon. member that I was referring to all the members of the opposition. However, if any offence should be taken, I certainly apologize.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS*[English]***PUBLIC SERVANTS DISCLOSURE PROTECTION ACT**

The House resumed from April 2 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: It being 3:03 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the referral to committee before second reading of Bill C-25.

Call in the members.

● (1515)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*(Division No. 44)***YEAS**

Members

Adams	Alcock
Anderson (Victoria)	Assadourian
Asselin	Augustine
Bachand (Saint-Jean)	Bagnell
Bakopanos	Barnes (London West)
Barrette	Bélangier
Bennett	Bergeron
Bertrand	Bevilacqua
Binet	Blondin-Andrew
Bonin	Bonwick
Boudria	Brown
Bulte	Byrne
Calder	Cannis
Caplan	Cardin
Carroll	Castonguay
Catterall	Chamberlain
Charbonneau	Coderre
Collenette	Comuzzi
Cotler	Crête
Cullen	Cuzner
Dalphond-Guiral	Desrochers
DeVillers	Dion
Discepola	Dromisky
Drouin	Duplain
Easter	Eggleton
Farrah	Folco

Government Orders

Fontana	Frulla
Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)	Gagnon (Champlain)
Galloway	Gaudet
Gauthier	Godfrey
Goodale	Graham
Guarnieri	Guay
Guimond	Harvard
Harvey	Hubbard
Ianno	Jennings
Jobin	Jordan
Karetak-Lindell	Keyes
Kilger (Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh)	Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Knutson	Kraft Sloan
Laframboise	Laliberte
Lalonde	Lastewka
LeBlanc	Lee
Leung	Lincoln
Longfield	Loubier
MacAulay	Macklin
Malhi	Maloney
Marceau	Marcil
Marleau	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Matthews	McCallum
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough East)
McLellan	McTeague
Ménard	Mills (Toronto—Danforth)
Minna	Mitchell
Murphy	Myers
Neville	Normand
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)	O'Reilly
Owen	Pacetti
Pagtakhan	Paquette
Paradis	Patry
Peric	Perron
Peschisolido	Pettigrew
Phinney	Picard (Drummond)
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)	Pillitteri
Plamondon	Pratt
Price	Proulx
Provenzano	Redman
Reed (Halton)	Regan
Robillard	Rocheleau
Roy	Saada
Sauvageau	Savoy
Scherrer	Scott
Sgro	Shepherd
Simard	Speller
St-Hilaire	St-Jacques
St-Julien	St. Denis
Steckle	Stewart
Szabo	Telegdi
Thibault (West Nova)	Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)
Tonks	Tremblay
Ur	Valeri
Vanclief	Volpe
Wappel	Whelan
Wilfert	Wood— 166

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)	Bailey
Benoit	Blaikie
Borotsik	Bourgeois
Breitkreuz	Bryden
Burton	Cadman
Casey	Casson
Cummins	Davies
Day	Desjarlais
Doyle	Elley
Epp	Fitzpatrick
Gallant	Godin
Goldring	Grewal
Grey	Hearn
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	Hill (Macleod)
Johnston	Keddy (South Shore)
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)	Mark
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Mayfield
McDonough	McNally
Meredith	Merrifield
Mills (Red Deer)	Moore
Nyström	Obhrai

Pallister	Penson
Proctor	Rajotte
Reid (Lanark—Carleton)	Reynolds
Ritz	Schellenberger
Schmidt	Skelton
Solberg	Sorenson
Stinson	Stoffer
Strahl	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Toews
Vellacott	Wasylycia-Leis
Wayne	White (Langley—Abbotsford)
White (North Vancouver)	Williams
Yelich— 69	

PAIRED

Members

Asselin	Augustine
Bigras	Brison
Fournier	Gagnon (Québec)
Grose	Peterson— 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

(Bill referred to a committee)

* * *

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2004

The House resumed from April 19, 2004, consideration of the motion that Bill C-30, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 23, 2004, be now read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the deferred recorded division on the amendment to the motion for second reading of Bill C-30.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, I think you would find unanimous consent that those who voted on the previous motion be recorded as having voted on the motion now before the House, with Liberal members voting no.

[*English*]

The Speaker: May I dispense with reading the motions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Dale Johnston: Mr. Speaker, I would like to have the name of the member for Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys included in this vote with our party and we will be voting yea.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, members of the Bloc Québécois vote yes on this motion. I would ask you to add to the list of members in favour of the motion, the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie and the member for Terrebonne—Blainville.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the members of the New Democratic Party vote yes on this motion.

[*English*]

Mr. Dale Johnston: Mr. Speaker, I am informed that the member for Vancouver Island North should also be added to that list.

[Translation]

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 45)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)	Asselin
Bachand (Saint-Jean)	Bailey
Benoit	Bergeron
Blaikie	Borotsik
Bourgeois	Breitkreuz
Bryden	Burton
Cadman	Cardin
Casey	Casson
Crête	Cummins
Dalphond-Guiral	Davies
Day	Desjarlais
Desrochers	Doyle
Duceppe	Duncan
Elley	Epp
Fitzpatrick	Gagnon (Champlain)
Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)	Gallant
Gaudet	Gauthier
Godin	Goldring
Grewal	Grey
Guay	Guimond
Hearn	Hill (MacLeod)
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	Hinton
Johnston	Keddy (South Shore)
Laframboise	Lalonde
Loubier	Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)
Marceau	Mark
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Mayfield
McDonough	McNally
Ménard	Meredith
Merrifield	Mills (Red Deer)
Moore	Nystrom
Obhrai	Pallister
Paquette	Penson
Perron	Picard (Drummond)
Plamondon	Proctor
Rajotte	Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
Reynolds	Ritz
Rocheleau	Roy
Sauvageau	Schellenberger
Schmidt	Skelton
Solberg	Sorenson
St-Hilaire	Stinson
Stoffer	Strahl
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews	Tremblay
Vellacott	Wasylycia-Leis
Wayne	White (Langley—Abbotsford)
White (North Vancouver)	Williams
Yelich — 99	

NAYS

Members

Adams	Alcock
Anderson (Victoria)	Assadourian
Augustine	Bagnell
Bakopanos	Barnes (London West)
Barrette	Bélanger
Bennett	Bertrand
Bevilacqua	Binet
Blondin-Andrew	Bonin
Bonwick	Boudria
Brown	Bulte
Byrne	Calder
Cannis	Caplan
Carroll	Castonguay
Catterall	Chamberlain
Charbonneau	Coderre
Collenette	Comuzzi
Cotler	Cullen

Cuzner	DeVillers
Dion	Discepola
Dromisky	Drouin
Duplain	Easter
Eggleton	Farrah
Folco	Fontana
Frulla	Galloway
Godfrey	Goodale
Graham	Guarnieri
Harvard	Harvey
Hubbard	Ianno
Jennings	Jobin
Jordan	Karetak-Lindell
Keyes	Kilger (Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh)
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)	Knutson
Kraft Sloan	Laliberte
Lastewka	LeBlanc
Lee	Leung
Lincoln	Longfield
MacAulay	Macklin
Malhi	Maloney
Marcil	Marleau
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	Matthews
McCallum	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough East)	McLellan
McTeague	Mills (Toronto—Danforth)
Minna	Mitchell
Murphy	Myers
Neville	Normand
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)	O'Reilly
Owen	Pacetti
Pagtakhan	Paradis
Patry	Peric
Peschisolido	Pettigrew
Phinney	Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Pillitteri	Pratt
Price	Proulx
Provenzano	Redman
Reed (Halton)	Regan
Robillard	Saada
Savoy	Scherrer
Scott	Sgro
Shepherd	Simard
Speller	St-Jacques
St-Julien	St. Denis
Steckle	Stewart
Szabo	Telegdi
Thibault (West Nova)	Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)
Tonks	Ur
Valeri	Vanclicf
Volpe	Wappel
Whelan	Wilfert
Wood — 139	

PAIRED

Members

Asselin	Augustine
Bigras	Brisson
Fournier	Gagnon (Québec)
Grose	Peterson — 8

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

INCOME TAX ACT

The House resumed from April 2 consideration of the motion that Bill C-246, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (child adoption expenses), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Private Members' Business

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-246 under private members' business.

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*(Division No. 46)***YEAS**

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)	Assadourian
Asselin	Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bagnell	Bailey
Barnes (London West)	Benoit
Bergeron	Bertrand
Blaikie	Bonin
Bonwick	Borotsik
Bourgeois	Breitkreuz
Brown	Bryden
Bulte	Burton
Byrne	Cadman
Calder	Cannis
Caplan	Cardin
Casey	Casson
Castonguay	Chamberlain
Charbonneau	Crête
Cummins	Dalphond-Guiral
Davies	Day
Desjarlais	Desrochers
Dion	Discepola
Doyle	Dromisky
Drouin	Duceppe
Duncan	Duplain
Easter	Elley
Epp	Farrah
Fitzpatrick	Folco
Fontana	Gagnon (Champlain)
Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)	Gallant
Galloway	Gaudet
Gauthier	Godin
Goldring	Grewal
Grey	Guay
Guimond	Harvey
Hearn	Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Hill (Macleod)	Hinton
Hubbard	Ianno
Jennings	Johnston
Jordan	Keddy (South Shore)
Kraft Sloan	Laframboise
Lalonde	Lastewka
Leung	Lincoln
Longfield	Loubier
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)	Malhi
Maloney	Marceau
Marcil	Mark
Marleau	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Matthews	Mayfield
McDonough	McNally
McTeague	Ménard
Meredith	Merrifield
Mills (Red Deer)	Mills (Toronto—Danforth)
Minna	Moore
Murphy	Neville
Normand	Nystrom
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)	O'Reilly
Obhrai	Pallister
Paquette	Penson
Perron	Phinney
Picard (Drummond)	Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Pillitteri	Plamondon
Price	Proctor
Proulx	Provenzano
Rajotte	Redman
Reid (Lanark—Carleton)	Reynolds

Ritz	Rocheleau
Roy	Sauvageau
Schellenberger	Schmidt
Simard	Skelton
Solberg	Sorenson
St-Hilaire	St-Jacques
St-Julien	Steckle
Stewart	Stinson
Stoffer	Strahl
Szabo	Telegdi
Thibault (West Nova)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Toews
Tonks	Tremblay
Ur	Vanclief
Vellacott	Wappel
Wasylycia-Leis	Wayne
Whelan	White (Langley—Abbotsford)
Wilfert	Williams
Wood	Yelich — 168

NAYS

Members

Adams	Alcock
Anderson (Victoria)	Augustine
Barrette	Bélangier
Bennett	Bevilacqua
Blondin-Andrew	Boudria
Carroll	Catterall
Coderre	Collenette
Comuzzi	Cotler
Cullen	DeVillers
Eggleton	Goodale
Graham	Guamieri
Harvard	Jobin
Karetak-Lindell	Keyes
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)	Knutson
Lee	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McCallum	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough East)	McLellan
Mitchell	Owen
Pagtakhan	Paradis
Pratt	Reed (Halton)
Regan	Robillard
Saada	Scherrer
Sgro	Shepherd
Speller	St. Denis
Valeri	Volpe — 50

PAIRED

Members

Asselin	Augustine
Bigras	Brison
Fournier	Gagnon (Québec)
Grose	Peterson — 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded divisions, government orders will be extended by 26 minutes.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1530)

[English]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2004

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-30, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 23, 2004, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise with all this enthusiasm in the House for the budget. I can see that everyone is so excited about it that they are making lots of noise, and that is great. One reason they are so excited is that it is a great budget for the north and a great budget for my riding. I really have to commend the members for Nunavut—

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the Chair neglected to do something. We have a submission on a point of order. Since we have a lot of noise, a little later we will let the hon. parliamentary secretary have free rein in his remarks in peace and quiet, I hope.

The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth wishes to speak on a question of privilege previously raised, and I would be pleased to hear him now.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Dennis Mills (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this matter goes back to an issue that was brought before the House on April 1. It emanated out of our public accounts committee.

On March 29 a group from our committee on public works spoke to the lawyer of Mr. Chuck Guité, as he was unable to attend on a particular day. During that meeting, the committee requested of Mr. Guité's lawyer that the seal be taken off his testimony. Later that day, on March 29 at 3:30, the lawyer for Mr. Guité returned to the committee with a written acknowledgement that the seal could be taken off Mr. Guité's testimony. At that time we presented it and it was denied, so we restarted a motion in place so that the testimony would be released 48 hours later.

On Wednesday I was approached in a scrum and I made some statements that were part of that testimony. If there was a technical breach on this issue, I apologize to the House and the committee.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member. Now we can perhaps go back to the bill we were discussing. We will resume debate and call on the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

* * *

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2004

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-30, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in

Government Orders

Parliament on March 23, 2004, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue explaining why people in the north are so excited about this great budget. The budget will do a lot of things for my riding, and I have had a lot of positive feedback from my constituents, as I know other members from the north have.

I have to commend the members from Nunavut and NWT for all their work over the years to help get these great items for north of sixty into the budget.

Some people might wonder how democracy works in this complicated system of parties, caucuses and committees and whether they get their voice across. This is a perfect example of how it works. We have a number of caucuses every week for the northern and western and rural regions. Then all the various caucuses in the regions and sectors feed into a national caucus. The Prime Minister and ministers get to hear the concerns and suggestions which have come directly from our constituents. Of course, that is how they get fed into a budget and that is how we get a budget with a number of tremendous items for our constituencies. Democracy works in a very effective way.

There is \$3.5 billion for the largest environmental program of any government in Canadian history, of which 60% will go to the north. We have \$90 million in economic development funds. We have the GST rebate for municipalities. We have huge infrastructure funds that are based not on a per capita basis but on need. Members of Parliament now recognize that it costs a lot more to produce infrastructure in the north, with a scattered population and very harsh climate conditions.

I was very excited to see funds for northern sovereignty, for which I have lobbied for a number years. Also, we had the announcement recently of a five year plan that had a number of items to help protect our precious northern sovereignty.

We have just finished the longest one way northern sovereignty patrol which started right after the budget. We will have unmanned patrols this summer of aircraft in the north. We will have the first major military exercise in the north, and a number of other investments.

I was delighted also about the \$41 million in the budget to map the north slope. By doing that, we can extend our 200 mile boundaries once we have made that very important investment in the Arctic. Russia has already done that, and I am very excited that we will do the same to protect our sovereignty.

However, that is not what I wanted to talk about today. I want to talk about a commitment by the government to aboriginal people.

Many people know that when our present Prime Minister came into office, he came in with a major commitment in spirit to help the first nation peoples and aboriginals and to reduce the tragic gap in poverty, education and health care and to give them equality with other Canadians.

Government Orders

As Canadians know, we had a very historic day, chaired by the Prime Minister, on Monday. Seventy aboriginal leaders of national aboriginal organizations from all provinces and territories were in Ottawa. Everyone was working together in the spirit of reducing the disparity and finding new solutions in a new world. Members of Parliament were not telling first nations and aboriginal people, Inuit people and Metis what to do. It was the first nations people meeting with parliamentarians and cabinet ministers to come up with solutions in this modern world.

Where is the commitment beyond that? This partnership is very important. In fact it is an essential foundation in trust that is needed to make this work. However, what are the actions after that? Those actions are set out very clearly in the throne speech. The throne speech covers the government's agenda which includes items for early childhood education, youth education, training, the urban aboriginal strategy and for Metis people.

We have the program, but once again we need more actions to show our commitment and those show up in the budget: \$25 million a year over five years for human resources development. It also has funds to set up a new governance institute.

● (1535)

If we look at the budget estimates, right in the actual figures there are increased investments for first nations people. This is a very careful and responsible budget in times of tight money but the investments did not stop increasing for first nations people. There were \$226 million more for claims, \$84 million more for programs, \$84 million more for safe drinking water, \$66 million more for education and \$26 million more for capital rust out projects. There is a total of \$495 million, a 9% increase in this very important budget.

Our action continued on after the summit. The next day we started debate on a land claim and self-government bill in an area of Canada larger than some countries. We carried on with a very important aboriginal agenda. It did not just end that day.

Today we have carried on with yet another debate on yet another land claim which would bring first nations people into governing themselves, those who are there on the ground, who understand the solutions and who can work to reduce the poverty.

The examples are so successful. We have done this across the country. It is so exciting that the Prime Minister has led this move and this enthusiasm to reduce poverty and that a vast majority, if not all members of the House, are quite on-side in this enthusiasm to bring these people into equality.

With all that good news, I move:

That the question be now put.

● (1540)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Madam Speaker, I realize that people are anxious to get on with the passage of the budget measures, which we hope will actually result in many of the important programs and services on which Canadians depend, to be fully implemented. This, of course, is the budget implementation legislation that will enable us to do this.

On behalf of my constituents in Halifax, who I am privileged and proud to represent, I want to speak briefly about some elements of

the budget that are under consideration. Let me say that as we do so it is important that we take account of the context in which this budget implementation debate is taking place.

First, we know that the Liberals wrestled the deficit to the ground, as they like to say, but it was only after it had heaped the real burden of that deficit reduction program upon the provinces and municipalities, in many cases the most vulnerable of our citizens. The program really became a deficit downloading or a shifting of deficit rather than any meaningful and fair-minded budget deficit solution.

However, having done so, we then witnessed seven successive years in which there has been a very significant and growing surplus under the current government. Canadians were hopeful that what this meant was that the many years of tearing down many of our public services, failing to address the growing problems with respect to our public infrastructure and rebuilding many of our public institutions that had been severely eroded would actually get underway in earnest.

Therefore it was with some considerable alarm, even before the introduction of the first federal budget under the new Prime Minister, the former finance minister in the government, that his very first act upon taking the reins of power as Prime Minister was actually to proceed with a \$4.4 billion tax cut, primarily benefiting large corporations that had no claim as first priority to such tax dollars.

That is the context in which we are now debating the budget priorities, the budget allocation that is before us in this implementation bill. Although one is hard-pressed to find actual dollars and cents on which Canada I think, predictably, will be on the hook in the future if the government does not reverse its current course, I think it is also part of the context in which we debate this budget that Canada, again without consultation with Canadians, to the considerable alarm I think of Canadians who have been following this issue, has now signed on for Canada to participate in the missile defence madness of the Bush administration, with the details of Canada's participation to be worked out.

However it has been made clear to Canadians, and we should make no mistake about it, that the government is quite uncritical about that missile defence program, engaging in the fiction that it is not about the weaponization of space and the further fiction, actually a very dangerous one, that somehow it will not cost Canada anything anyway, which of course is ridiculous.

With that context in mind, I want to talk a bit about the prebudget consultations that were held across the country with our federal leader, Jack Layton, meeting together with constituents in many parts of the country. In particular, I want to talk a bit about that prebudget consultation in my own riding of Halifax that was held in the run up to the budget that has since been introduced and is now before us for implementation.

Government Orders

I am sure it will not surprise anyone to know that there was a great deal of concern about the plight of post-secondary education.

• (1545)

I am proud that my riding of Halifax has no less than seven post-secondary education institutions. However many students, faculty members and staff members of those post-secondary education institutions were very concerned about the steady erosion of funding to post-secondary education. The effect has been enormous. Not only has there been some erosion in the quality of educational experience for students and a tremendous loss and outflow of some of our very best faculty members to other parts of Canada where provinces have a bigger tax base and deeper pockets, but also an outflow from the country to the U.S. and other places.

I want to say that what we saw in the budget was woefully inadequate in its response to this growing problem. The most serious aspect of it is the massive student debt that has been heaped upon the shoulders of our students who are always being reminded of how critically important it is for them to have post-secondary education in today's knowledge based economy.

What we have in the budget primarily that purports to address the problem of student debt and rising tuition costs is the privilege for families of limited income—and even that is a ridiculous notion for many because of how untenable it is to set aside many dollars for the future—of sheltering \$500 a year toward a learning fund, not to even take effect for 18 years. It is truly amazing that the government would think this would be the response to the crisis that is already being borne by many students and, of course, the privilege of accumulating another \$3,000 debt. It is a very inadequate response.

Health concerns are enormous all over the country but in Halifax, where we have a number of primary, secondary and tertiary health facilities, both a provincial and regional centre, there is little in the budget to address what are growing waiting lists for surgery, for diagnostic testing, for specialist services and the longer waiting times in our hospital emergency rooms. There is absolutely no serious commitment to deal with the crisis.

I had the opportunity to meet with political action representatives of the Canadian Medical Association a couple of weeks ago who were extremely alarmed that the government has yet to take seriously implementing the recommendations of the Romanow commission. Many of those recommendations have been ignored but the most serious one, for the continuing erosion of our not for profit public health care system, is the failure to recommit the funds year over year to the financial base, having taken \$17 billion out of our public health care system.

There are many other areas of priority concern, such as child care and social housing, that have been virtually ignored by the budget. It will not surprise anybody when I say that I join those colleagues in the NDP caucus who have already spoken to express alarm about the misplaced priorities, the inadequacy of addressing many of these concerns, and of course the environment and the rebuilding of our municipal infrastructure across this country, which again the government has engaged in a great deal of fanfare about, but substantively, when we come down to the actual dollars and cents of the priorities of this budget, are virtually absent or very timid indeed.

It is with heavy heart that I say that the budget surplus that has been accumulated at the expense of many of our most vulnerable citizens and our most vital public services, in this budget that sacrifice has not been recognized and the reparation and repair to the damage done remains unattended to.

• (1550)

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Surrey Central to participate in the debate on Bill C-30, the budget implementation act, 2004. This omnibus bill would put into law several measures in the March 2004 budget.

Last month's budget failed to deliver money for our hospitals. It did nothing to reduce spiralling tuition fees. It ignored the pressing needs of the Canadian armed forces. It neglected to put money back into the pockets of Canadian taxpayers.

Under the Liberals, spending has increased by \$41 billion over the past seven years. Over the next two years spending is set to rise by another \$13 billion, but almost none of the government's multibillion dollar spending will do anything to alleviate child poverty. It will not do much to improve health care, build new roads, help public transit or create jobs. Hospital waiting lines will continue to get longer. Students will continue to plunge deeper into debt. Our soldiers will be stretched as thinly as ever before.

The Liberals use weasel words like “prudence” and “accountability”, but waste and scandal more accurately describe their spending record. When the current Prime Minister was the finance minister we witnessed the billion dollar HRDC boondoggle, \$100 million in GST fraud, a \$1 billion cost overrun on the gun registry, the theft of \$160 million from the defence department, not to mention the sponsorship scandal and the hundreds of millions of dollars given to Liberal friendly advertising agencies. Quite frankly, this is money that would be better off in the pockets of hardworking Canadians.

The aim of the equalization program is to shift resources from the have provinces to the have not provinces to ensure a reasonably similar level of service for health care and education across the country. Eight provinces receive about \$10 billion annually. The amount is determined by a very complex formula which measures the ability of each province to raise revenue. B.C. receives about \$440 million since it became a have not province under this government's watch.

Government Orders

Bill C-30 renews the equalization program for five years, to March 31, 2009. At their annual conference, all 10 premiers called on the federal government to calculate its standard for equalization by averaging the fiscal capacity of all 10 provinces.

The Liberals refused and instead unilaterally introduced their own changes for a new formula. It changes the way some revenue sources in the formula are measured, resulting in payment increases of about \$265 million per year. It also introduces a three year moving average to the way the formula is calculated to smooth out year to year fluctuations in payment levels.

The budget announced a payment to the provinces of \$300 million to support a national immunization strategy and \$100 million to help improve public health facilities. The budget stated that this would be booked to fiscal year 2003-04 but that payment would be made over three years.

Bill C-30 also authorizes payments to a trust for these purposes but does not specify when they are to be made. Nor does the legislation specify the amounts to be paid to individual provinces.

The budget announced that a further \$100 million would be provided to Canada Health Infoway Inc. While the budget said that the payment was to help the provinces invest in hardware and software for public health surveillance, Bill C-30 gave no direction as to its use. This brings the total funds advanced to the foundation to \$1.2 billion, including its initial endowment of \$500 million announced in September 2000 and \$600 million announced in the 2003 budget.

● (1555)

In her April 2002 report, "Placing the Public's Money Beyond Parliament's Reach", the Auditor General raised concerns about this foundation's accountability structure. Transferring money to funds and foundations so that it may be spent in future budget years was a popular way of doing business when the Prime Minister headed the finance department.

The Auditor General found that from 1996-97 to 2000-01 the government paid \$7.1 billion through transfers to nine foundations to achieve various policy objectives of the government. The government treated the \$7.1 billion in transfers to foundations as an expenditure, but as of March 31, 2001 almost the entire amount was still in the bank accounts and other investments of the foundations. Very little of it had actually been received by the ultimate intended recipients. The Auditor General concluded that "the \$7.1 billion, or most of it, is not really an expenditure of the government".

The recording of these transfers as expenditures enabled the government to report a lower annual surplus. It was hiding money. This is completely cooking the books.

I remember in the public accounts committee at that time discovering that the government was hiding money in a foundation which was not even in existence as of that date. The foundation came into existence a year later, but the government hid money to pay to that foundation which did not even exist. If a businessman were to follow this practice in his business, I would bet he would be in jail.

Why was the Prime Minister, who was the finance minister at that time, allowed to cook the books? The Auditor General took a strong

step. The Auditor General refused to sign off on the government books. What the government did was completely, in my judgment, illegal and a violation of generally accepted accounting principles and should not be allowed to be done by the government.

The federal government also talked about employment insurance. The EI fund is a real scandal in Ottawa. The surplus of employment insurance overpayments has reached about \$44 billion and another \$3 billion surplus is expected. That surplus is not supposed to exist. This money belongs to employees and employers. The government does not need to accumulate money to the tune of a \$47 billion surplus. The Auditor General and the chief actuary of the EI fund have said that it should not be more than \$15 billion. The government is abusing its accounting powers and manipulating generally accepted accounting principles just to benefit the government and its Liberal friends.

On another issue, in Surrey at least 44% of what we pay for gasoline is the taxes on gasoline which the Prime Minister has been talking about. Last year the tax bite for B.C. totalled over \$1.1 billion. In return the government transferred only \$37 million to the province for infrastructure improvements, which is a paltry return of just over 3%. In contrast, the United States gives 95% of the money for infrastructure development projects. In Canada, it is about 3%, which is laughable. The government is carrying all that money into the general revenue, which is a complete black hole.

Discretionary spending increased a whopping 15% this budget year and the government wants overall spending to grow by another 8.8% over the next two years. Truth and transparency in fiscal policy is what we were promised, but we do not see it.

My time has expired, so in conclusion, I would like to say that the sponsorship program referred to by the environment minister's staff as a Liberal slush fund, and likely the unity fund as well, also known as the honey pot, funnelled money into Liberal ridings. We saw the same thing with the transitional jobs fund.

● (1600)

The rot extends far beyond a mere \$100 million skimmed by a few advertising firms. It is the whole system of discretionary spending that we are concerned with that is corrupt and corrupting the system. It depletes the treasury, distorts the economy, incites envy, encourages special pleading, and rewards friends of the government.

With the tax filing deadline looming, Canadians should pay close attention to what the government is doing with their money. The Liberals are furiously spending in their bid for re-election and that is not acceptable.

Government Orders

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is good to speak to the budget in the House of Commons. This will be my last speech before the election and I want to outline a number of issues that are important to me in my riding and issues that were neglected in this budget.

Regardless of what kind of budget the government has, integrity and values are a very important part of any government's budget. The way people perceive politicians in the House of Commons, whether or not they vote for us, is important.

We have looked at the sponsorship scandal from this Liberal government of virtually \$250 million of which \$100 million of it went missing somewhere or was inappropriately spent and some of it got back to the Liberal Party. Is it any wonder people have lost confidence?

We see another member of the House stealing a \$50,000 ring which is totally inappropriate and unwarranted. Those kinds of issues just harm everybody here in the House of Commons. If we were to do anything in a budget, we should spend a few dollars trying to wake people up in this House, and put some integrity and values in politics.

The avian flu has hit my riding and we are going to debate that issue a couple of hours from now so I am not going to spend any time on that. We will be looking for real commitments from the government on how to deal with that issue.

I want to identify a couple of things that were missing in the budget. There was no mention in the budget of the immigration deportation system, the whole refugee system. It is the kind of thing that the government does not like us to talk about, but I have three cases going on in my riding right now.

A fellow by the name of Phu Son came into the country and got on welfare, and stayed on welfare. He made a lot of money on grow ops. He bought three houses while on welfare, one in Abbotsford, one in Langley and one in Alderville in my riding. When he was caught, he went to court and the judge gave him a \$100 fine. This fellow should be deported and those houses should be taken away from him.

What about the Canadian dream? What about all Canadians who are law abiding citizens, trying to keep a family going and raising enough money to buy a house ultimately? This fellow comes here and lives on welfare, and buys three houses. There is something wrong with the system and something wrong with the integrity.

Then there is a fellow by the name of John Fottvik. He came to Canada, beat a woman to death, set her body on fire and served 17 years. At his parole board hearing, he was told that he would be released on condition that he would be deported. The deportation immigration board told him to deport himself. A ticket would be sent to him and he was to show up at the airport at 6:30 on Monday morning and deport himself. Well, John Fottvik is still in this country and did not show up, of course, and nobody is bothering to chase him. The investigation people at Immigration Canada, the RCMP, say that they have other things to do, so that was a waste of time.

Conversely, let me tell members about a young lady who came to Canada from Germany with her parents when she was two years old.

She grew up in Toronto in a nice family and then moved to Abbotsford in my riding. She graduated from high school and then was accepted into Harvard which is not an easy task. She graduated from Harvard with a chemistry degree and stayed in the United States for a year and then went to Africa for some volunteer work, and then wanted to come back to Canada.

She was refused entrance to Canada because she did not have a permanent residency card even though she came into the country at age two, went through school and lived in my community. She is an honourable Harvard grad. How many Harvard grads does Canada have? And she is refused entrance.

Meanwhile, I am fighting people like this drug dealer who is still in the country. I am fighting John Fottvik who murders a woman, and this young girl cannot get into our country. It makes me sick. There will be changes after this election to that kind of process.

• (1605)

The issue of drugs was also not included in this budget. I brought this issue up in the House of Commons and across the country. We studied it, a committee worked on it, and 41 recommendations were made on how to deal with cocaine, heroin, ecstasy, and crystal meth. None of those recommendations have been accepted and implemented by the House.

After an 18 month study and a \$500,000 committee, the government dropped the ball. In fact, it felt the recommendations were a little conservative so it threw out a bill to decriminalize marijuana, sent the media flying in that direction, and did not even bring that bill in because the election is close and the government knows it would get hammered for it. Nothing has been done on drugs. I can assure the House that after this election, when we form the government, something will be done in that regard.

I call Highway No. 1, in British Columbia, from Hope to Vancouver a cow path because it is very similar to a cow path by today's standards. It is woefully inadequate. There are traffic jams at any time of day. It is the number one highway in this country and yet not one red cent has gone toward widening it and yet over three million people use it every day.

Missing totally from this budget was any amount of money from revenues to be put toward a crucial project like that where there is gridlock for trucks going in and out of Vancouver. Not one cent was included in this budget.

SE 2 is a generating plant which the Americans wanted right on the border. I live on the border of Sumas, Washington and Abbotsford, British Columbia. The Americans wanted to build a generating plant that would pollute our already polluted air, which, I might add, was also not addressed in this budget.

Government Orders

We managed to fight that for over three years and that generating plant was refused. Now a private American company is appealing to our federal court, but it will not be successful. The problem is that the air in the Fraser Valley is already brown. It is already a problem. Here we are fighting additional problems of air pollution from generating plants, and the government has done nothing at all about the air pollution in the area where I live, and the air is bad. That also was not in the budget.

People in my area might remember this when they go to the polls. We do not plan to lose. The last time we won by 72% and we expect it to be somewhat higher than that this time.

An. hon member: 80%.

Mr. Randy White: A little better than 80%. The reason is because all of these problems are realistic problems that were never addressed in the House of Commons.

The national sex offender registry, which I wrote three years ago, is another issue. The government denied that a sex offender registry was needed. Finally, after two years of fighting and with pressure from victims and police, and other people, the government said a sex offender registry was needed. The registry just became law last week. It was brought in essentially the way I wrote it, but the government added some things.

Here is what the government added. The Crown must apply to have a sex offender placed on the registry. We said no and provided a list of sex offences. We said that if someone was convicted of one of those offences, they should go on the registry. Giving the Crown the option to apply is bad. It will be inconsistent across the country.

The government also said it would give a sex offender the right to appeal. Every sex offender will appeal and I am sure some will win those appeals so a few more will drop off. The government said it would allow judges the right of discretion. After all of this, if their privacy is invaded or the judge does not think somebody should be on the sex offender registry, they too can say no. We have a sex offender registry that will be virtually useless thanks to the government.

Madam Speaker, my time is up. The government's time is up. It is time to form another government and it is going to happen.

• (1610)

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to confirm that this is a debate on Bill C-30, the budget implementation bill. I did not hear anything about the budget in the last speech. Every once in a while the hon. member should actually read the budget. It would probably be of some assistance to him.

I am going to narrow my remarks to annex 3 of the budget, which I again recommend to hon. members just in case they are interested in what is in the budget.

This is the seventh year in a row that the Government of Canada has posted a surplus, which is the first time since Confederation. It is quite a remarkable financial achievement given the difficulties that we had last year. That has been said quite a number of times. What might not be known is that, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, Canada is

projected to be the only G-7 country which will record a surplus in both 2004 and 2005.

It is also interesting to note that Canada has had the largest improvement in its budgetary situation among G-7 countries since 1992. That was just about a year before this government took over from the predecessors of the Alliance-Reform-Conservative, et cetera. That was the hole from which we had to dig ourselves out. If we are benchmarking, that is probably an appropriate place to start.

Over that period of time, the other governments, following the lead of the Government of Canada, started to realize that this debt situation could not continue. Therefore, over this period of time, Canada's total government sector debt—by that I mean the provincial and federal governments—has declined to an estimated 35% of gross domestic product, which is a remarkable turnaround, given that we were probably at that time about the second highest in the G-7 nations in terms of indebtedness.

In 2002-03 we posted a \$7 billion surplus, much to the chagrin of my colleagues in the far end of the chamber. That was somewhere in the order of .06% of the overall gross domestic product. That contrasts quite favourably with our colleagues to the south and the co-religionists of members opposite.

The U.S. balance fell further into deficit in the same period of time to \$375 billion or 3.5% of GDP. Actually, the story is somewhat worse than that because the Americans count their deficit by mixing their pension plan surplus money into the actual government revenues. Therefore, there is a better deficit picture in the United States than the way we project it here in Canada. We separate out the surplus that we have in the Canada and Quebec pension plans and keep them separate and apart from the actual government revenues. That in effect makes a substantial difference.

This year the government projects through its budget a surplus of \$1.9 billion. Whether it turns out to be more than that or less than that we actually will not know until July or August of this year. Nevertheless, at this point that is what we are projecting, which is approximately 1% of the entire revenues of the government.

I hear members from the far end of the chamber from time to time say that the house is leaking and all we are doing is paying the mortgage. The mortgage is about 20% of the government's revenues. That is about \$37 billion, just to pay the interest on the mortgage. The hon. members to the left on this factor say we cannot pay down any principal. Well, the principal payment in this particular year as projected in the budget is 1% of the entire revenues of the government. They say that is a horrible thing. Surely we should not pay down 1% on our debt. So I do not understand the thinking there.

As a result of continued surpluses at the federal level and the deterioration of U.S. finances, the federal debt to GDP ratio is expected to fall below the U.S. figure for the first time in quite a while, actually since 1977-78.

Government Orders

•(1615)

That is almost 30 years in which the Americans have had a better debt to GDP ratio than we had. This past fiscal year is the first year that we will have a better debt to GDP ratio than our colleagues to the south.

Members will be interested in some of the material that is contained in annex 3.

As I said, Canada was the only G-7 country to record a surplus in 2003 out of all the OECD countries. Canada's surplus for 2003 is estimated to be 1% of GDP, compared to an average deficit among OECD countries of somewhere in the order of 4.7%.

Let me just emphasize that because 4.7% is the average of what an OECD country will be having as a deficit, where Canada will be in a slight surplus, in spite of all the difficulties that we had in this past fiscal year. Those fiscal difficulties that we had with SARS, mad cow and all those other plagues and pestilences, as the minister has described, will be rippling through our 2004-05 fiscal year. We just do not recover from hydro blackouts and expect to instantaneously replace the loss on the gross domestic product.

Turning to the third chart that is in the annex, Canada's total government sector financial balance has improved when it recorded a 9.1% deficit of GDP, almost double the G-7 average. In other words, in 1992 we were 9.1% of GDP in a deficit position—one of the worst countries in the G-7.

We have already improved by being in the seventh year of consecutive surplus. From 1992, in other words the last period of time in which a conservative form of government was running the government of Canada, to 2003, Canada's total financial balance registered a turnaround of 10 percentage points. Before 1992-93, we were way below the G-7 average and making a real hash out of things. With a lot of hard work on the part of this government and on the part of Canadians, we have now turned it around to have the best financial situation of all the G-7 countries in the world.

The previous speaker talked about government spending and that we are just like drunken sailors. Unfortunately for him, the facts are somewhat different. When his previous incarnation of a political party ran the shop, Canada was in a bit of a mess. On a national accounts basis, our total government spending was well above the average for the OECD and the G-7. Since then, we have experienced sharp reductions in program spending and between 1992 and 2003, Canada's total government spending program, as a share of GDP, is estimated to have been reduced by 9.2%, which is a far greater reduction than any other country. So, between the Conservatives of 1992 and the Liberals of 2003, the difference is a reduction in actual program spending net of debt, I am not including debt in this, of 9.2%.

When we add the actual significant differences in debt, we were actually paying 28¢ out of every dollar on debt. We paid out \$37 billion this year. We have actually taken that figure from 28% down to just a touch under 20%.

This is a remarkable story. It shows that, contrary to the nonsense we hear out of the other side, Canada is arguably the best managed

country in the world. Frankly, if there is going to be an election, I am happy to go to the people of Canada on that record.

•(1620)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Betty Hinton): Just to reassure the member for Scarborough East that I do listen very carefully to the speeches and make sure people remain on topic, the member for Langley—Abbotsford prefaced his statement by saying he was talking about things he thought were missing from the budget. So, we were talking about the budget.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Madam Speaker, as usual when I listen to the member from Scarborough, I find that he must be a lawyer because of the way in which he couches his speech. He speaks like a lawyer. Ordinary Canadians outside of this place cannot even understand what he is talking about with all these great words and great percentages and everything that he puts in. He must be a lawyer.

Let me tell him that as far as Canadians are concerned, they look at what the Auditor General said. Where is the transparency? Where is the accountability? Let him talk about what his government has wasted. The government has wasted billions of dollars on the gun registry. They could do better things here. The member should not try to hide behind the figures out there by talking about the GDP and all those things.

As I was saying yesterday in my speech about this government, the so-called change the Liberals were talking about has not transpired. It is the same old government with the same old policies. There has been no change. There is a lack of vision and a disconnect from Canadians.

We can see what the Liberals are doing on the other side: they are trying to blame it on the Conservative Party now, on Brian Mulroney's party, yet they have been ruling over there for the last ten and a half years. They should forget about Brian Mulroney's record. They should talk about their own record, about what they have done here instead of going back there.

Now, as for their record, the member from Scarborough is absolutely right. The Canadian people will make the choice when they vote at the election. They will say to the government that there is no accountability and they will send the message that the Liberal Party needs to hear from Canadians.

As I said in my speech yesterday, there is a lack of vision and there is a lack of direction in the budget that the Prime Minister has presented, and this is a Prime Minister who was finance minister, the second most powerful man in the last administration. I think we better start using the word "administration", because it is the same Liberal government doing everything.

Today I want to talk about international assistance. As the senior critic for international development, I noted that this budget has a \$248 million increase for international assistance. We noticed the increase, but we do have some very serious concerns about how Canada's international assistance is managed.

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The previous government made a commitment of an 8% increase. This \$248 million shows that increase. However, when we are talking about figures, we can quite comfortably say that our contribution to international aid has fallen, to .25% of the GDP in 2000, and it remains below .03% of GDP. When we start talking about GDP percentages, it looks very low, but in reality over \$2.5 billion is now going to international assistance. That is a huge sum of money.

What we need to know is what is happening with that \$2.5 billion that we are allocating to international assistance. Right now we are in 105 countries, giving out money to small projects as band-aids. They are having no impact, no impact at all. I had a meeting with senior officials from CIDA and asked them to give me a success story, to tell me where CIDA has been. The officials have been involved in international development assistance since the 1960s and 1970s and I asked them to give me a success story. They could not give me a success story. Where did they put the money? It is a good question. Where? We do not know.

Let us talk about the countries that were recipients of Canadian aid and what has happened to them. Recipients were the continent of Africa and the continent of Latin America. What happened to the continents of Africa and Latin America? Those two continents today have the largest number of poor countries in the world, so what has happened to all our development assistance?

• (1625)

We were not there to issue development assistance. We were there just to show the Canadian flag. In reality, companies in Canada were the ones that were benefiting from this international development assistance, not the countries to which the aid was supposed to go.

Now, fine, it has been recognized that this was a mistake and the government is trying to address that issue, but I will tell members what the biggest flaw is. We are a country that has absolutely no legislation on determining how to achieve and what are the objectives of our international development assistance. The U.K. has just issued a legislative agenda to tell the bureaucrats where the money should go, but here in Canada the bureaucrats tell us where the money is going. There is an oversight from Parliament, but that does not mean we are telling them where the money should go.

What do we have? We have bureaucrats deciding which countries will get money, where the money will go and how the money will be spent. At the end of the day, it goes in all directions, and as it goes in all directions, there are no concrete results coming out of that kind of thing.

Let me give an example. I stood up in the House two years ago demanding that we stop aid to India and China. Why? Because these were the emerging economies that did not need the small amount of money we were giving them.

What did the minister stand up and say? He said, "No, we have to give the money to them. There are poor people in those countries". Of course there are poor people in those countries. I agree. But these countries also have governments that should be responsible for their own citizens. What spectacle do we end up with? A year later we have the spectacle of the government of India telling us to pack our bags and leave.

Yet the government did not get that message from China. China sent an astronaut into space. China spent \$3 billion dollars on that. Why would the Chinese not worry about their poor while we are saying we are worried about their poor? Even now the aid workers will not move out of China. I do not understand why not. It is not that China is poor. Yes, there are poor people, but the reallocation of resources in China should be the responsibility of the government of China, not the responsibility of the Government of Canada. Still the minister will not agree to that request.

We keep throwing away international assistance money, yet our budget says that we are going to increase our aid spending because we need to help the poor.

I wish to make a small comment on an announcement that the Prime Minister made today. I will say that we were the first to support the initiative of changing the legislation to send cheaper drugs to Africa to fight AIDS. We recognize the importance of this. We recognize the devastation that AIDS is causing. We recognize our commitment. Our party is supporting this legislation and finally we see this legislation moving forward.

Last, I would like to say to my friend on the other side, my friend from Scarborough, that, yes, I also am waiting for an election.

• (1630)

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak to the budget debate here today. The issues I would like to address are issues related to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Coast Guard, which is part of that organization.

In the event that a large aircraft comes up short in the tidal flats off Vancouver International Airport, the emergency plan for the Vancouver airport requires that two hovercraft be dispensed to bring rescue craft and provide rescue services to that downed aircraft. Hovercraft are the only vessels capable of entering on the tidal flats and of course their presence is almost mandatory, or required, I should say, to effect a rescue.

In the past, we did have two hovercraft available at the Sea Island Coast Guard base. In October 2002, one of those hovercraft was taken out of service due to old age. We were promised a replacement by December of that year. We are still waiting for that replacement. The latest estimate is that it will not be ready until June of this year.

The remaining hovercraft was taken out of service about a month ago due to a serious mechanical problem. It will not be available for service again for probably up to three months. This means that there is no hovercraft available to effect a rescue in the tidal flats off Vancouver, either for an accident at the airport or for any other tragedy that could occur on that very large expanse of water.

Plan B of the rescue plan in the tidal flats called for Department of National Defence search and rescue to provide a Cormorant helicopter to bring rescue rafts to the downed aircraft, but those same planes, those Cormorants, have now been taken out of service and are available to fly only for emergency or rescue services because of their mechanical problems.

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So the fact of the matter is that there is no Coast Guard availability for the tidal flats off Vancouver. Absolutely no rescue service whatsoever is available. That, I think, is a very real condemnation of the government's failure in this regard.

I have a copy of the minister's briefing book, which was prepared for the new fisheries minister, the minister responsible for the Coast Guard, and it confirms what I have said. In that briefing note, the minister is told:

The Canadian Coast Guard's on the water capacity to support the government's marine priorities and programs, and marine security, is eroding rapidly. A strong government commitment is needed to reverse this.

The briefing note goes on to state:

...the state of the large vessels in the Coast Guard fleet requires an immediate investment decision by the government—

Thus, the minister has been advised by his own department of the lack of readiness of the Coast Guard due to funding cuts.

However, the funding cuts are not restricted to the Coast Guard. John Fraser, the head of the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, noted recently in an annual report that:

Further reductions...fundamentally undermine the capacity to monitor salmon stocks and identify those in need of conservation measures.

Of course in this report we are talking about the west coast fisheries, particularly the salmon fishery. Fraser goes on to say:

The effective management of the salmon resource is confounded and undermined by the downsizing of staff and budgets by both levels of government at the same time.

He goes on to state:

The prospect of even larger reductions in 2004 makes it likely that effective management of Pacific salmon stocks will be further diminished.

The briefing book the minister received on becoming minister gave him ample warning about the problems that John Fraser is now warning us about, another reason why we needed the departmental spending plans, which should have been provided in a more timely fashion. However, let us see how the minister was advised.

● (1635)

The briefing book stated that several internal challenges “threatened the long-term sustainability of DFO's services”.

The notes claim “chronic financial pressures”, some of which date back to program review and “budget shortfalls” in recent years. The notes state “growing program and workload pressures to deliver an increasing range of services”.

The briefing notes go on to say that there were established plans to reduce DFO's staffing by “not filling 15 percent of the positions that will be vacant over the next two years”.

All of that underscores the comments made by Mr. Fraser that the funding cuts by the government will undermine the department's ability to manage and protect the salmon resource on the west coast.

That is further illustrated by the point that DFO was identified as being part of the first round of Treasury Board Secretariat led expenditure and management reviews and was required to contribute \$9 million to the \$1 billion federal reallocation exercises in the year 2003-04.

DFO will be required again to cut further to support the government spending cuts. I think it has already been cut to the bone as we have illustrated here with a report from the Coast Guard and from the minister's briefing notes on the state of the salmon fishery on the west coast.

These cuts are not restricted to the west coast. The briefing notes prepared for the minister state:

Overfishing and the increasing trend of non-compliance with NAFO measures by foreign fishing vessels outside Canadian waters is a serious concern to the Government. They are threats to conservation and jeopardize the rebuilding of important straddling fish stocks.

These briefing notes also state:

Directed fishing for fish stocks under moratoria (e.g. Grand Banks American plaice), the use of small mesh gear, misreporting of catches, and the use of non-impartial observers are the main areas of non-compliance.

The non-compliance can be attributed in part to the current declining level of detection that in turn contributes to a decreasing deterrent effect.

In other words, the fisheries department is not out on the water, is not monitoring these foreign fishing fleets and that is leading to the increased pressure in the catching of fish stocks that are under moratoria.

The briefing notes state further:

While there is 100% observer coverage on foreign fishing vessels, it has lost its deterrent effect, particularly on EU vessels because observer reports are not regarded as evidence of violations by the EU.

There is also inconsistent and inadequate follow-up to infringements of the NAFO measures by flag States.

Many see this as the result of an ineffective governance regime in the NAFO Regulatory Area.

The fisheries committee warned the government of these ongoing problems and encouraged the federal government to exert some control over these fishery problems on the east coast but to no avail.

What is also very interesting is that cuts are ongoing in the fisheries department of British Columbia. The briefing notes to the minister note that as a result of the core services review conducted by the provincial government, the minister of agriculture, food and fisheries resources have been “reduced by 45%”.

It goes on to say that MAFF is expected to seek greater support from DFO programs which will likely “create funding pressures for DFO”. Provincial cuts are simply being matched by federal cuts which further put the fishery stocks at risk.

I am not very encouraged by what I read in the budget because essentially no mention is made of the problems facing the fishing industry and the Canadian government's ability to fulfill its constitutional mandate, which is to protect these fishery stocks.

I am disturbed by that and I know that fishermen on both coasts will be very upset to learn of the minister's knowledge of the impact of these cuts and yet has failed to ensure that the government addressed these very real concerns.

● (1640)

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to say a few words on the budget implementation bill. I also want to say a few words on what I think is one of the most important issues facing most Canadians today, the whole issue of health care.

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The Liberal government has been in power from 1993 to 2004 and in 1995 we had a massive cutback. I know the member for Malpeque is upset about this because in 1995 there was the biggest cutback in history in transfers to the provinces for health care, education and social programs. It was an absolutely devastating cutback. The member for Malpeque almost crossed the floor at that moment and joined the NDP. He probably should have done that as he is more at home over here.

At one time the federal government funded 50% of health care and the provinces 50%. Now the federal government funds 16% of health care and the provinces pay some 84%. There has been a real drop in funding, from 50% to 16% , by the federal government.

We then had the Romanow commission report which stated that federal transfers in cash should be increased to 25%. I think we have many ways of raising that money.

The government, for example, is saying that it wants to reduce the debt to GDP ratio to 25% of the economy within 10 years. Right now it is at 42%. The government plans to put some \$30 billion or \$40 billion on the national debt. However, even if it put nothing on the national debt, we would be down to 25% debt to GDP after about 12 years.

What I think the government should do is to take that \$30 billion or \$40 billion and put it into transfers to the provinces for health care. That would be one way of finding a large part of the money we will need, although not all of what we will need, for transfers to the provinces. It will cost, of course, a lot more than \$30 billion over 10 years but with the economy growing and a fair taxation system, the money will certainly be there.

I want to spend the remaining five or six minutes I have putting on the record, I think, for the first time in the House because I have not seen it before, what this means to provinces. I will start with my home province of Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan had a budget recently in which it budgeted \$2.69 billion for health care, an increase of 6.3% which is well ahead of inflation. If the federal share of funding were increased from 16% to 25%, that would mean an additional \$306 million a year for the province of Saskatchewan. That \$306 million a year is a lot of money to a province that only has one million people. It would allow the Saskatchewan government, in the current circumstances, to balance its budget without going into the fiscal stabilization fund.

In British Columbia, going from 16% to 25% would mean an additional \$1.115 billion per year. That would be a lot of money for British Columbia.

My good friend from Wild Rose, Alberta is here. In Alberta, going from 16% to 25%, if the federal government were to adopt the Romanow commission report, it would mean an extra \$751 million per year for the province of Alberta.

An hon. member: How about Manitoba?

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Manitoba is the next one. The budget came down today but I have not had a chance to do the numbers yet so I am not sure. However it is probably comparable to a province like Saskatchewan, which is \$306 billion per year.

In Newfoundland, it would mean \$175 million per year. In New Brunswick, it would mean \$214 million per year. I do not have the Nova Scotia figures, but in Prince Edward Island it would mean \$43 million per year.

• (1645)

In Ontario the budget comes down on the May 18 and I suspect we will be looking at around \$3 billion, or something like that, but again we do not have the figures.

[*Translation*]

If the federal government were to increase its share of health financing from 16% to 25% in Quebec, "la belle province" would have \$2.15 billion more each year. That would be around \$20 billion over the next 10 years. That is a lot of money.

This is in Mr. Romanow's report. It is in the federal report, which calls for more equal sharing. Mr. Romanow was a great New Democrat. He was an eminent provincial premier. I agree with the parliamentary secretary on the other side who said so.

[*English*]

This would be a much more equal sharing of resources if the federal government were to put in 25% of the cash transfers to the provinces. It used to be 50%. Now it is 16% and we are advocating 25%. The Romanow commission recommended the same thing. I think the Canadian people would agree that this would be the fairest and most equitable way to go.

If there are any Liberals across the way who disagree with this I hope they will stand up in the House before the debate ends and tell us why they disagree.

If we do not do this soon, we will get some radical Conservative, such as Premier Klein in Alberta or the Leader of the Opposition, talking about two tiered medicine and American style for profit hospitals. If we do not do something soon to increase the federal share we will have a person like Premier Klein pulling Alberta out of the Canada Health Act and forfeiting the 16% that it gets from the federal government.

That should hit a very sore spot for my friends across the way. They just cannot wait to allow the big American corporations into our country to start building hospitals for profit, which is what they would like to do and what they will do.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Madam Speaker, it is getting kind of noisy. Could you tell the dinosaurs to go back to their caves while I finish my remarks?

If we do not do this we will have some radical Conservative like Ralph Klein trying to get out of the Canada Health Act and allowing private hospitals. Then we will lose health care. This is all in the hands of the federal government and it will be a big issue in the campaign.

We have been the party of health care for a long time. Health care was founded in the province of Saskatchewan by Tommy Douglas and Woodrow Lloyd back in the 1960s. There was a doctors' strike and the people of Saskatchewan and Premier Woodrow Lloyd of the CCF government of the day stood up against the Conservative forces. The Conservative forces then were under the banner of the Liberal Party led by a guy named Ross Thatcher who I know is a hero of the former government House leader. He led the fight against health care in Saskatchewan. However the people persevered and a few years later, under the pressure of the NDP and Tommy Douglas in the House of Commons, and after a royal commission chaired by Mr. Hall, the Pearson government, in a minority situation because of the NDP presence, brought in national health care.

Those were very progressive times. When the balance of power was with the NDP, that is what it delivered. It is the legacy of the NDP in this country, and that is what makes us different from and much better than the United States of America.

I want to say to the House that we must not let the government take health care away. We must keep health care in this country, a single payer system, a not for profit system, a system where everyone has equal access regardless of the thickness of one's pocketbook, but to do that we must have more federal funding. Without more federal funding we will lose health care and it will be the fault of the federal government, starting probably in Alberta with the pressure of the Alliance Conservatives and their friend Premier Klein.

• (1650)

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to address you, sitting so finely in the chair, and to congratulate you on your elevation to that post in this august House.

I want to address three parts of Bill C-30, the budget implementation act that was presented some time ago, and I hope to get through all three parts. The first part concerns the budget generally. The second part concerns the equalization formula. The third part concerns the secret reserve.

First, with regard to the budget generally. Paul Martin and Ralph Goodale have taken government spending and taxing—

Hon. Don Boudria: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am sure you heard as clearly as I that members of Parliament in the House, namely the Prime Minister and a member of cabinet, were referred to by their names. Whether one reads from a newspaper or whether one is able to read is immaterial in this regard. It is out of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): The Chair is in agreement with the hon. member. The member for Kelowna may continue but please refrain from using names.

Mr. Werner Schmidt: Madam Speaker, I am pleased that at least one member on the opposite side of the House was alert and understood what happened a moment ago.

The Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister have taken spending and the use of taxpayer dollars to a high point that we have not seen in Canadian history for some time.

As my hon. colleague from the NDP suggested, waiting lists are as long as they ever have been, our troops are still overstretched,

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university students are still carrying the highest debt burdens they have ever carried, cattle farmers are going broke every day, despite some developments that might help them a bit now, and our softwood lumber workers face problems. B.C. forest fire victims have not received a dime of the aid that they were promised, but I must admit that has changed slightly since the budget but not enough. There are some very serious problems with the budget.

The Liberals argue that they can make better use of the \$190 billion they tax away every year and that they are better stewards than homemakers, than students, than farmers, than lumber workers and so on. I think, Madam Speaker, you and I could probably manage our money better than the government could on our behalf, and that is what is happening with the budget.

Every year the Liberals spend billions of dollars on the firearms registry, corporate welfare, grants to special interest groups, making television sitcoms, and expanding the federal bureaucracy. Is that the way we want our money spent?

These are the same Liberals who bought the \$100 million ad scam, the \$1 billion firearms registry, the \$160 million in fraud at DND, the billion dollar boondoggle at HRDC, and the globe-trotting expenses of the Governor General. They spent money for what?

I do not want to go into any further detail about the budget because I will only get even more disturbed than I already am.

I want to now address the equalization program. This implementation bill would actually change the equalization program to quite a degree, and I will go into some of the details of that. It is a good thing that the equalization program is being reviewed because it requires some major adjustments. I would like to read into the record the Conservative Party's position on this.

A Conservative government will support changes to the equalization formula to encourage the development of natural resources and economic growth. We will remove natural resources from the equalization program and change the formula from a five-province standard to a ten-province standard over a five-year phase in period.

That is a very substantial change to the equalization program.

The implementation bill suggests some other changes to the equalization program, and some of them are quite commendable.

One of the major changes is the shift with regard to the property tax base. The changes address structural deficiencies that have been a longstanding issue between provinces and move to an approach that reflects the use of real market value in the residential property sector.

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I am sure my colleagues from British Columbia are aware that British Columbia has used the real market value of properties for quite some time as a base on which they have been assessed. Special consideration has been given to take into account the unique nature of British Columbia's high property values.

More specifically, what is changing? Property taxes are the second most important revenue source in equalization. Given their importance, it is essential that property taxes be equalized equitably across Canada. The current multi-concept base was put in place over 20 years ago at a time when property taxation was quite diverse across Canada. Most of the provinces have now moved to real market value.

Academic experts were asked to comment on the current base and several alternatives. A number of them supported the current base being replaced with one incorporating the market value of property adjusted to take into account pure price differences related to scarcity. The property tax base is being changed to reflect the use of real market value in the residential property sector.

• (1655)

Then the obvious question is this. If that is what is happening across Canada, then why would we do a special adjustment to British Columbia? A specific and special provision will be applied to British Columbia where property values are significantly higher than in other provinces. These high prices reflect more than just differences in the quantity and quality of properties. Here is the key sentence. "Such price differences should not be included in the Equalization". That is a beautiful statement made by the bureaucrats in the department. Hopefully, the Minister of Finance is completely in support of this position and that they will not be in the equalization. If that is the case, then true change in the equalization formula can be supported.

So much for the equalization program and the specific changes in the reference to British Columbia.

I would now like to refer to the hon. member for Medicine Hat. He wrote an article not too long ago that was published in the *National Post*. I would like to read certain parts of that document into the record because I think it is probably one of the most insightful statements that we have seen in quite some time. He also happens to be the finance critic for our party, and that is just fine. He is talking about the secret reserve fund. He wrote:

In the shady world of secret slush funds... If reports are correct, \$50-million a year will buy lots of political favours—all of which can be called in with the drop of the election writ. But the National Unity Reserve and its bigger slushier cousin, the Sponsorship Program, are just pikers compared to the \$5-billion+ secret reserve that the Liberals deliberately build into every year's spending.

Could it really be that there is a secret reserve that nobody knows anything about and it is \$5 billion? It could not possibly be. He goes on:

In the fiscal year 2002-03, the government budgeted \$138.6 billion for program spending, but its actual spending plans were for \$133.3 billion—a full \$5.3 billion less. Why would it budget \$5.3 billion more than it expected to spend?

Because fooling the public has turned out to be very politically profitable for them...

In deliberately padding the public books with billions of dollars every year, whacks of unknown and often unsupported expenses are allowed to slip through the cracks without the involvement of Parliament.

That is where the issue lies. It is a secret reserve that exists in which Parliament has no say.

By the way, it was this secret reserve that made it possible to spend money that really was not authorized by the Parliament of Canada. It allowed the Prime Minister to buy \$100 million worth of executive jets so he could fly around the country. He did not really need to replace the jets because the ones that were in service were perfectly serviceable, yet that is what happened. With a \$5 billion secret reserve, the Liberals could do anything they wanted.

We should not implement this budget as it is written.

• (1700)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): The question is on the motion that the question be now be put. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): The recorded division on the motion stands deferred until 5:30 p.m. tomorrow.

* * *

• (1705)

WESTBANK FIRST NATION SELF-GOVERNMENT ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-11, an act to give effect to the Westbank First Nation Self-Government Agreement, as reported with amendment from the committee, and on Motions Nos. 1 and 3.

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

Some hon. members: Question.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The question is on Motion No. 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The recorded division on the Motion No. 1 stands deferred.

The next question is on Motion No. 3. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The recorded division on Motion No. 3 stands deferred.

The House will now proceed to the deferred recorded division of the report stage of the bill.

Call in the members

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Bélair): At the request of the government whip, the vote stands deferred until tomorrow night at 5:30 p.m.

* * *

TLICHO LAND CLAIMS AND SELF-GOVERNMENT ACT

The House resumed from April 19 consideration of the motion that Bill C-31, an act to give effect to a land claims and self-government agreement among the Tlicho, the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Government of Canada, to make related amendments to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management

Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to support Bill C-31, the Tlicho land claims and self-government act. The principle component of the legislation is a tripartite agreement negotiated by representatives of the people, the Government of Canada and the Northwest Territories, as all of us would know.

The agreement is remarkable for a number of reasons. Let me remind the House of the reasons why it is so.

It will provide certainty for the exercise of aboriginal and treaty rights within the traditional territory of the Tlicho, almost 20% of this great land mass of Canada, namely the Northwest Territories. Within their traditional territory, the Tlicho people will own an unbroken parcel of land of some 39,000 square kilometres and they will have all the rights and responsibilities that come with self-government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I apologize for interrupting the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, but I would like you to check with the Table, because I believe we had reached the turn of the hon. member for Drummond, who rose at the same time as the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The Bloc Québécois whip is correct. I apologize to the hon. member for Drummond, but I simply did not see her. We are correcting the situation and she now has the floor.

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member of the government party.

As I indicated during oral question period yesterday, the Government of Quebec, which at the time was the sovereignist Parti Québécois, signed an historic agreement with the Cree people, known as the peace of the braves. This agreement respects the nation-to-nation approach.

That is why the Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-31, an act to give effect to a land claims and self-government agreement among the Tlicho, the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Government of Canada, to make related amendments to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

In order to help our constituents understand this bill, we must explain who the Tlicho are.

The Tlicho are a people native to Canada whose ancestral lands are in the Northwest Territories. There are 3,000 members of the Tlicho First Nation, which was previously known as the Dogrib. The grand chief of the Tlicho is Joe Rabesca.

Under the three-party agreement of August 2003, involving Ottawa, the Northwest Territories and the Tlicho people, the Tlicho First Nation obtains administrative control over a territory of about 39,000 square kilometres between Great Slave Lake and Great Bear Lake.

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This region has the only two diamond reserves in Canada. In addition to ownership of natural resources and significant control over their development, the agreement includes a new self-government system for the Tlicho.

What about the bill? The enactment gives effect to the Tlicho Land Claims and Self-Government Agreement and the Tlicho Tax Treatment Agreement. It includes related amendments to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act and consequential amendments to a number of other acts.

Representatives of the Dogrib Treaty 11 Council and representatives of the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Government of Canada signed the Tlicho Agreement on August 25, 2003.

This is the first combined land claim and self-government agreement of its kind in the Northwest Territories. The agreement will create the largest single block of first nation owned land in Canada, and provide new systems of self-government for the Tlicho First Nation, who were previously known as the Dogrib, as I mentioned earlier.

Treaty 11 is the last of the numbered treaties and covers most of the Mackenzie District. The land in the area was deemed unsuitable for agriculture, so the federal government was reluctant to conclude treaties. Immediately following the discovery of oil at Fort Norman in 1920, however, the government moved to begin treaty negotiations.

The agreement gives the Tlicho the tools for becoming financially self-sufficient. The agreement also gives them more power to protect their way of life, to further economic growth, and to increase community well being.

Under the agreement, the Tlicho Government will be created, and through it the Tlicho people will own a 39,000 square kilometre block of land, the Tlicho lands, including the subsurface resources. Tlicho lands will surround the four Tlicho communities of Behcho Ko or Rae-Edzo, Wha Ti or Lac la Martre, Gameti or Rae Lakes, and Wekweti or Snare Lakes.

• (1710)

In the years to come, the government of the Tlicho will receive a sum of money in compensation for non-compliance with Treaty 11 of 1920, along with a portion of the annual royalties collected by the government on resource operations in the Mackenzie valley.

The Tlicho will gain fee simple ownership of approximately 3% of the land of the Northwest Territories, which represents approximately half the area of New Brunswick.

Implementation of the Tlicho agreement ought to enhance the certainty and clarity of the ownership and management of lands and resources in the North Slave region, which covers about 20% of the NWT. The agreement's clarification of Crown ownership of the land claim will put an end to the legal uncertainties.

The Tlicho agreement was ratified by Tlicho eligible voters on June 26 and 27, 2003. A total of 93% of the Tlicho participated in the vote, and over 84% of Tlicho voters were in favour of the Tlicho agreement. If the agreement is to become reality, federal and

territorial enabling legislation must be passed, which is the reason for Bill C-31.

Now, what is the Bloc Québécois position on this? The Bloc Québécois is in favour of the bill to implement the Tlicho agreement. There are three main reasons for our position. First, the Bloc Québécois wholly subscribes to the concept of aboriginal self-government, and this agreement puts their right to self-government in concrete form. We support the underlying principle behind that treaty, if only for that reason.

Second, the Tlicho have come out in favour of this agreement in a majority referendum vote of 84%. This is totally democratic.

Third, the agreement constitutes an excellent example of self-government.

More generally speaking, the Bloc Québécois is concerned about aboriginal claims for self-government. It acknowledges the aboriginal peoples as distinct peoples with a right to their own cultures, languages, customs and traditions, as well as the right to direct the development of their own identity.

Bill C-31 is the last stepping stone in giving effect to the tripartite agreement between the Tlicho, the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Government of Canada.

Given the nature of the bill to implement the Tlicho final agreement, we think the role of Parliament should be to debate, accept or reject this bill. It is not our place to amend the bill. It has been duly signed by the three parties who negotiated it. Amending the bill would be paternalistic, and we refuse to adopt that attitude.

I would like to point out that the Bloc Québécois has supported most of the recommendations of the Erasmus-Dussault Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. That commission's approach to the concept of self-government was based on the recognition of native governments as a type of government with jurisdiction over issues concerning the good governance and well-being of their people. In addition, the entire report was based on the recognition of indigenous peoples as autonomous nations occupying a unique place within Canada.

• (1715)

In closing, I would like to say, to the members present in this House and the public following this debate, that the signing of the peace of the braves initiated by the Parti Québécois was an eloquent example of the way a sovereign Quebec would treat the first nations, a respectful agreement based on a nation-to-nation approach.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to commend my colleague from Drummond for her speech and tell her that I fully support what she said and her position, which is the Bloc Québécois position.

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This week the Prime Minister put on a good show when he met with the aboriginal people. Once again, despite the fact that the Erasmus-Dussault report came out some 10 years ago, if my memory serves me correctly—my colleague could correct me if I am wrong—the Prime Minister told us that this report included many things that could have been implemented gradually as soon as the report was released. The report in question seems to have been forgotten and once again the government wants to start new consultations, do all the work over again and not even refer to this report.

We are told the report needs to be updated because things have changed. I basically agree, but a report can be updated while consultations are taking place. I would like my colleague's opinion on this.

Ms. Pauline Picard: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his comments. I think that he is completely right. This morning, the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, Northern Development and Natural Resources convened. This meeting was attended by the chief of the first nations and other chiefs, representing Inuit communities and communities in the Northwest Territories, who came to tell us about the problems they face, particularly with regard to social housing.

I reminded the committee chair that, in 1993-94, when I was the Bloc health critic, we had considered a report on the health and well-being of aboriginal children. At the time, we reached the same conclusions as the representatives of these nations who came to share their concerns with us. Eleven years later, they are facing the same problems. Nothing has been resolved.

I remember that, at the time, some nations came to tell us that they were really fed up. In fact, each time there was a new government, a study was done; like the Erasmus-Dussault report, it was widely publicized in the media, many promises were made and, one year later, the report wound up on the shelf.

I agree with my colleague that yesterday was another big production by this government. In reality, if it truly wanted to put things right, it would have done so a long time ago.

● (1720)

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague, the hon. member for Drummond, on her speech, and for her interest in issues affecting the indigenous peoples, the first nations.

I know she has been following this issue for a number of years and so I would like to ask her if she agrees with me that we, as Quebecers, have good reason to be proud of the new partnership we have established with the first nations. It goes as far back as the early 1980s, when René Lévesque's government obtained unanimous approval by the National Assembly—it was not a partisan issue—to recognize 11 indigenous nations.

For the Bloc Québécois, the native people are not just communities, they are not just distinct people; they are nations, with all that means for their rights to develop and to determine their own future.

Does the hon. member not agree, then, that the time has come to abolish the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and treat the first nations as true equals?

In addition, could she tell us about the role René Lévesque played in shaping her political philosophy?

Ms. Pauline Picard: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his most pertinent comments.

I think the initiative taken by Quebec's sovereignist government in recent years is to the credit of the sovereignists and all the people of Quebec, the entire Quebec nation. It signed an historical agreement with the Cree: the peace of the braves. This is an agreement which respects the nation-to-nation approach.

I agree there should no longer be any department of Indian affairs in Canada. There ought to be representatives of the first nations. The first step is to recognize them as nations. Discussions need to be held with them that fully respect the distribution of wealth, as must be done, and is in fact done, with all Canadians and all Quebecers.

I think this would be a major step forward. I know the Prime Minister referred to this yesterday, but he indicated this would not happen overnight. It may take some time. Perhaps we will not see this approach, which I consider humane, because the first nations have been demanding their rights for a long time. They were put on reserves, and it is high time they were recognized as peoples, just as we designate ourselves as the Quebec people and the Canadian people.

They must be respected and provided with the proper tools to improve their quality of life. The fact that the first nations were the first ones here must be taken into consideration. It is through their way of living, and our own, in mutual respect, that we can succeed in improving the quality of life of the entire Quebec nation, the first nations, and the nation of Canada.

● (1725)

[*English*]

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have just a few words to say on the bill before the House today, Bill C-31. It is an agreement with the Tlicho people of the Northwest Territories, the former Dogrib people, and was signed some time ago. The prime minister of the country at the time, Jean Chrétien, was in the Northwest Territories on August 25, 2003. In his speech, he remarked that this was a very historic agreement of great importance to the aboriginal people of that part of our country.

I just wanted to say in a very few words that we support this bill. It is a recognition of aboriginal rights, of the inherent rights that the aboriginal people have in the Constitution of Canada.

I remember the constitutional process of 1982. I remember the negotiating that we in the New Democratic Party did—I was the constitutional critic at the time—to make sure that treaty rights and the royal proclamation were both included in the patriation package.

In the first package that came from the Trudeau government, there was no reference to the aboriginal people, to treaty rights, or to the royal proclamation. As we tried to develop a national consensus for a constitution with a charter of rights, that was part of what was put into the package. That was a very controversial time.

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At that particular time, I had a great many problems with the initial package brought out by the then prime minister. It did not have an amending formula that treated all provinces equally. It had no reference to aboriginal rights and so on. Throughout the process, there were some improvements in the constitutional package, and one that was made was for first nations people, so now there is a constitutional recognition of the reality of first nations people. There is also a reference to Métis people in our Constitution. It does give them some recognition that they are peoples.

[*Translation*]

I also agreed with former Quebec premier René Lévesque, who signed the agreement with the native groups, 11 nations in the province of Quebec, if I remember correctly. This recognition of them by the province was something very important.

[*English*]

This kind of recognition has been happening over the last number of years, and what we are seeing now are the fruits of some of what was done about 20 years ago. There are many land entitlement agreements that are yet to be fully negotiated. This is also happening. I hope that this is just another example of a positive thing for aboriginal first nations people in our country.

I think that most of us want to see the full negotiation of self-government and a third order of government in our country. We have the federal government, the provinces, and then we have first nations governments. Those negotiations are under way.

I want to conclude by saying that this is a step in the right direction. First nations people in general have a living standard that is a lot lower than that of any other Canadians. Infant mortality rates are very high. Crime rates are high. Alcoholism rates are high.

Few first nations people have access to education and job opportunities, but recently there has been some improvement in terms of the access to education. I remember back about a year and a half ago going to the law school in Saskatoon and being very pleasantly surprised that about 15% of the law students were from aboriginal backgrounds, which is a very positive thing in the province of Saskatchewan.

With that, I want to endorse the bill before the House today and say that we are moving in the right direction with this bill, plus the Westbank bill, which we have dealt with already. I hope we will have more successful negotiations with our first nations people, our Métis people and the Inuit people of this country.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Chair for recognizing me. I want to ask my colleague a question. I also wanted to ask the member for Drummond a question earlier.

I was a member of the Quebec government in 1984, when it recognized the right of aboriginal peoples to the full rights granted all peoples. René Lévesque was perhaps among those who had the most respect for the aboriginal peoples in general, and the first nations in particular. In fact, we have inherited their work, since they were here well before us.

Can the member tell me why the federal government has treated these people like some kind of minority since 1984—and that was already late? What are the advantages of being paternalistic toward people who would make significant contributions to the community if their rights were fully recognized, as any other peoples in the world? This would greatly benefit us. Can he tell me the answer?

This was in 1984, 20 years ago already. However, even if Quebec has officially recognized the aboriginal peoples, current legislation is still paternalistic. Can the member enlighten me, given his federal political experience?

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has asked a question that is not easy to answer.

Why were the Liberals so slow in responding to the problems of aboriginal groups in our country? This really began with the patriation of our Constitution in 1982. I well remember the grand ceremony and I also remember that Indian treaty rights and Métis rights were included in the Constitution.

Since 1982 or 1984 there has been very little progress. They are truly the forgotten peoples of our country. This is a comment against the federal government—the Liberal Party, but also against the government of Brian Mulroney—because not a lot has been done in this area. This has also been a big failure in almost every Canadian province. I know that Mr. Lévesque contributed to progress. We had New Democrats who were positive toward the aboriginals, but despite all that, most aboriginals live in great poverty in our country. We need more economic and social development and other things like that.

On another topic, soon there will be two appointments to the Supreme Court of Canada. Perhaps for the first time in our history, the time has come to consider the possibility of having a Supreme Court judge from an aboriginal group. That would be something new. I do not have someone specific to propose, but I wanted to make the suggestion of having someone from this community on the Supreme Court.

[*English*]

Hon. Ethel Blondin-Andrew (Minister of State (Children and Youth), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take great pride today in giving my support to Bill C-31, which puts into effect the land claims and self-government agreement signed last August between the Tlicho and the governments of Canada and the Northwest Territories.

I would first like to offer my deepest congratulations to the Tlicho people for achieving this monumental self-government and claims agreement. It comes from years of hard work by many people.

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I wish to acknowledge and remember with deep respect and fondness one individual in particular, Chief Eddie Paul Rabesca, who was still with us in the final stages of this claim. Chief Rabesca passed away a few months ago after a life devoted to the Tlicho people. He was involved in this land claims and self-government initiative from the beginning and worked both politically and personally all of his life for the betterment of the Tlicho people. I know that his fellow negotiators on the team, as well as Grand Chief Joe Rabesca, who was a very close colleague of his, and the other chiefs who worked alongside him in the communities appreciate beyond words their working relationship and his contribution.

I also would like to recognize that for as long as I have been a member of Parliament, which is 16 years, through the major comprehensive claims process the Dogribs aspired to a claim. This was not meant to be under that arrangement and they have pursued their own regional claim, which has resulted in the Tlicho agreement. I know that they have worked on this long and hard.

When we know the nature of the negotiations of a major claim, we know that these people divest themselves of their personal lives. They divest themselves of the time they would give to their families and communities and dedicate themselves to a goal that perhaps totally consumes their whole personal life and work life. This is what the negotiating team for the Dogribs has done, along with its legal consultants.

These people bear mentioning: Grand Chief Rabesca, along with his chiefs, both teams, including the negotiating team, which consists of John B. Zoe, the chief negotiator, as well as Eddy Erasmus and James Washie, the self-government specialist. It is the first time that we are embedding a self-government agreement within the body of a claim. This is the work of those individuals, as well as Ted Blondin and the elders that accompany them generally. Everything is done on a consensus basis and there is a seldom a period when the elders are not there. The elders, like Alexis Arrowmaker, who is the former chief and is well known to many politicians across the country, have been there to support the negotiators.

It would be remiss of me not to recognize the legal team, Rick Salter and Art Pape. They have dedicated themselves to providing the best legal advice that is available to the Dogrib team and to come up with an innovative document that addresses so many issues.

The other individual who I think bears mentioning—and I am sure the Dogribs will appreciate this—is our one federal negotiator, Jean Yves Assiniwi, who is well known in many parts of Canada on constitutional, as well as other legal issues. He worked very well alongside the Dogribs.

I wanted to start out with a preamble saying that the people who are involved in this are not involved in a casual or cavalier manner. It is a very dedicated process. It is a very detailed process and involves many months and years of travel. For as long as I have been in cabinet, which is 11 years, I know that the Dogribs have worked very hard. The credit really goes to them and to the people who saw fit to cooperate with them to make sure that this happened.

Many people along the way have contributed. There have been many ministers and officials. They are to be thanked, as well as all of the other people who were involved, but mainly the people on the

Dogrib negotiating team. They worked hard for their people and brought home a document that was broadly accepted by their people.

We are in the House today to discuss the various aspects of this claim, but I think it is important to recognize what goes on behind the scenes and what happens. A document did not miraculously appear in the House of Commons at second reading without the work of those people.

• (1735)

The Speech from the Throne stated that aboriginal Canadians must participate fully in all that Canada has to offer, with greater economic self-reliance and an ever-increasing quality of life based upon historic rights and agreements that our forefathers signed long ago but that are not forgotten. Bill C-31 will allow the Tlicho people to do just that.

As the Prime Minister said yesterday at the opening of the first Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Round Table, “Canada would not be Canada without the aboriginal peoples. Their distinct traditions, cultures and languages enrich Canada immensely.”

I am a proud member of the Dene First Nation of which the Tlicho are also a part. Their traditions are unique, however, and the Tlicho have made every effort to preserve their culture and language and continue to teach the young Tlicho their traditions. The majority of Tlicho speak the Tlicho language which is still taught in Tlicho schools. This legislation will help to preserve this priceless heritage.

The Government of Canada enjoys a longstanding and respectful relationship with the Tlicho people. In 1921 the Tlicho entered into a treaty relationship with Canada when they signed Treaty No. 11, the last of the historical numbered treaties signed with aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Due to the remoteness of the Northwest Territories and the limited aboriginal presence in the treaty area, however, many of the provisions of Treaty No. 11 relating to reserve lands and other measures were not implemented. In addition, the aboriginal peoples of the region regard Treaty No. 11 as a treaty of peace and friendship rather than one dealing with land.

For these reasons and because of differing views of the treaty, its limited implementation and legal challenges to its interpretation, the Government of Canada agreed in 1981 to enter into negotiations of a comprehensive land claim agreement with the Dene and Métis of the Northwest Territories to achieve certainty with respect to land and resource rights.

The agreement reached is the first of its kind in the Northwest Territories, and the first of its kind in Canada to combine land claims and self-government since the Nisga'a treaty.

When Bill C-31 becomes law, some 3,000 Tlicho people will have the power to protect their way of life and control their land, resources and lives.

Under the Tlicho agreement the Tlicho government will be created. Through it the Tlicho people will own a 39,000 square kilometre block of land between Great Slave Lake and Great Bear Lake, and the largest single block of first nation owned land in Canada.

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The Tlicho government will receive about \$152 million over 15 years. This will be used as a type of investment fund to promote social, cultural, educational and economic development in the area, as well as an annual share of resource royalties that the government receives from development in the Mackenzie Valley.

The Tlicho government will replace four local band councils and the Treaty No. 11 council now in the region. Tlicho legislative bodies will regulate daily life and have powers such as tax collection.

Under the bill the federal and territorial laws and Tlicho laws will be concurrent with laws passed by other governments.

When this bill becomes law, the Tlicho will finally be allowed to play a significant role in the management of land, water and other resources in most of their traditional territory.

Not having had claims has not deterred the Tlicho from success and from the opportunities that abound in their back yard. They are full partners economically. They have not only developed organized political bodies, but they have also organized an economic arm through the Dogrib groups of companies to reap the benefits of resource development that abound in their region. Even without a claim they have done that. Now that they have the mechanism of a claim, none of the opportunities will escape their capabilities to reap the benefits from anything that happens around their area.

Under this bill the Tlicho will have access to governance tools needed to safeguard culture, improve social services and bolster the economy. A central Tlicho government will oversee culture, land use and other matters. Community governments elected by all residents, aboriginal and non-aboriginal, because it is a form of public government, will deliver municipal services.

• (1740)

I also want to stress that the bill we are considering today enjoys clear support among the Tlicho. It is the culmination of an agreement in principle reached in January 2000 and overwhelmingly approved by the Tlicho in a vote on June 26 and 27. A total of 93% of Tlicho participated in the vote and over 84% were in favour of the agreement.

The Tlicho also conducted hundreds of consultations and information sessions on the agreement. Consensus has always been a part of the process. That is highly recommended on such an important issue. They secured the support of the Government of the Northwest Territories which will soon enact bills establishing new relationships with the Tlicho. This was not a bilateral process. There were many complicated and sensitive negotiations that the Tlicho underwent with other levels of government to achieve this agreement.

Economic growth can occur only when people have the freedom to cultivate it. Most Canadians take this truth to be self-evident, but I was struck by a comment made by Mary Ann Jermemick'ca upon the signing of the Tlicho agreement last year. She indicated:

We were always told what to do and what we couldn't do. We could have somebody doing mining right next to our house and we would have nothing to say about it. Now at least we have some say about what's going on in our community and our land.

The Tlicho have never been hesitant to speak their minds and to provide leadership for their people. This is a governing tool that will help them very much. It will enhance the leadership that is there.

The bill will finally give the Tlicho a say in the development of their own community. Under the Tlicho land claims and self-government agreement the Tlicho will gain additional governance and administrative tools to strengthen their economy. Using these levers to prosperity, the Tlicho expect to create an entrepreneurial climate that will encourage investment and pave the way to new jobs paying very good wages.

Through the land resource and financial benefits they receive from the agreement, the Tlicho will be in a better position to undertake new business ventures and forge profitable partnerships. As new economic ventures get underway, other opportunities are sure to follow.

It is important to remember that the Tlicho are no strangers to entrepreneurship. In fact, they provide a sterling example to other groups, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike, of the benefits of hard work, the strength of partnership and the value of innovative thinking.

The Tlicho were the first group in the Northwest Territories to develop its own hydroelectric project. It was developed in the 1990s. In fact the former premier of the Northwest Territories, Nellie Courmoyer, and I in my earlier years as a parliamentarian attended the event when they opened the Snare hydro project.

The Snare Cascades project, developed in the mid-1990s, is a joint venture with the Northwest Territories Power Corporation and represents the largest economic project yet undertaken by the Tlicho. A vital component of the regional power grid, the Snare Cascades project now generates more than four megawatts and supplies 7% of the territory's power.

The Tlicho also built, independent of any government funding—actually that is not totally true—an airport in the aboriginal community of Rae-Edzo. They provided most of the support and funding actually. The airport enables airlines to provide direct flights to Edmonton and Yellowknife and is a sure way to bolster industry in the region as traffic steadily increases. The impetus for building this particular airport was to bring workers back from the diamond mines and to ensure that they had the immediate contact with family upon finishing their shifts in the two diamond mines that are now operating. There is one that is being developed and under review.

The Tlicho currently partner with some of Canada's largest engineering companies, including Procon and SNC-Lavalin. The Tlicho are also party to impact and benefits agreements with Diavik and Ekati, two prominent diamond mining companies in the region.

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• (1745)

These accords and impact benefits agreements are unlike anything that indigenous groups have encountered around the world. They have set a template for groups in other parts of the world for indigenous people to look at and to follow. Through these accords, the Tlicho have negotiated for guaranteed training and employment at both mines, enhancing the chances for increased employment and improved standards of living for the Tlicho well into the future.

As most members of the House know, the mining industry is the leading employer of aboriginal peoples in the Northwest Territories. It should be noted that the Northwest Territories has the second highest employment growth rate in Canada. It is 68%, next to Alberta which is 69%. That is very progressive. We also have the third or fourth highest GDP positive growth rate in Canada.

Some 60% of the jobs and contracts from our mines still go to Ontario, Quebec and to southern provinces. What we are doing in the north is not just good for the north, or just good for one particular group, it is beneficial to all of Canada. Our projects are international projects, they are domestic projects, and they are Canadian projects that benefit all of Canada.

The Tlicho have negotiated guaranteed training and employment at both mines, enhancing not only employment, but improving the standards of living for the Tlicho. Most members in the House will know also that there have been very strong partnerships forged with the Tlicho in an entrepreneurial sense.

Up until the early 1990s however aboriginal people accounted for only 10% of full time mining jobs in the north. Direct employment since then has tripled to about 30%, largely due to the aboriginal hiring and training initiatives at the Ekati and Diavik diamond mines. In fact, at the end of 2001, 683 aboriginal employees, or 30% of the operations workforce worked for the Ekati mines or its contractors.

Diavik for its part now anticipates that aboriginal workers will account for at least 40% of the company's northern workforce when the mine reaches full capacity. There are those who would aspire to make that even more so. Indeed, the mine is well on the way to reaching this figure following a recent agreement signed between Diavik and I&D Management Services, a consortium of aboriginal groups that promotes the employment of its people. Under this agreement, I&D provides 100 employees to the mine of whom half are aboriginal. These workers operate many of the trucks, excavators, dozers and other heavy equipment essential to the mine's operations.

It is not just individual aboriginal workers who are benefiting from this employment growth. Aboriginal communities in the region such as Wha Ti, Wekweti, Gameti, Rae-Edzo, Dettah, Ndilo and Lutsel K'e are reaping rewards as well. Living standards in these communities have risen as improved social services follow in the wake of economic growth.

The spirit of entrepreneurship is also reflected in the rapid growth of the local business community. Today, more than 200 aboriginal owned businesses in the region with annual revenues in excess of \$100 million are employing some 1,000 aboriginal people. These figures represent unprecedented growth in aboriginal entrepreneur-

ship in Canada's north. We must encourage and support this growth. Bill C-31 will do that.

It will give the Tlicho greater and more immediate decision making powers to capitalize on business relationships and expand its entrepreneurial horizons. As those horizons expand, the range of work experience available to the Tlicho people will continue to broaden. It is precisely that breadth of experience that will foster ongoing economic development and innovation.

I would like to say a few words with regard to this piece of legislation on how it will improve educational outcomes for Tlicho young people and deliver additional benefits to all Canadians.

• (1750)

We all know that in our increasingly complex global economy, a sound education is crucial. Knowledge is key to self-sufficiency, quality of life, and success for all Canadians. This is no less true for aboriginal people.

Although much has been done in the past two decades to improve educational outcomes for first nations young people in Canada, a significant gap in achievement still remains between aboriginal and non-aboriginal children.

Due to their small size and geographical remoteness, many first nations schools are unable to deliver programs comparable to those in provincially run or territorially run schools. Aboriginal students without access to on reserve education often have to travel a great distance to attend school.

Historically, these factors have led to higher dropout rates and lower educational achievement among aboriginal youth. Clearly, this is an unacceptable situation for any group of Canadians. It is widely accepted that aboriginal communities know best how to meet these challenges and the educational needs of their young people.

I would like to conclude by saying that the Dogrib people were the first group to run an educational institution for their people. They engendered the culture, the language, and the aspirations of their people in doing so.

I want to congratulate Chief Jimmy Bruneau School that offers culturally based education to the young people of the Tlicho. We have many more graduates and the numbers are increasing. We have university graduates. People are moving on. We have many challenges.

This is a successful document that will speak to a great future for the Tlicho people.

• (1755)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The hon. member will have 10 minutes for questions and comments when debate resumes on the bill.

[*Translation*]

It being 5:56 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[Translation]***THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE**

The House resumed from February 25 consideration of the motion.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow will be the first time members will be able to vote on this important matter, although it is the fourth time a similar motion has been introduced in this House.

I was therefore surprised to find in my mail a letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade addressed to MPs and encouraging us not to vote in favour of this private member's motion. I was, frankly, somewhat shocked and dismayed, particularly since this is one of the ministers of this government who claims to attach a great deal of importance to what members think and want. I was surprised for that reason.

Yet, after reading his letter, my second reaction was to be pleased he had sent it to us, and I will tell you why. In his third paragraph he says the following.

The established government policy was set out in a statement in this House in June 1999 in favour of reconciliation: "We remember the calamity afflicted on the Armenian people in 1915. This tragedy was committed with the intent to destroy a national group in which hundreds of thousands of Armenians were subject to atrocities which included massive deportations and massacres—"

Who has not read the definition of genocide in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide? All components of that definition are clearly recalled in the minister's statement. According to the definition, genocide is "an act committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group." That is what we have just heard from the mouth of the minister, or rather from his pen.

I would like to repeat the motion, for which I congratulate my colleague for Laval Centre. What does it say? It reads:

That this House acknowledge the Armenian genocide of 1915 and condemn this act as a crime against humanity.

There are some new elements, some recent events, that make it possible for us to be even more clearly in favour of this motion.

The first of these is the recent ruling by the appeals section of the International Tribunal in the Hague, relating to the defence of Mr. Krstic, who, hon. members will recall, felt that responsibility for the deaths of seven to eight thousand Muslims in July of 1995 was not sufficient reason to term this genocide. The appeal court clearly certified that this defence was invalid and recognized that this was genocide.

I believe we all understand the importance of this ruling, which the experts feel broadens the concept of genocide.

Another piece of news is quite interesting. The *New York Times*, a widely respected newspaper, has recently changed its guidelines for reporters and editorial writers. I do not have it in French, because it is the *New York Times*, so I will read it in English:

● (1805)

[English]

—"after careful study of scholarly definitions of 'genocide,' we have decided to accept the term in references to the Turks' mass destruction of Armenians in and around 1915"...the expression 'Armenian genocide' may be used freely and should not be qualified with phrasing like 'what Armenians call,' etc".

[Translation]

That is one more important element, and I can add that the *Boston Globe* did the same thing a year ago.

Now there are questions to be raised. Why not recognize that the 1999 declaration by the Minister of Foreign Affairs is equivalent to saying, "There was a genocide"? Why not recognize it? It has the same definition.

Why would this threaten relations between Turkey and Canada, and relations between Turkish-Canadian citizens and other Canadians? I can say—this is not the best argument—that the threat has been made everywhere but never executed, while many assemblies in many countries, which have been named repeatedly, have passed such a resolution.

How does this motion attack Turkey? The word "Turkey" is not spoken, in contrast to the motion that was proposed in the United States House of Representatives. The word "Turkey" is not seen here.

Can we not remember that Mustapha Kemal, who founded the Turkish republic in 1923—the genocide we are discussing took place in 1915—repeatedly, dozens of times, condemned the massacres? They were not hidden away in a closet. Many times, he called them heinous acts and called for the guilty parties to be punished.

The Republic of Turkey was not formed until 1923. Turks now and then could have said, "It was the Ottoman empire. It was a moment of crisis. We feel for the Armenians and acknowledge that they were victims of genocide". Why do otherwise?

I want to add that, if the word "genocide" is not mentioned before 1948, it is because it was not used for this purpose. I even looked in my old Larousse dictionary, the first edition of which was published in 1932—interesting tidbit for a historian—and under "genocide" it states, "The word used by Holocaust deniers".

In my opinion, there is no good reason to vote against the motion before the House tomorrow. I have already repeated the definition given by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. All we will need to say is, "what is called the Armenian genocide".

The Quebec National Assembly and many other legislatures across Canada, as well as the Senate, have passed this motion couched in the harshest of terms. However, is this not necessary recognition for the descendants of these men and women whose suffering was great and attested to at the time by numerous witnesses? There is plenty of evidence.

How could voting in favour of this motion delay the rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey? Recognizing the Shoah certainly did not prevent an extraordinary rapprochement between Europe and Germany.

Private Members' Business

The future cannot be built on a hidden past. The future, in this case, depends on the respectful admission of the facts, so considered by those who have studied this issue.

With regard to the reconciliation, the future needs to be considered once the past has been put to rest.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, clearly, I must have the consent of my colleague who introduced the motion to pass the following amendment. I am going to read it in English.

[*English*]

I request unanimous consent to amend the motion by substituting it with the following: That this House remember the calamity afflicted on the Armenian people in 1915. This tragedy was committed with the intent to destroy a national group in which hundreds of thousands of Armenians were subject to atrocities, which included massive deportations and massacres. May the memory of this period contribute to healing wounds, as well as to reconciliation of our present day nations and communities, and remind us all of our collective duty to work together toward world peace.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I guess it is up to me to accept or refuse. I would like say that there are two official languages in this Parliament. I would also like to say that I find it unacceptable that this amendment was not prepared in French and English given the absolutely extraordinary translation resources available to the government and the hon. members.

Nonetheless, I understood it very well. I am sorry, but, with or without a translation, I cannot include this amendment in my motion.

Mr. Bélair (The Deputy Chair): I believe the problem has just been resolved.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development (Social Economy), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is truly a great honour for me today to speak once again in this House in support of this important motion put forward by my colleague.

I must admit that I am very happy about how much progress the Armenian cause has made since I have been in this House.

[*English*]

I have always been pleased to speak in favour of motions that have been presented in the House of Commons urging parliamentarians to recognize the Armenian genocide because I truly believe that we must all seek to do good by recognizing a wrong and speaking against it.

More important, however, I chose to speak today because I wish to assure the survivors of the Armenian genocide, who I have personally met in Montreal and in my constituency, that I want to ensure that they leave this life knowing that people like we parliamentarians in the House of Commons are fighting for recognition and closure to the horrors they lived and witnessed firsthand and that have haunted them all their lives. I have looked

into their eyes and they are only asking for us to acknowledge what happened and to call it by its rightful name, the Armenian genocide.

We want to assure them that the Turkish government will recognize the Armenian genocide and other atrocities and move toward reconciliation, which we all want in the future.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

The 20th century has seen two world wars and numerous historical conflicts. In spite of this, crimes against humanity are not a thing of the past but continue to be daily occurrences in too many countries, countries which routinely practice torture, slavery, and the massive deportation of their civilian population.

Everyday, we witness the persecution of minorities on the basis of their political opinion, race or religion.

[*English*]

To this day, these unacceptable acts of inhumanity continue, despite the fact that the Geneva convention condemns such actions. Even though the international community has admitted that these acts should not be practised, we are still a long way from achieving this goal. Present events attest to similar acts and cry out for our vigilance.

The Nuremberg war crimes tribunal, designed specifically to prosecute high ranking Nazis for the atrocities that had occurred during World War II, tried for the first time those guilty of committing crimes against humanity. These crimes were defined in article 6 of the London charter and included murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population before or during the war or persecution on political, racial and religious grounds.

While not all criminals have been tried, the international community recognizes the holocaust and commemorates it every year, as we did in Canada last week, so that everyone around the world will remember this tragedy to ensure that it will never occur again. Regardless of this, we still live in a world where ethnic cleansing is practised, the most recent examples being the former republics of Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

[*Translation*]

While these atrocities are some examples of crimes committed against humanity, there are unfortunately many others, both past and present. Some are well known; others, such as the Asia Minor catastrophe of 1922, are not so well known.

At the end of the first world war, close to two million Greeks were living in a region of Asia Minor on the west coast of modern Turkey. Greeks had been living in that region for over 3,000 years. In 1922, these people, like the Armenians and other Turkish minorities, were the victims of the first ethnic cleansing operation of the 20th century.

Private Members' Business

[English]

The Armenian genocide, which took place around the time of the first world war, is perhaps the most vivid example of genocide as an instrument of national policy by the Ottoman Turks. What makes the Armenian genocide such a particular example is that, unlike the genocide of the Jewish people that took place during the second world war, the international community did not try the war criminals or even formally acknowledge that this massacre took place.

The United Nations convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide describes genocide as, "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group". Clearly, this definition applies in the case of the atrocities committed against the Armenians.

Because the UN convention was adopted in 1948, 30 years after the Armenian genocide, Armenians worldwide have sought from their respective governments formal acknowledgment of the crimes committed during World War I. Countries like France, Argentina, Greece, Russia, Sweden, Italy and Belgium have officially recognized the Armenian genocide.

[Translation]

On November 28, 2003, the Quebec national assembly passed a motion put forward by Yvan Bordeleau, my own representative there, declaring an Armenian genocide commemoration day. I greatly appreciate the efforts he has made in the 10 years we have been working together.

[English]

Thanks to our collective efforts in advancing the Armenian cause, we are reminding the international community that these types of tragic historical events cannot simply be forgotten or denied. It is my hope that the international community as a whole will take the necessary steps to condemn these horrible acts of inhumanity and recognize the atrocities committed by the Ottoman Turks for what they were: a genocide.

• (1815)

[Translation]

Many countries such as Italy, France and Israel, have adopted parliamentary decrees officially recognizing the Armenian genocide.

[English]

Why, people may ask, is it so important to recognize an event that occurred over 80 years ago? We must always remember that those who disregard history are condemned to repeat it. Let us just think about if the international community had reacted to this as it should have at the time. Would the atrocities of the second world war ever have taken place? Perhaps not.

During a debate in the House of Commons, the then secretary of state for central and eastern Europe and the Middle East reiterated the position of the Government of Canada, stating:

...we remember the calamity afflicted on the Armenian people in 1915. This tragedy was committed with the intent to destroy a national group in which hundreds of thousands of Armenians were subject to atrocities which included massive deportations and massacres.

May the memory of this period contribute to healing wounds as well as to reconciliation of present day nations and communities and remind us all of our collective duty to work together toward world peace—

Although the federal government recognizes the genocide as a "calamity" and "tragedy", many parliamentarians, including me, do not agree with this position and continue to work toward the recognition of the genocide.

I truly believe that by working together we can and will accomplish our goal of recognition of the Armenian genocide by the Government of Canada and eventually the government of Turkey. For this reason, I have been working closely with the Armenian community in Canada and with my colleagues from the House of Commons and the Senate to convince the Canadian government, my government, to recognize the Armenian genocide. I do it for those survivors and I do it for my constituents and all Canadians of Armenian origin.

Years of work and concerted efforts resulted in significant breakthroughs in 2002 for the Armenian cause, starting with the first ever Canadian parliamentary visit to Armenia in May 2002. I was honoured to have the opportunity to visit Armenia as a member of the delegation formed by the Canada-Armenia parliamentary friendship group. My colleague, the member of Parliament for Brampton Centre, who is a Canadian of Armenian origin born in Aleppo, Syria, has been the leading champion of this cause in the House. I want to congratulate him again.

This trip reinforced my already firm commitment to this cause, after having the opportunity to visit Yerevan, a museum commemorating the victims of the Armenian genocide, and to meet with several Armenian political representatives or colleagues. This parliamentary exchange was reciprocated, of course, by a visit to Canada last fall.

The Senate of Canada passed a motion on June 13, 2002, presented by my colleague and friend, the Hon. Shirley Maheu, calling on the Canadian government to officially recognize the word "genocide" rather than just calling the event "a crime against humanity" or "atrocities", as was the case in a former resolution of the House of Commons.

Another very important step toward the recognition of the Armenian genocide came when the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade passed a historic motion on November 27, 2002, calling on the House of Commons to recognize the Armenian genocide.

The member for Brampton Centre presented this motion, which reads as follows:

That the committee invite the House of Commons to recognise the genocide of Armenians, which began at the turn of the last century, by the Ottoman Turks, during the First World War.

We have done other things over the years to bring this issue to the forefront and make our colleagues recognize the importance of bringing resolution to this issue.

I invite all members of Parliament to support this. I certainly will be voting for it. Also, I am very proud to have in my riding of Ahuntsic a monument to the Armenian genocide and in fact to all genocides. It was constructed by the City of Montreal. I urge all my colleagues to support this very honourable effort by the member, who unfortunately will be leaving us and this House. I encourage all our colleagues to let justice be done and recognize a wrong.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in addressing the question today it is first important that as we look at what this was and what took place, we are clear on what this was not. As a matter of fact, in regard to the motion today I would like to be clear in my view about what this is not. This motion is not a demand for reparations. This motion is not a demand for vengeance. As a matter of fact, it would decry vengeance and those wanting to somehow retaliate in any way.

When we look at horrific events throughout history, we recognize that we have to be part of a reconciliation process. If we look even at the second world war, I reflect on the fact that both my grandfathers served. One of my grandfathers was captured as a Hong Kong veteran and went through four years of torture. As a matter of fact, he never fully recovered from that torture and eventually died as a result of it. For that reason I never had the joy of meeting him, and yet I cannot be part of a process of ongoing vengeance and anger. I have to be part of a process that somehow moves on to reconciliation and to forgiveness.

This is not a demand for vengeance and retaliation. The motion is not a denunciation of the people of Turkey today or of the government of Turkey. I know there are sensitivities around this from those who represent that government.

In the report related to Muslim nations which the foreign affairs committee of the House just completed, we in fact give commendation in our recommendations to the government of Turkey today, saying that Canada should encourage the government of Turkey to be a voice of democracy and moderation within the Muslim world and to continue to implement its democratic and human rights reforms. We recognize that.

This republic developed after 1923 under Ataturk. Mustafa Kemal was his real name. He was renamed Ataturk, meaning father of the Turks. The Islamic caliphate at the time was abolished in 1923. A modern state began to develop, albeit a one-party state, but after the second world war developing into a two-party state and becoming, incidentally, the first and only Muslim nation to become a member of NATO.

There are many things to be congratulatory about in regard to this particular government today. As a matter of fact, one of our other recommendations is that their prime minister, Recip Erdogan, visit Canada and address Parliament to tell us, among other matters, about strengthening ties with countries of the Muslim world.

When I have discussions with the ambassador from Turkey, I try to allay concerns he would have that this is any kind of reflection upon those people and upon that government. It is not, but it is important that what happened be addressed. It must be addressed and it must be called what it was. We cannot look for euphemistic terms for something that was nothing other than genocide, as 126 holocaust scholars and historians have said.

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In their verdict of March 7, 2000, they said:

The World War I Armenian genocide is an incontestable historical fact and accordingly we urge the governments of western democracies to likewise recognize it as such.

The international Association of Genocide Scholars on June 13, 1997, said that it:

reaffirms that the mass murder of Armenians in Turkey in 1915 is a case of genocide which conforms to the statutes of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide.

Professor Roger Smith is the professor of government at the College of William and Mary. He is a historian and past president of the Association of Genocide Scholars. He said:

Indeed, there is now a consensus among scholars that the Armenian genocide, which was the first large scale genocide in the 20th century, is the prototype of much of the genocide that has occurred since 1945. Some of the patterns found in the Armenian case have appeared again and again in the 20th century.

Various world leaders have spoken of this. Ronald Reagan, during his term as president of the United States, said, "Like the genocide of the Armenians before it". He was referring to the genocide of the Armenians and the Holocaust. Gerald Ford, past president of the United States, also talked about it and in his words said, "with mixed emotions, we mark the 50th anniversary of the Turkish genocide of the Armenian people". Winston Churchill recognized it and talked about that "infamous" time in history and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk himself recognized and commented on it.

● (1820)

Mustafa Arif, the Turkish interior minister of 1918-19, said:

Unfortunately, our wartime leaders, imbued with a spirit of brigandage, carried out the law of deportation in a manner that could surpass the proclivities of the most bloodthirsty bandits. They decided to exterminate the Armenians, and they did exterminate them.

He made an important point, going on to state:

This decision was taken by the Central Committee of the Young Turks and was implemented by the government...The atrocities committed against the Armenians reduced our country to a gigantic slaughterhouse.

Why then do we pursue this? This happened. It took place. We have heard in great detail about the atrocities that took place at the time, the death marches, the massacres, the rapes, and, in many cases, the forced conversion to Islam.

At the time these were the headlines of the day in the British and United States press. Books were written at the time. Books are still being written today. Our own Atom Egoyan, a Canadian, has made a movie about this. It is called *Ararat*. A recent *New York Times* best-seller is a book called *The Burning Tigris*, written by Peter Balakian.

This event has been detailed since those times, since the headlines of the day, and in great detail. It is interesting to note that there was an awareness then in the United States and around the world that this was happening. It actually led to a huge response. People were trying to send funds. People were trying to find ways of intervening.

But the intervention did not take place. I want to look at that fact. The world knew at the time. This was making headlines at the time. People were shocked at the time. Yet an intervention did not take place because there was a sense that it was happening within a sovereign state.

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I would suggest that the importance of recognizing this genocide will also help us today to grapple with the question of when it is legitimate for peace-loving nations of the world to stop a genocide that is happening in another sovereign state. As much as we recognize the importance of nation states, is there a point at which there should be an intervention to stop a genocide?

We still grapple with that question. The world could not grapple successfully with the question in the killing fields of Cambodia. We have just recently seen the anniversary of what happened in Rwanda, a heartbreaking, shattering event that took place. Our own general was there trying to send out a warning that intervention was needed. Peace-loving nations still grapple with this difficult problem.

In the Sudan today, untold atrocities are taking place and we still struggle. Part of it has to do with the defining and the acceptance of the very fact that human beings at times—though we find this hard to accept—are capable of genocide. We find it hard to accept that groups of human beings could actually do this. I try to be optimistic about human nature and I ask these questions. How can these things happen? How could it have happened to the Armenians? How could these things happen to others?

We have just celebrated, if I may use that word, the anniversary of the most atrocious event ever in the 20th century or throughout history, and that is the Holocaust itself. Part of it is our lack of acceptance, our reluctance as human beings to accept that human beings could do this to one another, but we must accept it.

Accepting it equips us to identify it if it happens again in the course of human history and also impels us to action to possibly prevent it from happening again. That is why it is so important that this is recognized. That is why it must be called what it was, a genocide: to equip us and alert us to the fact that it can happen, that human beings can do these things to one another.

We need to stand as members of Parliament in this place and recognize this motion, not using euphemisms but using the word and calling it for what it was: a genocide. Perhaps then, when somebody sounds a future alarm, as the ambassador to Turkey in 1913, Henry Morgenthau, did when he sounded the alarm, we will listen. We will be aware that it has happened, we will be aware that it could happen again, and the incredible number of deaths, up to 1.5 million, will not have been in vain. Today, for those people who were massacred, for those people who were targeted for extermination, for their lives and their deaths, our calling it what it is can serve, hopefully, to honour what they went through but also to prevent future atrocities.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I have a list of four members and a potential fifth who wish to speak on this matter. I know the Chair is not in a position to ask members to limit their remarks to five minutes each, but I would ask you to be as brief as possible. I will try to let as many hon. members as possible speak.

The hon. member for Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore.

• (1830)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the House and all the people listening that if the House of Commons wants to deal with the issue, then let us have a vote on it now and move it forward.

I have information in front of me that the Ontario legislature was discussing this in 1980. The national assembly of Quebec was also discussing this in April 1980. The Progressive Conservative Party of Canada on July 23, 1984, stated, and I quote Mr. Stevens who said that “We will make representation to the General Assembly of the United Nations to recognize and condemn the Armenian genocide and to express abhorrence of such actions”.

The Liberal Party of Canada in 1984 abdicated setting aside a special day once a year in recognition of events such as the Armenian genocide. The NDP spoke about this in December 1989. It goes on and on.

Here we are in 2004 still speaking about it. Today, if people were not following the debate, they would be very confused about what is happening.

I have a letter from the ambassador of Turkey. In one of the paragraphs he states that the truth about what happened between Turks and Armenians is there in history for clear minds to study. The very fact that Armenians are so persistent to have the House adopt a motion to attest that the history was genocide is indeed a testimony that it was not.

I have a letter from the Armenian National Committee of Canada. It states “I am convinced of your response. You have always shown general understanding of the historical fact of the Armenian genocide. We ask that you give precious support for Motion No. 380”.

I have another letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs that says we should be careful what we do. We have one side saying no; we have another side saying yes; and we have someone in the middle saying we should be careful what we do.

I have spoken to the hon. member from Brampton and I know that this debate must be a very emotional time for him, his family and his ancestry.

My wife's aunt is married to an Armenian in Sacramento, California. A few years ago I spoke to him about this very issue. He said he did not believe he would ever live to see the day when the current country of Turkey recognizes what happened back in 1915.

I say very clearly that we have to call this for what it was. It was a genocide—the mass slaughter of a bunch of wonderful people. They were killed for whatever reason. We can debate that until the cows come home, but they were murdered and slaughtered.

The fact is that nobody is blaming the current Turkish government for what happened in 1915. All we are doing in the House of Commons is recognizing that the tragic event took place. We are calling it very clearly what it was.

There was a poem written by Lorne Shirinian and Alan Whitehorn. I say this because this poem says a lot. I was born in Holland and my parents and oldest brother were liberated by Canadian sacrifices. At that time the Nazi regime of Germany did some terrible atrocities to the people of Europe and, for that matter, the Jewish people as well. We just had a day of remembrance for the Jewish holocaust.

When groups of people are out there in the world today being harassed, slaughtered, killed or in any way defamed because of their nationality, religion, ethnicity or whatever, then we as parliamentarians in Canada must stand up against that.

We must remember the genocide for the following poem:

We must remember.
Remember and learn.
Remember and tell.
But also remember and live.

The last line is the most important:

And some day, remember and forgive.

That little poem summarizes this entire debate. We offer recognition to the Armenian survivors. We probably do not have many of them left, but to the children who are here and know the stories of their ancestors we can say once and for all that we remember what happened so that we can prevent these types of atrocities from ever happening again.

• (1835)

No one in this House or anyone else who I have referred to is in any way insinuating that the Turkish government is responsible for what happened. We are just offering our assistance to the Turkish government and to the Armenian people to get together, bury the hatchet, as they say, and work toward a common and lasting peace so that some day we will remember and forgive.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is kind of with a heavy heart that we are in this place today discussing very difficult, sad and tragic events that occurred back in 1915, the earlier part of the last century. Very troubling to me is the fact that we want to bring conflicts from abroad in a very calculated and deliberate manner into this place.

I have always had a bit of a concern about bringing some of the ethnic clashes in other parts of the world into this place, be it from Sierra Leone or wherever it happens to be. That we do it here without the careful kind of thought and attention we should is a somewhat troubling thing as well as the fact that it occurred so many years ago when there were things that occurred in history at that time that are in dispute. There are two different sides to it.

Also, what we tend to see here most often, and on this particular issue as it comes up time and again, is one side of it. Then we draw into the whole issue conflicts that the Greek people had with the Turks. We had a member today speaking from that perspective. We bring all of these conflicts into this present place. I do not think it is helpful. I do not think it is constructive or productive for this place. I think it would be much better for Armenian and Turkish people to be

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getting together and working through this. There were many lives lost on both sides, and that is to be regretted.

I have talked with individuals from the Turkish community who would like to meet with people from the Armenian community and in fact proposed this to an individual and asked if they could go on from here and heal respectively in regard to the losses and terrible tragic time back then. This individual was declined. I hope that is not reflective or symbolic of all Armenian people. I would hope it not to be true, but I know in this one case there was that invitation offered and there was just a flat refusal.

We need to go back very quickly in history to recognize that at that period in time there was the collapse of the Ottoman empire. Indeed, for all intents and purposes, it was an empire that was fairly benevolent. If we look at history one understands that they allowed a fair bit of local control throughout that vast empire. They sheltered the Jewish people. They provided refuge to them when the Jews were expelled en masse from Spain. It is a kind of cultural legacy that is much to be proud of. It contradicts to some degree the Armenian claims that the Turks had waged a war of total ethnic cleansing.

Of the multitude of ethnic groups which resided within the borders of the Ottoman empire, have any other people made claims of genocide as we have here to date? In fact, many of our Greek neighbours in Canada have told us that Ottomans had sheltered them from the conflicts that raged among the European Christians, Orthodox and Catholics at the time.

Stepping back in history it was a time when Russia, on the east and Great Britain were instigating one of the main ethnic groups of the Ottoman empire, the Armenians, to rise up against the Ottomans, in the eastern part of the empire. We were individuals who operated in a fairly violent fashion, Armenian terrorist gangs. Let us be honest. I am almost hesitant to go out on a limb when I say these things because I know that there could well be reprisals against people who speak. There have been within our own country. There were assassinations in our own country back in the 80s and in places around the world by Armenian terrorist gangs. That does not make me feel really comfortable, even here, speaking today on such a matter.

These Armenian terrorists back at that time intensified their actions. There were sporadic clashes between the Muslim and Armenian settlements in Turkey. Then when the Russian army invaded eastern Anatolia in 1915 those Armenian terrorist gangs, side by side with the Russian army, started launching systematic attacks against the Ottoman troops, but also against their civilian Muslim fellow countrymen. In addition to those attacks, the Armenian gangs also assisted the Russians by cutting supply lines of the Ottoman army, which was fighting with an invading force.

Under those circumstances the Ottoman government decided to relocate the Armenians who were living in that war theatre to other provinces in the empire. The rationale for that decision was two-fold: to prevent the inter-communal massacres, to keep these two conflicting communities apart, and to cut the support extended by those Armenian towns to the Russians.

Private Members' Business

During the period in discussion there were hostilities, famine, ailments, banditry and so on. It heavily affected all those communities in eastern Anatolia.

• (1840)

Innocent civilians lost their lives during that migration which took place under some very difficult winter conditions and those are the consequences of a war of unprecedented magnitude. But neither the distress of the Turks nor the Armenians should be solely singled out. It was a tragic and sad time in the course of history. These painful experiences were only part of the tragedy to which the whole of the Anatolian population was subjected.

I could go on a great length, but I do want to allow some time for other members. I am rather concerned when I hear genocide kind of statements that we have around the world. Generally we are going after somebody to prosecute them in the criminal courts in the international tribunals at the Hague or wherever. I am not exactly sure, even if this were to pass today, who we would be prosecuting or going after.

Another concern is when this is passed in other countries. It is interesting in noting the countries that have passed this; not the U.S., not the U.K., and not the United Nations. They have never passed a motion or resolution to this effect. Other countries may have had their own vested motions for doing so. In France, particularly, when as a result of passing a law somewhat to this effect, a lawsuit was brought against anybody who questioned that. A professor is now being sued because he differs with the Armenian perspective on this tragic time in history.

I am going to leave it there. I hope all members across the House, when they cast their ballot tomorrow, would recognize that often we have heard only one side of the story. There were Armenians trying to destabilize the empire at that time. They were collaborating with the orthodox Russians in the east. There were many tragic violent events occurring at the time. War is awful; war is ugly.

It is a mistake, though, at this time in history, so many years later, to be dragging that conflict here. We should leave those things to the historians to work out and to come to some agreement in terms of what the actual facts were. But there is not that clear agreement. The term genocide is far too strong a case to use in respect to what occurred—the tragic events that affect the Armenian community and likewise affect the Turkish community.

I rest my case and leave time for others at this point.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will start by thanking my colleague, the member for Laval Centre, for her initiative. There is something about this motion and the nature of the debate we are hearing that pleases me. I stayed for the first hour of debate in order to listen to my colleagues. I think our colleague is right to address the importance of historical rehabilitation. The motion we will be called to vote upon tomorrow is not in fact intended as any sort of accusation against anyone.

I have met with a number of members of the Turkish community, and I hope that the next time I travel it will be to Turkey. I know that the Turkish community includes some people who are just as peace-

loving as the Armenians, the Quebeckers, the French, in fact anyone else living on this planet Earth.

It would, however, be a mistake not to want to recognize what happened during the years leading up to 1915 and in 1915 itself. This was a time for which the Turks of today have no need to feel responsible. We are well aware of their desire to engage in constructive and positive dialogue with the Armenians.

It was with the purpose of rehabilitating historical memory that Brian Mulroney apologized to the Japanese community. It was with the purpose of historic rehabilitation that the member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier and a senator from the other place, wrote a book on the commemoration of the Holocaust. It was in the name of this historical commemoration that the hon. member for Verchères—Les-Patriotes put forward a motion concerning the deportation of the Acadians. This does not mean that we want to rewrite history. It means that we want to take the time to remember that there was suffering and historical conditions that led to what we call a genocide.

The word “genocide” has a particular meaning in international law. It does not have the same meaning as “tragedy.” It certainly does not have the same meaning as “calamity,” the word the parliamentary secretary proposed. In this process of historical rehabilitation, we must remember and we must call things by their proper names.

Because we love peace, because we believe in a productive dialogue, because we value the Turkish community, I believe that tomorrow, all members of this House should do what Argentina, Belgium, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Libya, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay, the Vatican and the European Parliament have done, which is to call for remembrance of the fact that 1.5 million Armenians lost their lives during a time of historical tension—the tension that prevailed at the beginning of the last century. We must remember that so as to avoid a similar event happening, and to make such an event impossible in the future.

I believe that the hon. member for Mercier, the Bloc Québécois critic for foreign affairs, referred to this. It is even more important now, when the values of international solidarity and the concept of international justice have never been clearer. The United Nations was founded in San Francisco in 1945. In the Canadian delegation at San Francisco were two parliamentarians who served as Prime Minister of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King and Louis Stephen Saint Laurent.

An hon. member: Joe Clark

Mr. Réal Ménard: The former prime minister and right hon. member for Calgary was too young, of course, to have been a member of the delegation, but that does not detract at all from his great international credibility.

I want to say that, in 1945, when we adopted the Charter of the United Nations, the San Francisco bylaws included the idea of an international court of justice.

Private Members' Business

•(1845)

Closer to home, there is this idea of an international criminal court. How important is this and what does it mean to have such instruments if, as parliamentarians, on a more national scale, we are not able to recall the facts that must be recalled for what they are, without any complacency, but to be constructive?

I do not believe that, when the member for Laval Centre introduced her motion, she intended once again to make accusations, stigmatize communities and make people bear a historic weight that is not theirs to bear.

We are well aware that all the conditions are in place for the current Turkish government to distance itself from the events that occurred at the time of the Ottoman empire and when, as was mentioned, modern Turkey, later founded by Mustafa Kemal Pacha Atatürk in 1923, did not even exist yet.

Once again, it is in the name of this ideal for peace. It is because we believe it is possible to build dialogues that the facts must be recalled.

Yesterday, I attended the book launch for the member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, who stressed the importance of remembering the Holocaust of 1945.

Does this mean that, by remembering the Holocaust, we think that the Germans are warmongers? Of course not. Does this mean that, when Brian Mulroney apologizes for the undeserved internment of certain members of the Japanese community, that Canadians are warmongers? Of course not.

We refuse, as parliamentarians, to cross that line. Some people are saying that, if we recognize the 1915 genocide, we will stigmatize groups. That is not our intention. That is not the intention of the member for Laval Centre. So, for all these reasons, tomorrow we must support the motion by the member for Laval Centre.

•(1850)

The Speaker: Because the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve has finished his speech, the hon. member for Laval Centre now has the right to reply. She has five minutes.

Ms. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with considerable emotion that I rise to close this second hour of debate on recognition of the Armenian genocide of 1915.

Part of the reason for that emotion is this opportunity to be able to share with you the respect I feel for the Armenian people and their remarkable tenacity in demanding recognition of this genocide, despite the pressure of often dubious socio-political imperatives. Their attachment to their identity and history is an example to us all.

On several occasions since 1993, the debate on the genocide of 1915 has been brought to the attention of the members of the House of Commons, yet only one debate has ever been sanctioned by a vote. It was on a motion by a Bloc Québécois member, Michel Daviault, on April 23, 1996, during an opposition day when the Bloc was the official opposition. The text of his motion was as follows:

That this House recognize, on the occasion of the 81st anniversary of the Armenian genocide that took place on April 24, 1915, the week of April 20 to 27 of each year as the week to commemorate man's inhumanity to man.

After much debate, the motion on which the House finally voted referred not to recognition of the Armenian genocide, but merely the Armenian tragedy. The support was unanimous. Some saw this as a step in the right direction, but others just saw it as better than nothing.

Since the beginning of the 37th Parliament, this is the fourth time we have had an opportunity to debate this important matter, and I am delighted that the vote on this motion takes place precisely during what is called, and I repeat the wording of the motion of April 23, 1996, "the week of man's inhumanity to man". This is, in fact, the first time we will have the opportunity to take a clear stand by voting in favour of this recognition of history. By supporting Motion M-380, we will be adopting as our own this thought of Étienne Gilson on the meaning of history:

We do not study history to get rid of it but to save from nothingness all the past which, without history, would vanish into the void. We study history so that what, without it, would not even be the past any more, may be reborn to life in this unique present outside which nothing exists.

It is high time that this Parliament joined the many parliaments—and not minor ones—that have recognized the Armenian genocide, as has the Senate of Canada, which, on June 13, 2002, passed a motion by Senator Shirley Maheu recognizing the Armenian genocide. I am pleased to point out as well that in December 2003, the National Assembly of Quebec unanimously passed a bill proclaiming April 24 as Armenian Genocide Memorial Day.

How can we explain that a country like Canada, so proud of its values of compassion and justice, prefers to use a euphemism instead of having the courage to call a spade a spade?

The Armenian genocide was the first genocide of the 20th century, but unfortunately it was not the only one. A number of historians describe the 20th century as the century of genocide. If we consider the situation in Sudan at this moment, it appears that we have not finished learning from the past.

Now that the world has become a global village, it is important to recognize that we all share in the responsibilities. As Mr. Robert Kocharian, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia put it so well, on March 24, 1998:

The genocide was not the tragedy of the Armenian people alone, but a tragedy for all of humanity.

As I finish this brief speech, I would like to say how much I want to see this House show the courage of its convictions. On April 24 this year, the Armenian genocide will mark its 89th anniversary. As for myself, I will be leaving politics soon. Nothing could make me happier than if, before I finish my mandate, I could have contributed in my own way to presenting the Armenian people with the best gift of all: recognition of its history.

Émile Henriot wrote:

The dead live on in the memories of those they leave behind.

Each and every one of us has the duty to remember. Thank you for your support and for the solidarity you will show to the Armenian people in the vote on Motion M-380.

Private Members' Business

•(1855)

The Speaker: It being 6:56 p.m., the time provided for this debate has now expired. The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the division stands deferred until April 21, 2004, just before private members' business.

[Editor's Note: For continuation of proceedings see Part B]

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CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 139 • NUMBER 037 • 3rd SESSION • 37th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

**Tuesday, April 20, 2004
(Part B)**

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 20, 2004

[Editor's Note: Continuation of proceedings from Part A]

EMERGENCY DEBATE

•(1855)

[English]

AVIAN FLU

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of a motion to adjourn the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration, namely, the avian flu.

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC) moved:

That this House do now adjourn.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the decision you made a couple of days ago to undertake this emergency debate. It is more than necessary considering the situation at hand. On behalf of my leader, the leader of the Conservative Party, and my colleagues, I thank the Speaker of the House of Commons for understanding the need for this debate.

The leader of the Conservative Party expresses his sincere disappointment for not being able to address this issue as he had previously committed to a function out of Ottawa and did not know the debate would come up this fast.

Everything I say here is meant as conservative and constructive criticism. I would like us all to keep the partisan politics out of this. I know many of the farmers across the country are watching the debate and listening for what will be said. What is necessary is that we take the high road on this issue. It is a serious debate and much will be said worth listening to.

I am going to talk about a number of issues to begin this debate. First, the non-economic impact of the avian flu to our farmers; second, the real economic impact of the flu; third, management by government, government practices; fourth, the small chicken farmer and the specialty bird farmers who are affected; and finally, our expectations of government.

I want to first address the need for this debate. Producers and processors need a clear definition of what is going to happen to them in the future.

Second, compensation is a serious issue and based upon my experience and our experience in the House here over the years in dealing with the government, we have watched many times where a

crisis passed and many of those involved have been forgotten. I can refer to the hepatitis C crisis where victims have been forgotten for the moneys they should have received as victims; the cull of the elk herd in the BSE crisis and people are still waiting for funding for that; and the SARS flu victims as well.

We in the Fraser Valley I know are not prepared to wait for years and go hand and foot to the government, whichever government it will be, and wait for some form of funding compensation for our losses.

Third, we have an obligation to speak out for the small farmer and the specialty farmer whose voice has not been heard very much to date.

Fourth, we must ensure that the federal government, through the CFIA, has a stable, effective plan for a future farm crisis in this industry.

Finally, Ottawa must understand that a serious issue has happened west of the Rockies in avian flu but that does not mean that it is not a national issue. It means that it happened in a locale but that it is still a national issue.

I am disturbed by the Prime Minister's comments about letting us understand that in British Columbia things should be a national issue but, on the other hand, recent comments suggesting that this is a problem that is west of the Rockies. It is irrelevant, quite frankly, where the problem is. This is a national crisis.

I just talked to the agriculture minister and I am glad he is in the House. In his response yesterday to my question about compensation to farmers and producers for neutralizing manure, shipping manure, down time, loss of production and other related costs, he basically said that I and my colleagues had waited for six weeks before bringing this to the House.

That, in effect, was quite true. Actually neither I nor my colleague from Battlefords—Lloydminster, our agriculture critic, brought this issue up in question period. The reason was that we wanted to give all governments, provincial and federal, time to work this thing out without making a national political issue out of it.

In fact, we watched what was happening and now is the time to discuss the issue. I have no intention of interfering with the good job John Van Dongen, our B.C. agriculture minister, is doing and that of the producers and processors. It had been, for me personally, a time to observe, a time to learn and a time to assess the problem itself.

S. O. 52

●(1900)

Thus far, after five weeks, what I see in observation is that we are intent on killing everything with feathers, consulting with some people but not all people, committing very little by way of compensation and insisting that everything is under control with the CFIA but, in fact, the virus is continuing to expand even though drastic measures have been taken. We have some questions on whether or not this process is working and we intend to cover that.

I will go over my first issue, which is the non-economic impact. A lot of people across the country watching the debate tonight should understand that this loss of production time has a significant impact on our farmers. An idle farm is not what our farmers and their families are used to. They are used to working day and night, seven days a week. This idle time is not good because it creates worry for them. They are thinking about the time they have to restart and when the income will start coming in. Those kind of things are the non-monetary concerns that many of our farmers are having now, their families and, quite frankly, our whole community of Abbotsford, which is a support industry throughout the lower mainland for these farmers.

Another non-monetary impact of this issue is the image of chickens as a food.

I do receive all the materials that farmers send out and one of the documents, which they sent out recently, entitled "From our family to yours", is a very good document. It explains a lot of the things that the chicken farmers are doing to promote chicken as a food, a sustenance, and all the activities that they undertake across the country.

I will just give some examples. They sponsor and present at agriculture and classroom meetings and events across Canada. They appear at and sponsor the Dieticians of Canada's annual conference. They create school kits and so on. This avian flu affects that image.

I will be directing some of my comments to the minister on how we can actually try to fix that image because it will be tarnished to some extent.

Those are the non-economic impacts. What I want to talk about, more importantly, is the economic impact of the avian flu: the cost of depopulating. The Government of Canada does reimburse for the cost of repopulating each chicken in an amount of anywhere from \$3 to \$33, which was the amount used by the CFIA, but \$33 is far in excess of an upper limit that they will be giving. I suspect it will be around \$3 or \$4 but the minister can correct me on that, on breeders and so on.

However, I want to discuss the real additional costs, the costs that are not included in farm income programs or the costs that are not included to date or being considered by the government. What I really want to impress on the minister here tonight is that it is those costs that have to be considered, and not later but sooner.

There is also the cost of downtime and the loss of production. Some of these farms have to wait until the last farm is cleaned up and restarted again. This is going to be a long time and it will be unproductive time. That downtime is an actual cost to our farmers.

There is also the cost of start up time. The repopulation of the chickens and other birds is another cost that they will incur. It is not a normal cost. It is an additional cost.

There is the cost of neutralizing the manure and of shipping out the manure.

There is interest on idle revenue-producing equipment. The farmers have all the equipment sitting there but they cannot use it. So they are paying the bills and paying the interest to the bank.

They have to pay for feed when no product is eating. Chickens are not eating but they have the feed sitting there.

There is a cost for processors in unproductive operating time while plants are shut down. They still need the processing plant even though it is not being used.

Innovative unemployment programs: job sharing, health care, waiting periods for EI, and so on. Those are all additional costs of somebody out there and the government has to look at sharing in it.

Heightened biosecurity initiatives. There is no doubt that at the end of the day that will be something we do not want passed on to the farmers. We want the government to share in the cost of that. We also have industry public relations when all this is done.

●(1905)

Those are actual costs that the government has to commit to and commit to tonight, quite frankly.

Also, we have the cost of depopulating other specialty birds. I will talk more about that later, but the amount that is on the schedule for the specialty birds, ducks, geese, quail, pigeons and so on, is far too low for the amount of the actual costs of repopulating the birds. Those are the things we want to talk about tonight.

I want to talk about management by government. I am no expert in the management of this crisis but, from my observations and after discussions, some questions need to be asked. I hope the minister, who will be speaking after me, addresses these issues concretely. How exactly did this virus start? We are in a position to know that now. What control measures were in place? If effective control measures were put in place, then why is it still spreading? We have not had a new farm in three days but it is still spreading.

Rumour has it that the measures that the CFIA had and continue to have in place are part of the cause of the spread of the virus. We want to know if that is in fact so. Nobody is putting blame. We are just trying to get some answers.

Why kill all birds including specialty birds? Is there a national strategy in place to deal with these kinds of issues because, if this does go somewhere else, what will the strategy be? Do we continue to kill every bird everywhere or is there some strategy that the government has learned now that it must implement?

It appears that local specialists, and I know this is a fact, to some extent are not being consulted, and I would like to know why.

In addition to that, small chicken farmers and specialty bird farmers are really not being consulted. They are included in the large mass of farmers but specialty bird farmers have unique issues.

What mistakes made during the BSE crisis are being repeated here, if they are at all? I know there will be some talk tonight about the cull of the elk herds, for instance. It has been quite a long time since that happened and I do not think there has been reimbursement, and if there has, it has only been recently. Our farmers should not and cannot wait for a year or two down the road to be reimbursed.

Why is removal of the manure taking so long? Why is a company like JF BioEnergy not being considered? I want to talk a bit more about JF BioEnergy. I had an opportunity to visit the company this week. It has a very unique piece of equipment that can help but it has been pooh-pooed along the way.

Those are all legitimate questions given to me from various producers, processors and related industry people. I can assure everyone in the House of Commons tonight that there is an expectation of clear and concise answers. I can assure the farmers, the producers and the associated industries who may be watching the debate tonight, that we do expect an answer. In talking to the minister, he said that he would have some. The time for generalities is gone.

With regard to the small chicken farmer, I understand that not all farmers can be contacted at once but we must have the assurance that all farmers will be consulted as it is their livelihood that we are destroying. I must tell the minister that, as I understand it, a lot of specialty farmers were not consulted but have been thrown into the mix of this larger problem.

These farmers are asking for a voice to stop the massacre of all healthy fowl. I do not know why the CFIA wants to kill everything with feathers but if it does, I wonder why the virus continues to spread, not in sequence but from farm to farm, skipping geological areas. For instance, it moves from Abbotsford all of a sudden over to Cloverdale, a distance of maybe 30 kilometres. What is in between all that and why did it spread like that if we have such a great program in place?

Small farmers feel that their operations are being sacrificed and that they should be exempt from eradication unless their birds prove to be positively affected. In one case, CFIA officials have informed a small farmer that because he was within one kilometre of an infected barn, he must depopulate, yet his hearty outdoor birds are not ill and will not become ill unless they are in direct contact with the virus by means of people or equipment. They do not understand why, so someone should consult with them as to why.

●(1910)

In another case CFIA officials have admitted to a farmer, off the record that is, that they agree with all his arguments that their approach is heavy handed, but they have no idea what else to do. They told him the edict came from Ottawa and they are just following orders. If that is the case and if the orders must be followed, why tell the farmer they do not know what they are doing, that they are just following orders? It is time to go back and say to these people to stop creating this acrimony.

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I want to talk about specialty birds, including pigeons, ducks and geese. This too is an area where a large amount of damage is being inflicted. These birds include, as I said, pigeons, ducks, geese and other fowl, such as quail. This area was overlooked in the time leading up to the eradication decision, yet the impact is most severe. These farmers are not supported by supply management and will suffer the loss of irreplaceable breeds, the loss of niche markets and the capital investment required to start over again.

Let me reflect what these specialty farmers are saying. This is coming from those specialty farmers. One, avian influenza is not a disease that infects ducks and geese to kill them, and therefore they should be exempt from this mass kill.

Two, Dr. Bruce Burton said, "There are significant genetic treasures in the Fraser Valley. They are isolated and totally unaffected by this curse. Once lost, they will be gone forever in a meaningful way, rare breeds of quail, chickens, racing pigeons, commercial ducks that are superior in growth, uniformity and egg production to any in the world. It is imperative that a way to preserve these species is found".

Their third comment is that the Health of Animals Act states that specialty farmers will be paid a maximum of \$30 for a duck or a goose, but how does this allow for the irreplaceable breeds they have? How is this reimbursement for years of investment in a particular breed? Without proper reimbursement the government will effectively legislate them out of business.

Fourth, specialty farmers risk having new entrants into the specialty bird industry, because they are not supply managed, upon repopulation. The existing industry will have lost their competitive advantage.

Finally, there are many other issues facing specialty farmers. I encourage the minister to contact their association or other specialty farmers and anybody else out there watching. It is different. They do have different needs.

Now the pigeons. This is an incredible story. I met with pigeon farmers who are very concerned. I note that I only have two minutes remaining so I will have to push this. The problem is that they have a very unique industry. To replace their pigeons would cost much more than the amount the government is prepared to give.

Let me get to our expectations of government. Act with confidence and in the interests of everyone. Make certain that the steps taken are the best options available. Do not walk away from those that will be bankrupt once the job is finished. Listen to all the people who should be involved, not just some. Declare what caused the virus. Admit what spread the virus. Complete a national strategy for such events that may occur in the future. Get the money in the hands of the producers and processors now, not when they go on hands and knees later. Implement tax deferrals on income received. Spend money on promotions for chickens and specialty birds. Involve our local experts; they do know what they are talking about. Ensure everything possible is being done to look after those who are becoming unemployed.

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In summation, our farmers are the best in the world. They are innovative. They are, in the truest sense of the word, real entrepreneurs. Rules and bureaucracy and partisan politics cannot step in the way of assisting these business people. Let us agree here tonight to immediately fund the cost of eradication, advance funds on other related costs, defer taxes on funds received, develop a national strategy for such cases, consider specialty farmers as unique, and assist employees who are laid off.

●(1915)

As for the government, accept this submission here in the house of the common people as non-partisan constructive criticism, so together we do what is the responsibility of a national government and that is, assist those who genuinely need it.

I want to compliment those farmers, processors, producers and like industries who provided us the information which I put forward to the government.

God bless our farmers and God bless Canada.

Hon. Bob Speller (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate. I appreciate the comments by the member for Langley—Abbotsford and I certainly take up his challenge to hold this debate in a non-partisan way. I think all parties would agree that these sorts of issues should not be treated in a partisan manner.

As the member knows, I recently visited the Fraser Valley to see first hand the work that is being done to stamp out this highly contagious disease. I was particularly impressed by the attitude of his constituents. The people there are going through a very difficult time. They are responding with the spirit of determination to do whatever is necessary to stamp out this disease and to restore health to the poultry industry in British Columbia.

The Prime Minister has also been active on this file. He has been advised by myself and the CFIA on the new developments. He has spoken with B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell, as well as myself, and assured us of the Government of Canada's commitment to eradicate the avian influenza, and as I said, to restore the B.C. poultry industry.

Let me take a moment to remind the House of what has happened so far. On February 19 the Canadian Food Inspection Agency confirmed the presence of avian influenza in British Columbia. This is highly pathogenic. Avian influenza is a reportable disease under the Health of Animals Act. This means that all suspected cases must be reported to the CFIA and all reported suspected cases are immediately investigated by inspectors from that agency.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency responded to the outbreak immediately by placing infected premises under quarantine and by depopulating all of the birds on the infected farms. Because avian influenza is so contagious, a surveillance program was put in place. On March 11 I issued a ministerial order that defined the control area that imposed movement restrictions of birds and bird products. The order also defined a surveillance region and a high risk region where movement restrictions were beyond those in the remainder of the control area.

Despite these measures, avian influenza continued to spread throughout the high risk area and in fact the control area. That is why

I announced on April 5 the depopulation of all commercial poultry flocks and other backyard birds in the control area. This includes approximately 19 million birds.

I want to tell hon. members that this decision was not taken lightly. It was based on the recommendations of the CFIA, in consultation with the province of British Columbia and the poultry industry. It was clear to us that the rapid spread of the virus required an aggressive response.

To date, the CFIA has confirmed avian influenza on some 31 farms. Depopulation of these farms has been completed.

The CFIA is now in the process of depopulating the entire control area. First targeted premises are where the infection is present or suspected. By eliminating the birds that are most at risk as quickly as possible, we will help minimize the risk of further spread. We should see fewer and fewer cases of infection as the depopulation progresses.

At the same time, tests are being conducted on the samples from all depopulated flocks. Poultry that are free of avian influenza will be eligible for human consumption and sent to commercial slaughter facilities.

I understand that this depopulation process is difficult for all affected bird owners, particularly those with smaller flocks and those who keep their birds as pets. Unfortunately, avian influenza is an indiscriminate and unrelenting virus. All birds in captivity are susceptible and all pose a risk to spreading the disease.

I have great sympathy for the poultry owners in the region, but I know that this depopulation is the best way to save the industry overall.

●(1920)

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency will assess on a case by case basis situations such as exotic birds, pets, or birds in zoos. Birds that are enclosed within residential premises will not likely be affected by the depopulation.

The Government of Canada is also aware there is concern that this outbreak of avian influenza may cause significant financial hardship for not only the producers in the industry but also the surrounding communities. I certainly understand the level of anxiety over potential financial losses. That is why I want to make it very clear what it is the government is doing.

Under the Health of Animals Act, our government compensates all farm owners who currently own birds that are being destroyed. Under the act, owners are paid market value for the flocks that are ordered destroyed. As for the broader compensation for economic loss, that is yet to be determined. We are currently working with the industry and the provincial government to understand the extent and the impact this is having on industry. Once this investigation is complete, we will be in a much better position to talk about further compensation.

S. O. 52

As members of the House already know, Agriculture Canada also has income stabilization programs that are available to all farmers in times of disaster.

The province of British Columbia and the industry agree that our first priority is to eradicate the disease. Depopulation is not the only tool we have to stamp out this disease. We have enhanced our collaboration with B.C.'s ministry of agriculture and food and the fisheries lab. I have great appreciation and respect for the expertise of these provincial laboratories. The Abbotsford facilities have provided invaluable help to our efforts to eradicate the disease. As well, Premier Gordon Campbell has made available the full resources of the provincial emergency program to support this effort.

With a disease that spreads so quickly and so easily, the movement of people and equipment is likely the most significant factor behind the spread of this disease. Therefore it is essential that all of the proper biosecurity protocols are followed to further prevent the progression of this disease. That is why the CFIA has now taken legal steps that require poultry owners to control access to their premises by affixing a notice at the entrance of their properties prohibiting unauthorized entry to their farms. These signs are being distributed throughout all premises in the control area.

Before allowing anybody onto their farms, poultry producers must ensure that the proper biosecurity measures are being taken. These include ensuring that all vehicles such as feed trucks and other suppliers are thoroughly cleaned and approved by disinfectant; thoroughly washing and disinfecting all equipment entering and leaving the farm; making sure that all workers and visitors wear clean protective clothing and footwear, and if possible owners are asked to provide coveralls and boots; and placing a foot bath at the entrance to all poultry houses.

To ensure people are aware of these additional measures, we have increased our public awareness activities. Public notices have been distributed. Regular technical briefings are being held to keep the media informed. An information session was held on April 15 to allow poultry producers and residents to speak freely with agency officials.

I know that with the current influenza situation in Asia, people are concerned about the human health implications of this disease. I must stress that the virus that exists in the Fraser Valley is not the same strain that is causing human sickness and illness throughout Asia.

Two workers involved in the avian response were infected by the virus and contracted pink eye as a result. Both have since recovered. There has been no evidence of person to person transmission of this virus and the risk to human health remains very, very low.

As a precaution, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has taken extensive measures to protect the health of those involved in the Fraser Valley investigation and response.

● (1925)

In accordance with Health Canada regulations, all staff have been outfitted with biocontainment suits and must attend occupational health and safety hazard awareness sessions to educate them on the essential precautionary measures.

I would like to speak now about the importance of partnerships in eradicating this disease. The depopulation effort requires the assistance and cooperation of all partners, including the province and the poultry industry.

The CFIA is working closely with those partners to move as quickly as possible in the depopulation. We are also speaking regularly with our American counterparts to keep them informed of the situation.

There has been great cooperation among federal departments and agencies. The CFIA is working closely with colleagues in Health Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Department of External Affairs. We are also collaborating with the USDA. A U.S. epidemiologist is working with us in fact in British Columbia as part of an epidemiological investigation.

As I said earlier, Premier Campbell, the province of British Columbia and particularly the minister of agriculture there have been very helpful and instrumental in this effort.

The CFIA has worked closely with both the B.C. Centre for Disease Control, the B.C. Ministry of Health Services and local health officials throughout the expanded depopulation efforts to ensure that all appropriate measures are taken to monitor and to protect the health of those involved in the avian influenza response.

Throughout this effort, the poultry industry has been very understanding and very supportive. It is understood that governments and industry share a common goal, and that is eradicating this outbreak as soon as possible so that the poultry industry can return to normal.

There has been a high level of cooperation from the residents of the Fraser Valley. In particular, I commend the people who live and work in the controlled area for taking immediate precautions to help us prevent the spread of this disease.

Canada has an excellent worldwide reputation for a comprehensive and responsive animal health system. We are well respected for our ability to address present and emerging challenges. Our animal health and safety system has been put to the test as a result of this recent outbreak of avian influenza. However, by working with our partners from the federal and provincial governments to local health authorities and from industry to consumers, we can stamp out this outbreak and uphold Canada's reputation for its responsive animal and food safety system.

I would be very pleased to answer the questions of my colleagues on this issue and I appreciate once again their commitment to treat this issue on a non-partisan basis. We all in the House work with our communities to represent our constituents and to ensure that we address these serious issues with not only speed but through cooperative effort.

● (1930)

The Speaker: There are about seven minutes remaining in the time allotted for the minister. Is it agreed that it be used for questions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

S. O. 52

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will not go past the seven minutes because there are many people who want to speak. If we do have further questions, it would be good if the minister did get back and talk to us about it.

One thing I was looking for when I originally made my speech was more of a commitment. I mentioned that the income stabilization programs did not really look after some of the costs such as the neutralizing of the material, the shipping of the material and particularly the down time and the interest on the loans that farmers have. All these things are very important.

I know the minister has said that, yes, the government will pay for the birds that are killed, and we understand that, but this other aspect is even as serious or more serious.

The other issue I would like the minister to address is the speciality birds. I did not have time in my speech to cover that, but the value and the compensation price listed in regulations is far too low for specialty birds. Many of them cost well in excess of \$50 to \$60 to replace, but farmers will only get a maximum of \$30. That will definitely bankrupt those farmers.

Therefore, I would like those two questions answered.

Hon. Bob Speller: Mr. Speaker, those are important questions. Let me start with specialty birds. I agree, there are birds that are much more valuable than that. What the hon. member said earlier about the genetics and the long line of some of these birds over a great deal of time is very worrisome.

In terms of my approach to it, and I have asked my officials to ensure that we look at these cases on a case by case basis, our overall goal is to move to depopulate that whole area. However, I want to start by depopulating those areas that are completely around the infected area where we believe there could be a spread of that disease.

The backyard flocks and some of these specialties I want to leave those until later on and work with these people to ensure we do not do something that is unnecessary. The belief by the best science that we know is that this is the approach we have to take. However, I want to ensure that maybe further on in the process if it is found that we have to take greater action with these specialty birds, that we do that, but I want to put them later on in the system. There is no question it is widely believed that this is the approach we need to take, but I understand that there is a problem.

We want to work with all groups. I noticed the hon. member mentioned earlier that he felt there was not enough consultation with some of these other groups. I think if he checks that, in fact there has been. I have asked my people to get out and talk to as many of these groups as quickly as possible so we have a better understanding of their situation.

However, he can well understand that it is just an enormous task and we have a lot of people. From across the country, we have brought in CFIA people and the provincial ministry has brought in people too. We are trying to get out and do as much of this consultation as possible. At the same time we are trying to hold open public consultations in case we miss people. We want to give them

the chance to let us know their views and let us know more about their particular situation.

In terms of other compensation, it really is too early to get a good understanding of what impact this has. I think in terms of jobs, we will see as we begin to kill more birds, with the processing of those birds those jobs will be there. However, there are other areas and certainly the hon. member has brought them up.

In the areas we need to look at, our priority right now is to depopulate those areas. This is really where we are putting all of our efforts. These other issues will be talked about with the industry and provincial government, and those talks will continue to go on. However, with respect to our resources, they are now really in the area of trying to eradicate the disease.

• (1935)

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister of Agriculture for taking some time to respond to questions. I too will be brief with mine.

We know that British Columbia is not the only place in North America that has had avian flu this spring. Certainly Delaware and Texas have had it. As I look at this, it strikes me that we are killing, depopulating, way more birds than are being depopulated there. It seem to me that it has been contained much faster in those two states. Is it because it is a different strain of avian flu? Is it because the USDA and the Texas agricultural officials have acted more quickly?

The final question is, when this is all over, will we have something like an international panel on BSE that will come and look at what we did right and wrong on this issue?

Hon. Bob Speller: Mr. Speaker, the situation in those areas was low pathogen. We get avian influenza, low pathogen, periodically. We have had it in Canada before. It is easily controllable.

We believe that what happened on the B.C. premises was that it mutated from a low pathogen into a high pathogen on the same farm. Therefore, we had results back from that farm that said it was low pathogen and we were treating it as there might be a possibility of high pathogen. Unfortunately, it somehow mutated and got out of control. That is what we believe happened and that is why it spread a lot quicker here.

The only other high pathogen was in the Texas area. It was able to control it because it tested as high pathogen right away. That is why we feel it got out of control.

We are putting in, as you mentioned today in question period, important biosecurity. We have as much bio-security as we think is necessary now, although we need to look at these issues maybe after this is all over. As you say, maybe an international—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food will know he has to address his remarks to the Chair, but the time has expired as well for his speech. We have gone over, so we will have to move on.

S. O. 52

[Translation]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Champlain.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to contribute to this evening's debate on the avian flu.

Over the past 12 months we have gone through various experiences in Canada with agriculture-related diseases that affect our livestock. We all know about mad cow disease, which is still causing major problems throughout Canada, including in Quebec, some 4,000 km from the source of the disease. Farmers are paying the price for a disease that, in my opinion, was not so serious and existed very far away from the major herds in Quebec.

Avian flu is a highly contagious disease and is transmitted to birds in general, including wild and domestic birds, and even those kept as pets. It should be noted that this disease is not easily transmitted to humans.

When such an epidemic strikes, it is essential to prevent the public from panicking, thinking that it poses a risk to humans. Avian influenza could be contracted by humans only through close contact with birds, for example by individuals working in poultry houses or with poultry, thereby increasing their risk of contracting the virus. There are only one or two cases where humans have contracted avian influenza. So, it is important that the public knows that there is no cause for panic here.

At the same time, it is important to take all the necessary measures to control this disease. People in Vancouver and British Columbia are not responsible for the outbreak of this disease, but I think that we must congratulate them for taking the necessary precautions to prevent the disease from spreading any further.

Thirty-one farms are said to be affected. Despite the precautions, we see just how easy it is for the disease to spread from farm to farm, particularly among poultry farms. I heard comments, for example, about the way poultry carcasses were buried or burned, and people mentioned the risk of crows and wild animals carrying and spreading the disease, causing more serious problems.

I personally had the opportunity to work in this field; I used to inspect such farms. I can tell you that one can never be too careful about contact between farms. The minister said that it is absolutely essential for visitors to take all the necessary precautions, and I fully agree. The cars and trucks driven by those needing to visit such farms must be inspected. It is absolutely essential that the necessary efforts be made so that, at that level, the disease is not spread within a riding or outside it.

Enormous damage has already been done. We can imagine what this means for poultry farmers who have to slaughter their entire stock and sterilize all their equipment.

● (1940)

This is a fairly considerable loss of revenue, a major financial loss. I hope that the minister will look to providing assistance for these people, who are not responsible for such an epidemic in their area.

Often people think that there is substantial assistance when there is reimbursement of the value of a slaughtered bird. I can tell you from experience that this is not true. When birds are slaughtered, it is often

in a quarantine situation and so a great deal of expense is incurred to ensure that the entire farm and its surroundings are sterilized. This is a very expensive undertaking.

As I said, people ought not to panic in this case because this is a disease rarely transmitted to humans. The necessary precautions must be taken, however, to ensure farms are inspected.

I would like to congratulate the minister in this instance, because action was taken quickly enough that the disease is so far limited to only one region of British Columbia. In fact, all 31 affected farms are in the same area.

Had the same been done, or had there been perhaps a little less panic about mad cow, the burden on the taxpayer would have been far less.

As I have already said, Quebec producers have suffered, and are still suffering, financially because of one mad cow 4,000 km away. That time they did not deal with only the area in which there was an epidemic and so the whole country suffered.

Now, at least where avian flu is concerned, they do know how to monitor the situation, so the rest of the industry will not suffer if all necessary precautions are taken. Precautions must be taken, and we can never take too many if we want other countries to continue to trade with us. Let us keep in mind how heavy the cost was in the case of mad cow, because the border was closed down.

We know that the entire poultry production is quota-driven. This is what is called supply management. Because of the 19 million chickens to be slaughtered—and we hope that is as high as the number will go—there will be a shortage, and we will have to accept imports. Caution is in order, however, because the entire supply management system cannot be made to suffer from the presence of this disease in one part of the country. This is why the import licences for poultry must be temporary ones.

What the farmer fears is that the border will open to quota-free imports and that this will become a habit. We will be very tough about this. The Bloc Québécois agrees with quota-free imports for replacing the losses, but not if this creates a poultry shortage here. Nonetheless, this needs to be limited to this case exclusively, in other words, temporary permits need to be granted.

In my opinion, with specialization in agriculture and the huge size of farms, the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food should, in the future, be more cautious and increase the number of inspectors and surveillance of farms.

S. O. 52

• (1945)

Farmers need to be encouraged to conduct their own surveillance in order to limit as much as possible epidemics that could be extremely serious for all large-scale cattle or poultry farmers. I am certain that inspecting farms and taking precautions to contain diseases such as this one will prevent epidemics that could be extremely serious for all farmers.

Sometimes when I would visit farms with 100,000 chickens, or 20,000, 25,000 or 30,000 turkeys, I would say to myself that it would be catastrophic if ever we had to cull all this poultry because of a disease that might spread across the country. We know this type of poultry breeding exists throughout the country.

We have to applaud the fact that the current threat was limited only to the Fraser Valley in British Columbia. All the stakeholders who have to work in agriculture must take extreme precautions to ensure that there is as little risk as possible of epidemic in the future.

I am pleased that we are having this debate tonight because this is a major problem. Naturally, I call upon the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to help those who are suffering the impact of the avian flu. We are ready to offer our assistance in replacing the destroyed birds by imports as far as possible. Nevertheless, as I was saying, the import permits must be temporary.

The minister replied earlier to some of the questions I had. I was wondering, for example, what would happen if someone had to destroy a flock of very expensive animals, such as emus. I do not know if there are any in the region affected by this disease, but here in Quebec there are several farms that raise these extremely expensive birds, which can cost many hundreds of dollars each.

In such a case, do we have the necessary provisions to compensate producers if, unfortunately, such farms were affected by this disease? The birds would have to be slaughtered if that happened.

Perhaps we will have an opportunity to ask a few more questions of the minister. Right now, however, people are living with insecurity. They wonder what will happen if a similar disease were to strike farms raising specialized fowl whose unit value is infinitely greater than that of a chicken or a turkey.

We were speaking about geese earlier. I know that in Quebec—and perhaps not only in Quebec—there are emus and ostriches that cost around \$1,000 each. Can we guarantee that we will help these producers or the producers in the region where fowl are being destroyed, if they have that kind of farm?

I thank you for proposing this debate this evening. I think it is an extremely important one. We expect the minister to take precautions to pay the producers who are facing this disease, but we also want him to take the opportunity, perhaps, to add some inspectors and veterinarians. With the quality and the large scale of our farms, we must take the precaution of increasing safety so that no catastrophe occurs, which could be disastrous for all of Quebec and Canadian agriculture.

• (1950)

[*English*]

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure as always to take part in a debate in this special chamber.

Tonight, of course, we are talking about the avian influenza issue. As I understand it, four main sectors are impacted: the chicken industry, the turkey industry, the egg industry, and the broiler hatching egg producers. In British Columbia we are told that of the poultry products in that province 80% comes from the Fraser Valley. The revenue generated exceeds \$1 billion annually, so losing more than \$3 million a week and the phased in depopulation of the 19 million birds will cost the B.C. industry hundreds of millions of dollars this year.

We know that the virus is concentrated in manure and in nasal and eye discharges of infected birds and that contact with wild birds is the highest risk for contamination since they carry the disease without necessarily showing the symptoms. Bird droppings, dust and soil all can serve as transmission corridors for the disease, together with vehicles, cages and clothing, which can carry the virus as well. Feed and water, where shared with the wild bird population, can also be a source. The minister, in answer to my question a few minutes ago, talked about the high pathogen-low pathogen issue.

The first line of defence, we all agree, is limiting what comes into contact with the birds. We know that biosecurity will break the cycle of contact, but in this case humans appear to be responsible for the rapid spread of the disease in British Columbia. I will now quote Dr. Brian Evans, the chief veterinarian of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, who suggests exactly this: that the investigation points to human transfer of the virus. Dr. Evans said:

Owners and managers of multiple barns, catching crews, feed suppliers, staff. Even the bio-security staff may be involved.

That is the issue on this particular contagious outbreak, an outbreak that is contagious among the chicken population. The avian flu in British Columbia is now in its third month. It has just started. It exploded from a small number of affected birds, a small number of affected farms, and a small geographic area within the Fraser Valley. It has now exploded outside the valley area and 19 million birds are going to be destroyed.

The biosecurity has been very seriously impacted and violated here and that is the question that must be answered. I do not know if this particular strain of avian flu is more serious or more virulent than the strains of the virus detected in Texas and Delaware earlier this year, but I do know that those two outbreaks in those two states were contained much more efficiently than how this has been contained in the Fraser Valley in British Columbia.

In Gonzales County in Texas, 7,000 broiler chickens were destroyed on February 21 after an Asian influenza strain, H5N2, was discovered in a flock in that country. According to the Texas Animal Health Commission, since mid-February of this year more than 250 non-commercial and commercial flocks were tested within a 10 mile radius and no additional avian influenza infections were detected in those tests.

In Texas, owners of the 30 flocks within the five mile affected zone were able to move poultry or eggs only after obtaining a permit. Flocks in the affected zones underwent a minimum of four re-tests to the birds most likely to have been exposed to the virus. Strict biosecurity measures were utilized from the outset to prevent the potential transmission of disease from one farm to the other.

Texas made it clear that their teams would disinfect equipment, boots, vehicles and vehicle tires and sanitize and bag all disposable gear. From the outset, they urged poultry producers to take similar precautions and prohibit unnecessary traffic onto farms.

● (1955)

Poultry in the buffer zone, outside the impacted area, were all tested on at least one occasion. Did we carry out similar tests and retests in Canada? I do not know. It is not clear from the information that has been received or is available.

The CFIA website, on March 1, said 16,000 birds in British Columbia and that, it was suggested, would complete the process. Ten days later, as the minister himself indicated, he declared a control in the Fraser Valley to prevent spread of the disease. Ten days. Should we have acted more quickly? It certainly seems like the Texans acted faster.

Information continued to worsen and by March 24, CFIA decided to depopulate all remaining flocks in the high risk region. The 16,000 birds had grown to 275,000. Two weeks after that, on April 5, depopulation of all commercial poultry flocks and other backyard birds in the control area, a total of 19 million birds. Quite a progression: 16,000, two weeks later it becomes 275,000, and two weeks after that it becomes 19 million.

Did CFIA and the minister, and the department do the right thing, at the right time? I do not know. But I, like a lot of other Canadians, have every right to wonder. Texas restricted its kill to 7,000.

Like the mover of this motion that we are debating tonight, I am not an expert and I am certainly not a scientist; however, I would agree strenuously for an independent panel similar to what happened in the aftermath of the BSE issue to conduct an investigation at the appropriate time when this virus is finally contained to ascertain what the government and the industry did right and where we went wrong, if we went wrong at all, and what we would do in the future.

I have another example from south of the border. When the State of Delaware, on February 7, learned that two birds in that state had tested positive, all 12,000 birds in the flock were immediately destroyed. Not fast enough however before the disease had spread to both Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Three days later an additional 73,000 chickens were slaughtered on an adjacent Delaware farm following one bird that had tested positive.

I want to quote what the secretary of agriculture for the State of Delaware said, right at the outset:

This now is a very, very serious matter. We have a multibillion-dollar industry at stake.

He urged reporters not to visit farms because it might spread the disease further. "I am asking and pleading for your cooperation", he told the media.

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Were similar travel restrictions placed in the B.C. hot zone? Perhaps. But I have not heard about it. It seems to me that I can recall seeing a lot of footage in the early days after the outbreak was first diagnosed in British Columbia of television cameras and birds that were being destroyed.

When the executive vice-president of the CFIA, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, appeared on March 30 before the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, I do not recall him saying anything about restricting vehicles at that time in the affected areas for reporters or for other organizations. He did say the agency would reassess other biosecurity control measures at the appropriate time.

We certainly expect this agency to do that because when I look at the Delaware and Texas situations, it seems to me that the end result was a lot less severe than what was being impacted in British Columbia. Perhaps, because strict precautions were taken at the outset. It is all well and good for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to say that when the outbreak was first diagnosed in British Columbia it was assumed that it was a low pathogen, and then it mutated into a high pathogen, but perhaps we should have assumed that it was a high pathogen at the outset and taken the appropriate strict monitoring controls at that time. Perhaps that is what Texas and Delaware did and we did not.

Poultry officials in Delaware hoped the combined announcements in that state, together with Texas and Maryland, now that the disease has been eradicated, would help persuade the 50 countries that have banned American poultry imports from those states to lift them.

● (2000)

The question must be asked, how long will it take our officials once we have finished all of our work and we are satisfied that there is no more positive test results? When we have eliminated 19 million, surely the outside world is going to look at that and say that this is a much more serious problem because Canada has eliminated so many more birds than the under 100,000, as far as I can tell, that were eliminated in all of the United States that had avian influenza this spring.

Certainly, the result is the need in Canada for more biosecurity and a great deal more surveillance as a matter of routine. My colleague from the Bloc Quebecois put that very well in his remarks.

The question I guess now is, where do we go from here? Compensation has been promised, but certainly the compensation program will have shrunk on the per bird basis because when we had 16,000 birds impacted there was talk about the value that would be placed on each bird. However, when we are slaughtering 19 million, obviously the cost per bird is going to go down very considerably.

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Chicken and egg farmers would argue for appropriate and timely compensation. They would also point out the important role of their industries in providing nutritious safe food from Canada and the need for full cooperation and consultation among all levels of government and the industry. I appreciate that in terms of the government and I believe in terms of the industry we can say that there has been, as far as we can tell, full cooperation and coordination on this important issue.

The critical situation is a long way from being over, but when it is, we need compensation for the industry, and we need to reopen and push to reopen borders as quickly as possible. Again, I stress we need a review of what we did right and the mistakes that were made so that we can learn from them.

Personally, I have a very difficult time understanding how a relatively small outbreak on February 19 turned into a 19 million chicken depopulation two months later. As I said before, I do not think that I am the only one who feels this way. I hope and think that the appropriate questions will be asked at the appropriate time.

The impact on human health appears to be low and chickens that do not carry the disease are safe to eat as are the eggs that come from disease free chickens.

There is no question that the depopulation of the commercial and the backyard flocks is the best means of ending the crisis. However, despite the best efforts of government and industry, the disease has spread and spread rapidly. It has created a significant threat to a very profitable chicken industry, poultry and eggs, and has negatively affected those producers in a very serious way.

We are not doing terribly well over the last year or so when it comes to public health issues. I appreciate that with avian flu and the mad cow issue the chances of human beings being impacted by that in any serious way are almost negligible; however, in addition to those, we have had SARS and the West Nile virus. Our commitment to public health in terms of the money that has been pushed in that envelope has diminished greatly in recent years. It is a good thing that we have revitalized a public health agency announced in the budget and it is important that the new agency be up and running just as quickly as possible.

Canadians should be concerned that when this AI H7N3 strain was discovered and recorded on February 19, we were told that only 16,000 chickens and turkeys would be destroyed. That, as I said before, has now jumped to the incredibly high number of 19 million.

I referred the House to what the chief veterinarian had said. He said that humans were probably the main culprit in spreading the disease. I am reminded of the old Pogo cartoon, "We have seen the enemy and it is us". We need to do things differently.

• (2005)

I say that in reference to a reporter that has been following this issue, who was aware of what had happened in the United States, in Texas, Delaware and the other states. When he confronted the Canadian Food Inspection Agency officials about the low numbers of birds killed in those states compared with the 19 million in Canada, the answer that he received from that CFIA official was apparently, "We do things differently here". Obviously, we do things differently, but I am not sure that killing 19 million birds as opposed

to killing less than 100,000 in total in the United States suggests that we are doing things right.

It is important to reassure Canadian consumers that neither the BSE issue nor the avian flu will cause individuals harm. Right now there is no risk to the general public and there is a need to ensure the public that the virus does not cause any changes to any genetic re-assortment with human flu. The health of barn workers and those who come into any contact with the birds is a concern. The minister indicated that a couple of individuals have had flu and another two have come down with conjunctivitis. Certainly, it is in sharp contrast to the avian flu in Asia, which has killed 22 human beings so far this year.

There are far more questions at this point than there are answers, but we do need to do an analysis and prepare. I think we will find that we need to do things a lot differently the next time that we have an avian flu outbreak in this country.

• (2010)

Hon. Mark Eyking (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food (Agri-Food), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to participate in this emergency debate on the avian influenza. At the outset let me express my support, and I am sure the support of all hon. members here this evening from both sides, for the member for Langley—Abbotsford and his constituents.

We are hearing good presentations here this evening and we are hearing very good questions. That is very good, not only for this House, but for farmers across the country and also the Canadian public at large.

This is a very trying time for the people of Langley—Abbotsford. Although the avian influenza does not pose a risk to human health or food safety, it is a very serious issue for the poultry industry. It is hard for poultry producers and for many people whose livelihoods depend upon this industry. It is difficult as well for everyone who must abide by the restrictions in this controlled area. I want to assure the people in the hon. member's riding that the sacrifices they are making are not in vain. We will make every effort to eradicate this disease.

Once the CFIA confirmed the presence of avian influenza in the Fraser Valley, the agency responded immediately by placing the infected premises under quarantine and depopulating all birds. Because the avian influenza is very contagious, as we heard this evening, the CFIA began a surveillance program and established movement restrictions for birds and bird products to stop the spread of this bad disease.

On March 11 the Minister of Agriculture responsible for CFIA, established a control area in the B.C. Fraser Valley to prevent the spread of this avian influenza. This action followed the findings of low pathogenic avian influenza on a farm in the valley in February, which was later found to be high pathogenic, as well as the presence of the avian influenza on a second farm in the area in early March.

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On April 5 we announced the depopulation of all commercial poultry flocks and other backyard birds in a controlled area that was established on March 11 in the Fraser Valley. The decision was based on recommendations by the CFIA, and we also consulted with the province of British Columbia and the poultry industry.

It is very important that we take the strong measures required to eliminate this very bad disease as quickly as possible. Our first line of defence against the spread of this disease and our first line of attack in stamping it out is biosecurity, as was mentioned tonight. Following proper biosecurity practices will ensure that all the hard work the people in Langley—Abbotsford have done will pay off in containing the spread of avian influenza.

One of the most important biosecurity measures has been preventing unauthorized access to premises where the birds are being kept. The CFIA has taken legal steps that require poultry owners to control access to their premises by fixing a notice at the entrance of their property prohibiting unauthorized entry to their farm.

Before allowing anyone entry into their property, poultry owners must check to ensure that the vehicles have been thoroughly cleaned with an approved disinfectant. These vehicles must be cleaned both before and after they leave the premises. Any equipment entering and leaving the farm must also be thoroughly washed and disinfected, and all visitors must wear clean, protective clothing and footwear. There must also be a foot bath placed at the entrance of all poultry houses.

My family has a poultry farm and I know from experience the hardship this can cause, not only to the farm family and the employees but also to the customers. These farmers are used to producing a product and delivering it to the customer on a regular basis, so this is a very serious situation.

Precautions have to be taken and these precautions will make a difference. They are an important part of an action plan that the government has had in place since February, which continues to evolve in response to this disease.

● (2015)

I would like to remind the House that the quick and decisive action by the CFIA has been instrumental in ensuring that a bad situation has not been much worse. We have contained the disease to the control area first defined last February. We are taking decisive action to control the spread of the disease. We will eventually stamp it out.

Our stamping out policy includes humane destruction of all infected and exposed animals, as well as the surveillance and tracing of potentially infected and exposed animals. We have prohibited the movement of bird products, such as eggs and meat, between these premises.

There are some very specific situations where the CFIA permits may allow limited movement, but generally bird owners cannot directly sell or donate restricted items to consumers or retailers. This applies to the farm gate sales of eggs, which is a common practice in this area. Buyers and sellers should be aware that fines may be issued if eggs or other restricted products are moved illegally. That is how serious this situation is.

As well, CFIA checkpoints have been established at B.C. ferry terminals, highway weigh stations and toll booths to ensure the disease does not spread beyond the control area. No birds will be allowed to leave the control area. The stamping out policy also includes the thorough decontamination of infected premises and zoning to define infected and disease free areas.

We face the very big challenge of depopulating and disposing of 19 million birds within the control area. This is a pre-emptive strike to control the spread of the disease. The slaughter of healthy flocks in proximity to known infected premises is an internationally recognized strategy to effectively eradicate highly infectious diseases that are in these animals. Our plan, which actually exceeds those of international standards, is justified by the rapid movement of this disease.

This depopulation will take some time. This effort will also require the assistance and cooperation of all partners, whether it is farmers, the industry or whoever else is involved in this production. The CFIA will work closely with these partners to move as quickly as possible in this effort.

The CFIA will also oversee the depopulation of the infected flocks. These birds will undergo a process to render the virus inactive on the premises or be trucked to an incineration site or to be rendered. Depopulation is taking place as we speak here this evening.

We are depopulating the control area and we are starting with the premises where infection is present or suspected. Right now the slaughter of all infected birds has been completed. Any new cases of infected flocks will continue to be a priority as the depopulation proceeds. Eliminating these birds as quickly as possible will minimize the risk of the further spread of this disease. As we continue to follow this strategy step by step, we should see fewer, if any, new cases of infection.

Poultry from non-affected flocks can be processed under full inspection in registered establishments and made available for sale right across the country. Industry is responsible for the removal of the birds that have tested negative for the avian influenza, either through routine slaughter for human consumption or for rendering. Poultry products from non-infected flocks for which there is no market will be disposed of through landfill or incineration.

A lot of steps are being followed to eradicate this disease.

While our primary concern is the protection of food safety and animal health, we are also committed to implementing disease control measures that would be no more restrictive than necessary. The agency's approach continues to be directed by science. We must act by science and not by emotion. Science has demonstrated that fresh and frozen poultry meat can be moved safely under certain circumstances.

● (2020)

I want to emphasize that the CFIA will take the precautions needed to protect the environment and remove potential infected material in a way that will eradicate this disease.

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The people of British Columbia have responded to the major challenge in helping us dispose of these birds. I know there has been some tension in communities that have been asked to do their part to stem the contagious disease in Langley—Abbotsford. We appreciate the support and understanding of these communities and we thank them for the work they have done so far. We look forward to the day when things can get back to normal throughout the whole province.

Another important aspect of preventing further spread of the disease lies with communicating with the public. The agency has public service announcements available to radio stations in the control area. We have printed ads also and they are being placed in daily and weekly newspapers throughout the whole control area. The agency has several technical briefings to update the media of this terrible situation in the Fraser Valley. Producers, media and the public can subscribe to an e-mail service to receive notifications and updates on this important issue.

Also, last week the agency held an avian influenza open house. The session for Fraser Valley residents was hosted by CFIA and the various municipalities in the surrounding area, and we appreciate their cooperation. Biosecurity was among the topics of discussion at the session which was well attended and well accepted by the local residents. More of these information sessions will be planned because education is very important. It is a very busy valley. A lot of people go through it, and everybody has to know the seriousness of the situation.

Finally, let me say a few words about the compensation for the affected producers because it was mentioned by the hon. members quite a bit here this evening. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency provides compensation to owners of animals ordered destroyed under the authority of the Health of Animals Act. This compensation program is part of the CFIA's effort to control or eradicate animal diseases that have threatened any Canadian livestock population.

The amount of compensation awarded to owners is determined by the assessment of the market value of the animal. It takes into consideration things such as the genetic background, the age and the production records and puts all these things in context. Therefore, the range of compensation could vary quite a bit.

I would like to talk about the issue of the broader producer compensation for a moment. At this time we do not know what the full impact of this avian flu will be, but we know it will be major. That is why our government is working with the province and with the industry to assess the full impact of this avian influenza. That there is concern about the potential financial losses for producers is very understandable. Once the investigation is complete we will be in a better position to determine what steps are necessary.

The members of the House should also be aware that under the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program, producers of supply managed commodities are protected if their production margin drops by more than 30%.

The day will come, and we hope it will come very soon, when this challenge will be behind us and the control area restrictions will be removed.

After an affected flock has been depopulated, the infected farm has to be cleaned out, disinfected and left free from birds. After 21

days, the incubation stage, a sentinel flock will be placed to determine if any infectious disease remains. Once it is cleaned out and put in a dormant stage for 21 days, they will place more birds to see if the influenza is still active. That gives a good signal if the farmer has cleaned it up well enough. We will maintain strict surveillance on this restocked flock to see whether the virus is still present.

● (2025)

After the last infected farm has gone through this whole process and has been found to be free of disease, we will lift control restrictions. Even after the agency has lifted the restrictions, it may take longer to bring trading relations back to normal, because it takes a long while to get back into business.

The OIE, an international standard setting body for animal diseases, allows up to a six month disease free period for trading partners to consider Canada free of avian influenza and to open borders to our poultry. We are fortunate that most of our poultry products are consumed domestically, so we should be able to get back into business a lot sooner.

Opening the borders to poultry and poultry products from the Fraser Valley will be a challenge. However, we are confident that our proposed action plan to depopulate and stamp out this disease will maintain the confidence of consumers, both domestic and international.

The chicken industry of Canada is showing a remarkable determination to work together to supply the B.C. market. British Columbians eat a lot of chickens and eggs. First and foremost we see farmers helping farmers, supplying the product from the rest of Canada to the B.C. processing industry for further processing and distribution.

If after this has been fully utilized and there is still a market shortage in British Columbia, then and only then will we consider how to supplement imports so we can fill the gap. We are going to try to get all sources from Canada through different agencies like the Chicken Marketing Agency and CEMA to make sure we have enough products going into British Columbia. If we are still short, we might have to bring them in from other sources. One may be the United States.

The focus has been to support the B.C. industry in maintaining its long term viability and customers as we work to restore the flocks. Special supplementary imports would be allowed when alternate domestic supplies are not available during this recovery period, because we do not want the people in British Columbia going without poultry products.

All members of affected areas—the farmers, the processors and others—in British Columbia and nationally are working hard to meet the challenge facing B.C.'s poultry industry. The government will continue to work closely with all stakeholders to ensure that the B.C. poultry and egg industry gets the support it needs.

I had the opportunity last week to go to British Columbia. I talked to many people affected by this outbreak. There is a big concern out there, but I can reassure people from British Columbia who are in this industry that we are going to work diligently with them to get them through this situation and get them back on their feet.

This will take a lot of effort and it will require time, but we will get through this crisis and we will emerge with a poultry industry restored to its former strength. We will learn a lot from this and have a food health and safety system that is stronger than ever for having withstood the test.

I join with my colleague from Langley—Abbotsford in offering hope and encouragement to his constituents for better times ahead. I thank him for bringing this up for debate tonight.

• (2030)

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here we are again having another emergency debate so it must be about agriculture, another crisis in agriculture in Canada. It is just crisis after crisis. I guess that in the long term a crisis is an opportunity if we come out of it stronger than when we went in, but what have we learned from past crises in agriculture in this country? What have we gained? Have we come out stronger?

I should mention at this time that I will be splitting my time with the member for Fraser Valley.

The member opposite who just finished talking said the whole premise is to come out of this as good or better than we were before. That is a wonderful sentiment and I do not think anybody would ever argue with that, but how do we get there?

The debate tonight is not even about compensation. It is about the timeliness of that compensation. We are two months into this, two months almost to the day.

The member opposite was talking about how we eradicate this, the 21 days of cleanup, the 30 days of a sentinel flock and so on. That is after the last barn is cleaned out. But we already have guys who have been in this crisis for two months. That is one complete cycle in a broiler operation. That broiler operation has been taken out of business for one full cycle already and there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

So when the government talks about how compensation is going to come some day, what about interim payments? Let us keep these guys alive. They have to get up tomorrow. Not only that, these guys are carrying on with expenses. Getting rid of the flock is the easy part. They are gassed, put on a truck and hauled away. That is the easy part.

Then that barn has to be cleaned out. Something has to be done with that manure. It has to be composted to a certain temperature to kill the virus and the cost of that is left with the farmer. All of these interim steps have to be taken for which there will be no compensation. Let us get that on the record right now. Those guys over there can promise that and hang it out there, but they have never given compensation back into other industries. They have never done that.

My area had the chronic wasting disease with elk. Three years later there is no more outbreak, the area is absolutely clean, and yet I

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have guys in my area who still have their corrals, their yards and their land quarantined. They are still being held off from putting animals back on their property, their own property.

They skinned off topsoil, a foot of it, mixed it with lime, rolled it and did all the things that the CFIA said, but they are still not able to put animals back into their facilities, not even if they want cattle or buffalo or something else that is not even conducive to CWD. They are not even allowed to do that. They cannot put animals back into their pasture areas to graze it off. Some of those areas are rocky and cannot be cut for hay, which farmers are allowed to do, but that is not feasible.

There is so much more to this compensation than meets the eye. We have to talk about the cashflow of the business. This is big business. This is a billion dollar industry in British Columbia alone. We have to talk about cashflow for these guys. We have to talk about interim programs that will keep them alive so they are able to restock their barns in six months or eight months or whatever. That is not being addressed at all by the government.

The minister and the parliamentary secretary both stood up and gave us some placating signals about how they are looking after this. Farmers already know all of that. They have been to the briefing sessions.

One thing we learned out of the CWD crisis and of course the BSE crisis, which we are still mired in, is that there is a lack of communication, a lack of good, solid, grounded evidence and solutions and so on that can be talked about. It is all pie in the sky. The government says it will compensate at market value and will figure x equals y but minus a and so on.

That is just fundamental stuff. The problem is, what do we do in the meantime? What keeps these farmers moving and growing and going in the Fraser Valley? God forbid the avian flu leaps out of there and goes somewhere else. There is an excellent chance of that happening.

The message has to get out to consumers across Canada. They are smart folks. They know value when they see it. Canadians' food supply is the safest, the most secure and the cheapest in the world, bar none. That whole safe, secure package is borne at the farm gate; it does not matter what commodity one buys. It is borne at the farm gate because that is who pays the bills to make sure we have a safe, secure food supply.

Nine days into the year consumers have paid Canadian producers for their product, only nine days, so it is just unconscionable that when there is a crisis like this the producer himself has to pick up the slack. We have to get past that whole concept. When the Prime Minister was in Montreal he was asked about this by Quebec producers concerned about what could happen. The Prime Minister actually said, and I quote, "it's a problem hidden behind the Rockies". That is an insult to agriculture as a whole, let alone the chicken producers and poultry guys in British Columbia.

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• (2035)

It is unconscionable for the Prime Minister to say that it is a little problem hidden behind the Rockies. It is a huge problem in Canada whether it is on that side of the Rockies or this side. It does not matter: we are a Confederation. We all look out for each other and we do that whether it is fires, floods, snowstorms or whatever. That is what we do, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to our safe, secure food supply, we had better ramp it up. We had better be there. I do not see that signal coming from the government. We are not proactive in any of these situations. Again I go back to the elk farmers and the BSE, and now there is the avian flu. Pork of course is on the radar screen and has had and will continue to have problems.

We have a whole agricultural sector in peril in the country. It comes from 10 years of saying, "Well, the producer can carry that". It comes from a lack of funding and lack of fundamental thought process: if we do not have a robust farm gate, we do not need all of the other stuff. We do not need the food safety programs and all the process, because there is nothing to process.

If we let the farm gate go, if we do not backstop it every step of the way, we might as well kiss it all goodbye and start importing our product from wherever. Then we will have no control over the safety and security, absolutely none, and there are all the processors and all the jobs that go with it. The third largest contributor to the GDP in the country is that little thing we call agriculture and it gets half of one per cent of government spending.

The member opposite talked about the CAIS program. If the supply managed sector sees a 30% drop in its reference margins, it will be there for them. The problem with the CAIS program is that there is a little fly in the ointment called the negative margin, which is not covered. When we have no production for the amount of time that we are talking about, we are into negative margins, not 30%. We are talking 100%. That is not covered.

Those little glitches in this APF they have been playing around with for over a year now have to be fixed. They have to be addressed and the government does not seem to have the gumption to do that. I think we have a huge wake-up call in crisis after crisis in every aspect of agriculture in the country. It is a call for this government on the other side to wake up and smell the roses.

We are losing everything here very quickly. We are down to having 2% of the population left on the land to produce product. The 100% of us who are the consumers owe it all to the 2% who do the job and still contribute 3% to the GDP. Those guys are working 24/7. The whole family is involved in most cases. A lot of them have to go off farm to support the farming habit because of tax laws and everything else.

The fellows involved in the avian crisis will be very much like those involved in the BSE and elk and so on if they do trigger a cash payout, which is never enough: it will all be taxed. There is no deferral mechanism in place that will stage it out long enough so that they can come back and be stronger than they were before.

We need a three year or five year deferral on this. We have written these letters to the finance minister, to the agriculture minister and so

on, on behalf of my constituent, Mel McRae, who had the search out herd for BSE—they think. He said he did not. He had pedigreed cattle. We talk about market value, but they just took him as a beef herd.

They did not give him any extra money for his 43 years of genetic work, none. Plus he had to clean up his corrals and bring his neighbours in to help move the cattle and so on. There was no compensation for that. There is no compensation for the heart sickness one endures after that. Then he got a "dunner" from Revenue Canada saying, "Oh, by the way, you are going to get taxed on this money". That is before he has a chance to get back on his feet.

Those are the types of things that the producers in B.C. had better come to grips with and had better be prepared for. As for all the placating from the members and the minister over there about how they are there for them, let me say grab your butts, guys, it is going to be a long tough ride.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this unfortunate outbreak of avian flu that sparked tonight's emergency debate started in my riding. The Minister of Agriculture got hold of me shortly after it was discovered on the first farm in Matsqui Prairie. He warned me that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency had determined that there was at least one farm infected with some sort of avian flu, and at that time it was not clear whether it was high or low pathogenic strain, and that they were treating it as a potential crisis.

I thanked him for getting hold of me. I agreed with him that every precaution possible should be taken immediately. I did pass along to him a warning at that time. There is a heavy concentration of poultry farms in the valley. The valley is a narrow geographic area. There is not a lot of room for error. We are smack dab in the middle of a major flyway for wild ducks and geese. The combination of all of that could make for a very potent and very terrible problem for the industry.

Of course, as it turns out, the problem has necessitated the complete depopulation, or that is the plan, of the chicken, turkey, and feather industry in the valley. The industry players are asking the minister to address many issues, hopefully tonight during the course of this debate.

Just to be clear, there are 31 farms identified so far. There are 19 million birds affected. One million of them are infected with the flu and the rest will be depopulated in the regular course as they mature.

I want to thank people like Ken Falk, Fred Krohn, Marie and Mark Tupper, Ray Nichol, Rick Thiessen and others from organizations and from larger farms in my area who have helped me with this. They are very concerned this evening about what is going to happen in their industries in the weeks to come.

These are questions that we need answered. First of all, tell us when and how the compensation will happen.

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I wrote a letter to the Minister of Agriculture last Friday spelling out many of the concerns of local producers. I urged the minister not to use an existing agricultural program to administer compensation if that program was not designed for the supply managed business and was not designed to address a crisis like this. The talk about using the GRIP or CAIS programs and so on has the local producers and farmers scared to death.

I also warned him that in some of those programs the trigger for the compensation is a drop in revenue of 30%. Yet, depending on their fiscal year end, some of our farmers may end up with a 50% drop in their income in a calendar year, cleaned right out for the next six months perhaps. What if it is split over two fiscal years? Then they will not make the 30% qualifying number and they will get nothing. That obviously is not acceptable.

Compensation needs to come quickly. If any of that compensation is held up, as has happened with the BSE for example, it will destroy the industry. It cannot afford that kind of lengthy delay.

While the CFIA has a formula to pay for the destroyed birds, it does not address the other issues like lost income and interruption to business costs.

I spoke with one farmer the other day who has a mortgage payment of \$15,000 a month. That does not include any of his personal costs for him and his family. He also admits that it is not a big farm. Many farmers have mortgage costs of \$20,000, \$25,000 and \$30,000 a month just to keep the banks from repossessing.

There needs to be some compensation for loss of income. Simply paying for the poultry, as important as that is, will not keep these farms viable.

I also urged Farm Credit Corporation and the banks to get into this now. They need to do their part to allow these farms to remain viable, to put off the interest owed on these loans, and so on. It is in no one's interest that these farms go under.

Tonight we heard from the minister that it is yet to be determined what kind of compensation they will be getting. There will be future compensation, sometime; they are looking at it. But any specific talk about deferred taxation, ways to look after the farmers going into this difficult summer ahead, there is just no talk of that. We need to get specifics and we need to get them soon.

It is critical that the government understand that this industry is so integrated, so finely tuned and interdependent that it is a just in time industry. Every component of the industry must be in place for any of this industry to work. That is why, for example, the sawdust delivering companies are as an integral part as are the chicken catchers, who sent me letters concerned about all the people they laid off. The United Food and Commercial Workers Union already have 400 people laid off. They expect thousands to be laid off in this industry.

● (2040)

The feed mills have contacted me. Many in my riding have told me they are closing the poultry divisions, laying off all their employees. It is the same for the truckers and so on. These people need to be around. The entire industry needs to be there when we come back on stream. If a part of it is missing, the industry cannot

survive. It is a just in time industry. All parts of it have to be there when the flu has been treated and the industry comes back on stream.

That is why related industries are asking the government to consider waiving the two week waiting period for EI for example, not because people deserve something for nothing, but because people are being asked to sacrifice their jobs for the good of the industry and the country. If we ask them to sacrifice their jobs and give up their employment, even though they themselves have done nothing wrong, then it is only right that we address those particular concerns.

Finally, for the poultry industry which has some of the most sophisticated and prudent agriculture producers in the world, we need to work together to ensure this does not happen again. The industry folks are ready to do their part. Without pointing any fingers or demanding anything outrageous, we all want to get to the bottom of where this flu came from and how it spread so quickly. Then we need to develop protocols to prevent it from happening again. The farmers are ready to do that. They are ready to work with CFIA to do that. That certainly has to be in place as the industry gets back on its feet.

There are other people affected by this depopulation order. The specialty bird market could be especially hard hit since it is not covered under a supply managed system. Its birds are genetically unique and very expensive. While they are not sick birds, these birds are perfectly healthy and suffer no symptoms of any disease, they could be carriers. Therefore they are being sacrificed in this depopulation order.

In other words, an industry that has no sickness, no problem, no danger to human health, no danger to its own population may be ordered to be completely depopulated in order to protect an adjoining industry. The producers in that industry say if that is going to happen, there are some specific things they need for protection. They are very concerned and who can blame them?

On the duck and goose farms in my riding some of the birds in those areas have been under genetic development for up to 60 years. Some of them have a veterinarian living on site to look after the breeding programs and look after the health of the birds. They are as careful as they can be and now those birds may all be gone, after generations of developing a specific specialty bird that supplies fresh meat throughout the lower mainland in Canada.

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Once lost, those birds, the quail, chickens, pigeons and commercial ducks which are superior in growth, uniformity and egg production to anything else and are not available anywhere else, will be lost probably forever. They cannot be replaced. They are not like a pullet. It is not like the chicken industry that can order up replacement chickens once this terrible thing is behind us. The chicken industry can phone up suppliers and that chicken is genetically the same from anywhere in North America. Those ducks, geese, quail and pigeons are not. They are a specialty and to depopulate them, to kill them all means they are irreplaceable.

If there is no way to preserve or isolate and protect these specialty birds, what happens to the people in the industry? These specialty breeders point out that the compensation suggested by CFIA will be totally inadequate. It will be \$30 per duck. That is the same price as one could get for a chicken. However the chicken growers who are going through a crisis do not go through the same genetic development process that is necessary to produce the ducks. Those producers have to do that on their own. The chickens are developed. They are a genetically identical bird. They are ordered up by the millions, but these other birds are a specialty.

When we talk to a pigeon grower for example, pigeon or squab, it is a unique thing. Those pigeons mate for life. In other words, when growers start breeding pigeons for sale later, they have to mate them up. They mate for life and it is an ongoing process. It is not a matter of cleaning out the barns and hoping for the best. They are there all the time. It is an ongoing breeding program.

Simply put, if they are completely eradicated, the species for all intents and purposes, at least at the commercial level, will be gone forever.

I have appreciated the minister's willingness to talk with me and keep me in the loop, but we need in a hurry from the minister some specifics on the compensation. There are people like April Hanes who wrote to me about her backyard chickens. Other people raise them for 4-H clubs. They are like pets. Those people need to be informed and kept in the loop.

● (2045)

Right now there is just too much misinformation or rumours, or we just cannot get what we need in a timely fashion. Let us keep people in the loop and informed. Let us keep the locals, especially the young girls and boys who are raising chickens basically for pets, in the loop as well. Let us get adequate compensation, not just for the birds that are going to be depopulated, but for the businesses that we need to keep this billion dollar industry viable in the Fraser Valley. Let us do it soon.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Georges Farrah (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food (Rural Development), Lib.): Mr. Chair, it is a pleasure to speak tonight in response to the motion by my colleague from British Columbia on the outbreak of avian influenza.

This outbreak has devastating consequences on the poultry industry in British Columbia and the many people whose livelihood depends on this industry. So it is vital to halt the spread of this disease, eradicate it and get the industry back on track.

One of the primary ways to help this industry is to encourage the resumption of trade in Canadian poultry and poultry products. In 2003, Canadian poultry and poultry product exports represented approximately \$275 million. British Columbia contributed approximately 10% of these exports.

To date, 45 trading partners have taken measures in response to the avian influenza outbreak. Twenty eight of these, including Japan and South Africa, have imposed trade restrictions on all of Canada. Seventeen others, including the United States, have imposed restrictions solely on live poultry and poultry products from British Columbia.

The Government of Canada has taken measures to normalize trade relations. The Canada Food Inspection Agency, the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, and Canadian embassies abroad are working in collaboration. Canada is keeping its trading partners fully informed of new developments through direct contact from Ottawa and in Canadian missions abroad.

First, the head veterinarian at the Canada Food Inspection Agency, Dr. Evans, sent a letter to key foreign counterparts confirming the presence of highly pathogenic avian influenza in British Columbia. He indicated to them, among other things, that a surveillance zone had been set up in the Fraser Valley, British Columbia.

This measure is consistent with internationally approved animal disease standards. Given the establishment of a surveillance zone and the implementation of strict control measures, we are able to ask that any measures taken by our trading partners be on a regional basis.

The government took even more energetic measures when the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food announced the depopulation of all commercial poultry flocks and other barnyard birds in the control area in an effort to eradicate avian influenza. This decision is based on the recommendation of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in consultation with the Province of British Columbia and the poultry industry and it was not easy to make.

We understand that destroying 19 million birds will have enormous repercussions on the poultry industry. We also realize that the situation will be very difficult for many people, particularly those who keep barnyard flocks as pets.

As we have seen, this highly contagious virus spreads rapidly. We must therefore take aggressive steps to eliminate it.

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I know that some people fear that avian influenza may present risks for human health. As has been said in the House, I would like to point out that it is not the same virus as the one which is now spreading and causing serious human health problems in Asia. Nevertheless, Health Canada and its federal and provincial partners are taking the avian influenza in British Columbia very seriously and are implementing firm and coordinated public health measures.

I would also like to mention that there is no public health danger associated with consuming cooked eggs or poultry meat because of those cases. In addition, Health Canada points out that poultry and egg products from the regions where avian influenza has been detected present no danger to human health.

While the risk for the general public is low, it is very important that people who are in close contact with infected poultry follow protective measures such as wearing protective clothing and glasses, and frequent hand-washing. So far, there is nothing to suggest that the virus can be transmitted to humans.

Foreign authorities have been advised that the avian influenza in Canada poses no risk to public health. We shall continue to keep the foreign authorities informed of developments in the situation and we will supply them with additional information as needed.

● (2050)

I want to acknowledge the importance of the open communication we have with our trading partners. Openness, transparency and trust are vital in our exchanges. Canada is known internationally for the quality of its health and food safety systems and for its openness to its trading partners. We earned this reputation over time, even in the most difficult periods.

Our system has a scientific foundation. Our willingness to share our scientific evidence with our trading partners reassures them that we will not hide anything likely to present a risk to their health and food safety systems. They trust our system and in the long term, this translates into a trust in our Canadian products.

The openness and transparency of our initiative have had some positive results. In March, for instance, the European Union was one of the trading partners that decided to set restrictions on importing poultry and poultry products from across Canada. Now, thanks in large part to the information provided by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, these import restrictions apply only to products from the area under surveillance in British Columbia. In fact, Canada once again has access to the European Union market and to Mexico, for some products.

This is good news for the industry in other regions in Canada and I am certain that Europeans will trust the information we release when the time comes to lift the restrictions on the area under surveillance.

Furthermore, I want to remind the House that Canada imposed its own restrictions on live poultry imports and poultry products from regions where this disease exists. We imposed restrictions on Texas as a precautionary measure following the confirmation of high pathogenic avian influenza in that state in February. On April 6, we lifted the restrictions when the United States Department of Agriculture, the USDA, announced that the outbreak in Texas had been completely eradicated. Canadian animal health officials reviewed the information provided by the USDA and acknowledged

that the measures taken by the United States to fight the disease had been effective and that this country was free from high pathogenic avian influenza.

I bring this situation to the attention of the House, because I feel that it is important to reassure Canadians, particularly the representatives of the industry in the Fraser Valley, and tell them that this crisis will pass. We will stop the disease from spreading; we will eradicate it. Our trade relations will resume, as they did for the United States following the outbreak in Texas.

How can we be certain that we can eradicate the disease? When will our partners know that it is again safe to import poultry and poultry products from the Fraser Valley? Certain standards were established in this regard by the international agency responsible for animal health, the World Organization for Animal Health or OIE. In countries such as Canada, where a program has been implemented to eradicate the disease, the OIE standards state that a country can be considered free of highly pathogenic avian influenza six months after the slaughter of the last animal infected.

However, the disease eradication program must be extremely rigorous to meet OIE standards. This includes the humane depopulation of all animals infected with or exposed to the disease; the surveillance and tracking of potentially infected or exposed animals; the strict quarantine and control of the transport of animals; the rigorous decontamination of infected areas; the establishment of infected regions and disease-free zones. These standards and criteria are extremely rigorous.

Everyone within the control zone can do their share to help prevent the disease from spreading. We depend on the collaboration of poultry producers and residents of the Fraser Valley to apply the appropriate bio-safety measures and help stop the disease from spreading. The movement of people and goods likely facilitates the spread of avian influenza. That is why the Canada Food Inspection Agency is distributing public notices and holding information sessions on measures that residents can adopt to help eradicate the disease.

● (2055)

Producers in the control zone are legally required to affix a notice at the entrance of their property prohibiting unauthorized entry to their farm. These notices are supplied by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Before allowing anyone to enter their farm area, producers need to ensure that appropriate bio-safety measures are in place. These include thorough cleaning and disinfection of all equipment and articles of clothing that might have been in contact with an affected operation.

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I should emphasize that it is illegal to enter an operation without authorization. This is a serious disease and we are taking stringent measures to eradicate it.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has imposed strict movement restrictions in order to prevent avian influenza from spreading beyond the control zone. Inspectors check for the presence of birds or poultry products on board vehicles at ferry terminals, highway weigh stations and toll stations. People travelling in these areas must pay careful attention to these restrictions. Birds, including pet birds, and other affected products may enter the zone but may not exit.

These are stringent measures, but they are necessary if we are to eradicate this disease from Canada and resume trade relations.

In the meantime, while we are taking the necessary precautions to get the poultry and poultry product export market back to normal, we want to ensure that the Fraser Valley poultry producers are going to be looked after.

The control zone contains five federally registered poultry processing plants, handling most of the chicken processing capacity of British Columbia as well as the only turkey processing facility and the only egg processing facility. The restricted circulation of products outside that zone has resulted in a glut in the region and storage facilities have reached capacity.

On April 10, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency reacted to this by announcing that it would allow fresh and frozen poultry products under federal permit in the control zone to be shipped to other regions of Canada under prescribed conditions. This will make it possible to move the excess production from that zone. As far as we know, no trading partner will be making changes to its import policies as a result of this decision to allow product outside the control zone.

The government is also helping individual producers. The Canadian agricultural income stabilization program is now in place and the government is committed to explaining to producers exactly how they can access this program. Producers of supply-managed products are protected under this program if their production margin goes down by 30% or more. In addition, all farmers whose poultry are subject to a destruction notice from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency will be compensated through the Health of Animals Act.

The spread of avian influenza in the Fraser Valley has had serious consequences for the poultry industry, whose exports are valued at some \$275 million. We are taking the measures that must be taken in order to halt and eradicate this disease and ensure the return of commercial activities. Canada's food health and safety system is internationally recognized and this reputation is now being seriously put to the test. I am confident nonetheless that we will get through this crisis. Our trade relations will be restored and our reputation will be protected thanks to the professionalism and rigour with which we are meeting this challenge.

• (2100)

[English]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this emergency debate tonight regarding the avian influenza outbreak.

While the avian flu is strongly connected to British Columbia's Fraser Valley, the issue is one of national importance. We need only to look to the far reaching economic devastation and personal losses suffered as a result of the BSE crisis to see that. After nearly a year of inaction, the Liberal government has still not been able to succeed in having the American border reopened to our cattle industry, nor has it seen fit to ensure timely compensation to affected cattle producers.

Now we have heard an order to cull commercial poultry flocks but the agriculture minister has not been able to let British Columbia producers know when they can expect compensation. It is easy to speak about agriculture or the agriculture industry. Whether we call it an industry, a sector or a business, the truth is that we are dealing with real people trying not to lose their livelihoods because of situations far beyond their control.

As a member of Parliament who lives in an area that has been ravaged by the BSE crisis, I ask the members opposite to develop a workable avian flu compensation program before this situation becomes as bad as the one faced by the cattle industry. The potential for economic disaster within the poultry industry has already begun.

While economic disaster looms for the people within this industry, our Prime Minister has different messages depending on where in the country he is speaking. In British Columbia he says that it is a priority, yet in Quebec he tells his audience that the problem is on the other side of the Rockies. This is indicative of how the Liberal government defines crisis in Canada: by region.

Whether it is SARS, BSE or the avian flu, these crises affect the entire nation and our Prime Minister and his government have to begin governing, recognizing that this is one country regardless of how diverse the regions.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has ordered approximately 19 million birds from commercial poultry flocks destroyed in an effort to contain and eradicate the avian flu disease, a contagious viral infection caused by the influenza virus type A. What will the economic impact of this cull be, not merely in the destruction of the poultry but in the cleanup and sterilization process necessary to ensure a similar outbreak does not reoccur? Despite the absence of definitive numbers, we know the cost will be catastrophic to poultry producers.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands.

This disease is not a newcomer to North America. According to the inspection agency information, cases of low pathogenic avian influenza in turkeys were often reported in the autumn during the 1960s. Three other Canadian cases were discovered between 1975 and 2000 and avian flu has also been reported repeatedly in the United States.

What is particularly disturbing is that unlike the case with BSE, there is a vaccination that could have helped to contain the disease. Unfortunately, it was not used in British Columbia and will not be used as a preventive measure in the control area in the Fraser Valley. An April 13 document from CFIA stated:

Vaccination has not been an option for a number of reasons. Preventive vaccination is not economically feasible in this situation given the large number of birds affected. Should the birds be vaccinated, the presence of antibodies from vaccination could not be distinguished from antibodies from natural infection. And, given that the effectiveness of vaccination could take up to two to three weeks, the virus could persist and spread during this timeframe.

A proactive position could have protected birds before the outbreak became a problem. Now we are faced with reactive measures.

Again, if I may draw a parallel to the BSE situation in that case, Health Canada officials had previously warned that proposed measures to curb the disease were inadequate and that Canada was not prepared for a potential outbreak. Those warnings were ignored and I have to wonder if some earlier preventive measures could have made a difference there.

• (2105)

As Fraser Valley Duck & Goose Ltd. managing partner, Ken Falk, wrote about vaccination in a letter to the members for Langley—Abbotsford and Fraser Valley:

I understand that there are considerations with our international trading partners that don't allow us to use it.

If that is the case, then allow those that rely on the domestic market only to vaccinate, and those that rely on the international market can sort out the issue for their products, politically or otherwise.

Poultry producers, such as Mr. Falk, have an intimate understanding of the industry and how best to get it back on track.

I would hope the minister and his staff would be looking to producers for guidance in coming up with the best possible solution to this difficult situation.

As the people most affected by this crisis, the producers will be able to provide valuable input. Yet, when I look to the CFIA and its description of our emergency response strategy, I am not convinced that this is the case. I will quote:

Canada's emergency response strategy in the event of the outbreak of a foreign animal disease is to eradicate the disease and re-establish the country's disease free status as quickly as possible.

That is an admirable first step in addressing a situation such as the avian flu but the vagueness of the strategy ignores important issues, such as compensation for producers and assistance for workers affected by the cull. What can they expect to ease the financial strain?

There is a vagueness of this strategy in this important issue. They have no idea how to prevent similar outbreaks in the future. What measures are in place? How will the preservation of specialty breeds be ensured? How will we regain market losses and the erosion of our competitive edge?

The time and effort it will take to rebuild the industry; how will the government facilitate the process?

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The Liberals do not have a stellar record when it comes to agricultural programs and delivering money to those in need when they need it.

I urge the members opposite to ensure that this will not be the case for the people in British Columbia and to deliver immediate attention to this crisis situation.

• (2110)

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, agriculture is extremely important to me as I come from an agricultural area and I farmed for 25 years.

The frustration I have is similar to that of the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster who mentioned earlier that here we are again late at night with one more emergency debate and what is it on? Once again, it is on agriculture.

Therefore I want to talk a bit about some of things he started discussing tonight, and that is some of the compensation plans and how they have worked and what the producers can expect over the next while in terms of compensation from the government.

One of the things that concerned me a lot was the Prime Minister's attitude when he was in eastern Canada where he basically said that what we had was a small problem behind the Rockies, when those of us who understand what is going on with the avian flu realize that this is a huge problem for our entire country, and we need to recognize that.

One concern is the compensation plan and what producers will get in return for giving up their livelihood for a number of months, possibly up to a year. I want to talk a little about the history of some of the other plans over the last few years. I do not think this will comfort producers but perhaps it will galvanize the chicken producers and the other producers who are affected by this problem so that they will be well aware of what they need to do to protect their own interests.

One of the programs with which I was familiar was the AIDA program, which later became CFIP. It was meant to stabilize income for farmers. Unfortunately, it did not work and the government finally acknowledged that it was a failure over the years, but it had been disastrous in many ways for a lot of farmers. It was supposed to help stabilize income when their income dropped. What we had was a situation in many places where people's income would drop, the program would kick in and later the government bureaucrats would go over the figures one more time. Farmers had already been paid their money and the government would tell them they had to pay back a big portion of the money it had given them. I had people in my riding telling me they had received in the neighbourhood of \$15,000, \$20,000, \$25,000 and that the government was demanding the money back from them. That was enough to finish off some people. I have had people call and cry over the phone, not knowing where they would get that money and how to deal with the situation.

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That was one program that was poorly set up. One of the reasons it was set up was because of the formulas that were used to determine compensation. Therefore I would urge the producers who are affected by the avian flu to be very careful when they are dealing with the government and they are starting to look at the programs that are being set up for them and make sure they understand the formulas that are being used in that determination.

The end of CFIP turned out to be quite a disaster. The government had budgeted about \$2.2 billion toward the program. When the final numbers came out it had only put \$1.1 billion into that program. It had some money left over and rather than pay it out in CFIP money it decided to reannounce that money and run it out in what it called transition payments. In one sense the government stripped the program, reannounced the money and then tried to get the positive spin out of putting money out into the community. Unfortunately, the final money, even in that transition payment, has now been paid out.

I just had a constituent call me in the last couple of days who said that he understood the beginning payment for last year was to be paid out in December, that the other payments should have been in March and that the government said it would be in March. The farmers have not received their money and they are wondering what happened to it. The more we look into it the more we realize that some of that money has disappeared as well and will never be paid out to producers. There is a second program that producers need to be aware of that has not worked well for producers.

A further example would be the three beef programs over the last year to try to deal with the BSE problem. Early on the government knew that it needed to try to put some money into the industry so it came out with a program. When it came out with the first program, the prices had stabilized somewhat and people were starting to find a market. The market had found its equilibrium. The government was two to three months too late with the money when it brought it out. What it caused was a drop in market prices. Basically, the entire amount that the government had sent out into the ag community was eaten up in a drop in prices. I would suggest that the packers and processors ended up with the majority of that money.

Therefore the producers who are involved with this avian flu situation need to be very careful that when programs are designed that the money comes to them and that it does not end up being passed on to people further up, what I would call the food chain, to the processors and the people who are doing the handling of the meat products and those kinds of things.

● (2115)

The second part of the beef program over the last year, the cull cow program, which was how the government paid ranchers to keep animals over the winter, worked reasonably well to some extent except that I have been getting calls from folks in Saskatchewan who say that they still have not been paid five months after the program was announced.

A fairly typical pattern that seems to be taking place is that programs are announced, reannounced and money is reallocated but then it is not paid out. We have producers, five months down the road waiting for money to help see them through the winter, who have still not received it. Winter has come and gone and they are sitting without the money they thought was promised to them.

Third, this spring, when the Prime Minister was in Lethbridge for a photo op with the local candidate, as he has done so often over the last few weeks, he made an announcement of an amount that he would be putting into the industry. It was interesting because I was talking with some friends at home before that happened and I told them to just watch what happens with the market price of beef after that announcement is made. The first week the price went down about 5¢ at the marketplace and the next week it dropped an additional 13¢. On an 800 pound cow that 10¢ would have taken all the money out of that program and the ranchers would have been no further ahead.

That program benefited the people who could keep the animals and collect their cash and not have to sell them. However for those ranchers who were squeezed and had to get those cattle onto the market right away, they again lost the government money and ended up having to go somewhere else. In that case it would have gone further down the line again to the people who were buying the cattle and to the processors. Producers need to be very aware of some of the traps and pitfalls in these programs.

A final program I want to mention tonight is the new CAIS program. The government has been selling that now for quite a while. It has been building it out of the APF and it has been presenting it as if it has something that is very good. It has advertised it very well but it is already causing huge problems for some of the producers.

It is interesting that the government was trying to make an interim payment for last year to help out some of the guys who were in real trouble, so it came out with schedules and people were able to fill out their forms and send them in. I have had a couple of people call and say that they actually received their money but that when they came to fill out the actual declaration that they needed to make, they found that the government had changed the price schedules on them.

I know of some people who had received large amounts of money but three-quarters of that will probably have to be returned. Accountants have told me that this is a complete disaster. They told me that when people realize what is going on here there will be blood on the floor. The problem is that the people who are the most desperate, the ones who absolutely need the money, are the ones who have already sent those interim applications in and they are the ones who do not have the money to pay it back. Producers again need to be very careful about what they are doing.

The other compensation programs have been mentioned tonight. What probably puts more fear into me than any other failures is taking a look at the example of the wasting disease with elk and then the mad cow disease. We have heard tonight that the government is prepared to pay market value for the animals that are slaughtered. As far as I know, that has never happened before. For the cattle and the elk, a price was set on them. It certainly was not market value. The elk price was nowhere near market value. For any of the purebred cattle that were slaughtered, producers did not receive market value. It was nowhere close. It was just a set value.

Again, the producers of these birds need to be paying attention to what is going on when the program is being set because the values that are put on their birds will determine, to a large extent, what they will receive under the program. They need to pay attention because that is one area where the government has completely fallen down for producers.

I again want to make it clear that the cattle and the elk producers did not receive market value for their animals.

There will be a lot of costs associated with this problem and with this situation. The government needs to consider what it will do about things like down time. It will be months before these people will be up to speed again. Disposal costs need to be considered as well and it needs to go far beyond the animals. There are many other costs to producers and the planned restocking and rebuilding of operations needs to be done properly.

In conclusion, I want to remind producers that when they are looking at a program there are a few things they need to do. They need to be clear on what it is they want. The producers need to ensure they are all represented because in some places there are special interest groups that will try to take the money. They need to get a clear, clean method of payment and they need to set it up so that the ground level producers get the compensation.

It is very important that the government pay attention to what is going on in British Columbia and that it treats these producers properly.

• (2120)

Mr. Murray Calder (Dufferin—Peel—Wellington—Grey, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to participate in this important debate regarding avian influenza.

The past year has certainly been a challenging one for agriculture and the agri-food industry. What with BSE, drought in some areas of the country, flooding in others, trade issues and now avian flu, the industry has been burdened with many hardships.

The Government of Canada is working side by side with the provinces and the industry to help our farmers, our farm families and the entire valued chain to get through these tough times and to continue its world-class status as a producer of safe, high quality food.

I would like to point out that the Government of Canada acted quickly and decisively to deal with avian flu. Earlier this month we made the hard decision to depopulate all commercial poultry flocks and other backyard bird and smaller operations referred to in the control area in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia. This serious measure was necessary, first, to prevent the spread of the disease and second, to help us quickly eradicate it.

As drastic as this measure seems, it is in fact the safest way to get the growers to restock their operations. However, in the meantime it is our priority to keep as much of the poultry business in British Columbia, particularly in the control areas, afloat and doing business. For growers who will have to wait for the green light to restock, there are a number of measures in place to support them until they are back in business.

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We are also working to keep continued access to supply for the processing sector. The chicken industry of Canada is showing remarkable determination, working together to supply the B.C. market. This is one of the strengths of supply management.

First and foremost, we see farmers helping farmers, supplying the product from the rest of Canada to the B.C. processing industry for further processing and distribution. If after this has been fully utilized there is still a market shortage in B.C., then and only then will we consider how supplementary imports can fill that gap.

Our focus has been to support directly the B.C. industry in maintaining its long term viability and customers as we work to restore the B.C. flocks.

Within supply management we take care of our own. All members of the affected sectors, the farmers, the processors and others, both in B.C. and nationally, are working hard together to meet the challenge facing the B.C. industry.

Through Canada's supply management system, chicken producers in other provinces plan to increase their own production by 10% and supply the B.C. primary processors with those extra birds. This will maintain a minimum of processing operations and reduce the impact on employees. This initiative will ensure that B.C. processors and consumers have access to all the poultry products they need.

I would like to add at this point that the cooperative approach being taken by the federal government, the province of British Columbia, the poultry industry in that province and the industry throughout the rest of Canada is truly commendable. It is truly the Canadian way.

Recognizing the challenge our colleagues in the B.C. poultry sector are facing, the industry throughout Canada is chipping in to supply that province to keep processors processing and consumers consuming. There is an old saying: Through adversity comes strength and through strength comes perseverance, and everybody's efforts are truly commendable.

Of course this issue is not just one of business and commerce, it is a human issue affecting farmers and family farms. Under the Health of Animals Act, compensation cheques to the owners of animals ordered destroyed are being issued. Farmers are being paid market value for their stock. As of April 16, 23 compensation cheques have gone out for a total of \$2.4 million.

The elimination of the disease will require special sanitizing of barns and farms before population can restart. If depopulation eliminates the disease, as hoped, restocking could start again in late summer or early fall this year.

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• (2125)

In the meantime, these farmers and farm families who produce supply managed commodities are eligible underneath the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program. The CAIS program is available to provide assistance to these producers whose production margins drop by more than 30%.

Our federal officials are also working very closely with provincial officials and industry leaders to help producers better understand how the disaster component of CAIS could support their income during this difficult period. Information sessions on CAIS are being held for farmers on April 26 and 27 in Chilliwack and Abbotsford. In addition, a federal-provincial letter with a simplified application form has been sent to all producers to make it easier for them. A federal-provincial avian flu working group has also been struck to examine the economic impacts created by the flu outbreak.

There is also assistance to ensure that the industry understands how the employment insurance program can help affected employees. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada officials are on the ground in the affected areas to provide assistance through its work sharing and EI programs information services. Some 50 regular EI claims have been received to date, with hundreds more expected. If mass layoffs occur, HRSDC officials will offer group information sessions at either the employer's premises or a mutually agreed upon site. Mass EI claims-taking will also be available, as will the information on the work sharing program.

We recognize that all aspects of the poultry industry in British Columbia are under severe pressure. The situation is extremely complex, but great effort is being made to carefully analyze it on an ongoing basis to ensure that the right policies are in place to resolve the crisis and minimize the time needed for the industry to recover.

We are in constant contact with the province and the industry to ensure that their views and advice are taken into account in the decision-making process as this issue unfolds. I am confident that before long we will have this industry solidly on its feet.

I have been a poultry farmer for a very long time. I know the suffering that is going on right now out in B.C. and I take that very much to heart. I have been in conversation with different people from the Fraser Valley and Abbotsford area. I know what they are going through and I know what it is to have one's flock depopulated. It sounds very quick and sanitized, but it is really a heart-rending experience if anyone has ever gone through something similar to that.

I will make my commitment as a member of Parliament, as a chicken farmer and as a very strong supporter of supply management to see the Fraser Valley poultry industry up and running as quickly as possible.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the fact that at least the Speaker of the House of Commons has recognized the need for this debate, and that has certainly been well reflected. We want to take advantage of that and address some items of concern.

Always at times like this, when we are addressing moments of emergency and crisis, there is a tendency for remarks to be interpreted as partisan. I want to say at the outset that the remarks we

are making here tonight, especially those reflecting on government performance or the lack thereof, are in fact based on sad experiences.

We have talked about the need for compensation and the need for quick action, but we see some of the same patterns that we saw in other situations and other crises. At those times the government said that it was moving quickly and that it had the situation well in hand. Then we reflect back sadly on other crises such as the hep-C crisis, the cull of the elk herd, the BSE crisis, the SARS flu victims and the reaction or the lack of reaction in British Columbia, especially in the interior, related to the softwood lumber crisis.

Forgive us if we sound somewhat dubious and if our faith seems faltering when we look to the federal government, but we are seeing the same patterns being repeated. The reason we are getting into this is because we do not want to see that pattern repeated. We want to see real action. We want to see things take place that will have an effect and will make a difference.

Many people are being affected by this crisis. Large producers are being affected in a major way. We appreciate the fact that the federal government has picked some of the bigger targets, the larger producers, but we also want to address the area of some of the smaller producers.

We start to have our doubts about the focus of the federal government when it is a crisis that is taking place in western Canada. We do not want to continually bring up this area but it is real. It is a factor. When a crisis hits western Canada, people get the sense that if it cannot be seen from the top of the CN Tower, maybe it does not exist. Well it does exist.

People may say that it is unkind to make a reflection like that. When the Prime Minister was asked about the avian flu crisis, why did he say that it was something hidden on the other side of the Rockies? We do not think people in western Canada are hidden there. They are an important part of the country. We are proud of the Rockies, and that is not a factor that hides. We look with pride at what goes on in western Canada.

We do not want this being overlooked. We do not want the same pattern repeated. When questions were asked of the agriculture minister in terms of what was happening and what was going on, his reflection was almost what was the opposition waiting for. We are waiting for some responsible action.

Right from the outset again we heard words that were meant to encourage. The government said that it had everything in hand and that it was not a problem. It is acting, reacting and everything is fine. After five weeks, what do we hear? We hear the government say that if it has feathers, kill it.

Some people have been consulted, but many people who have a lot to offer in this situation have not. When it comes to the area of hard compensation on the ground for people who need it, we see loopholes.

I am reminded, Mr. Speaker, that I am sharing my time with the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Langley.

There are a number of cost factors involved in a situation like this. Obviously the cost of depopulation itself is huge. Then there is the cost that has to be factored in related to the loss of production time and down time. There are costs related to repopulating. This problem will not be solved when depopulation of the so-called infected population happens. There are costs involved with repopulating.

Sanitizing the manure is a very serious item in the production areas. This might sound like a strong topic in the House of Commons, but a lot of sanitizing is needed here. There are costs associated with shipping the manure as well.

What about the costs involved in terms of the PR that will be needed to reach out to consumers now and in the future to let them know that everything is fine, that the industry is safe, that the product is safe? There will be costs associated with that.

For further prevention, there will be costs relating to the biotechnological security measures that have to be put in place to hopefully prevent something like this from happening in the future. There are interest costs also on all the equipment and capital that sits idle.

• (2130)

We wonder if the minister has taken these things into consideration. Some legitimate questions are being asked. They need answers now so that these things can be prevented or at least mitigated in the future.

How exactly did it start? Is the government pursuing these areas? These are questions that are being asked.

Here is something that has to be tracked down. I do not know if this is true; I am not an expert in the industry and that is why I am asking the questions. We hear that some of the measures that CFIA put into place may actually be causing some of the spread of the virus. Rather than get defensive on that question, let us look at it. Maybe things are being done with goodwill and good intentions but in fact they could be having a negative effect. Let us not back off from looking at that particular question.

What about the local people who know a lot about the industry and probably know a lot more than people in other parts of the country who now profess to be the experts? Are they being consulted in this area? Is there a national strategy that will be put in place to deal with issues like this if they happen again? We hope they do not, but the probabilities are there. Rather than guessing at a lot of these things, we should be looking at the longer term and the development of a national strategy further down the road.

We should ask the questions, much as with the recent forest fire devastation that happened in a lot of the B.C. interior last summer. What mistakes were made? Questions were asked honestly and legitimately without blame. What mistakes were made and what have we learned from the mistakes for future possibilities that might happen?

What mistakes were learned through the BSE crisis? That crisis still continues regardless of the fact that there has been some alleviation on certain product now. What mistakes were made that we can learn from? Are these questions being asked?

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There is the question of the small producer. We understand that we cannot contact every single person in the industry, but what about the small producer who has some legitimate questions? Is it necessary and was it necessary to kill anything that had feathers? That is a legitimate question. They need an answer to it.

The virus seems to move around without acknowledging geographical areas. Many of the smaller operators feel that their operations are being sacrificed when actually they should have been exempt unless it could have been shown that their birds were actually affected. It is like the biological case of innocent until proven guilty. Why did a lot of that happen?

This needs to be looked at, but we have heard that some of the officials have said, off the record of course and we understand that, that they agree with what some of the local operators are saying on the ground. However they are taking their marching orders from on high, from Ottawa.

When there is a crisis and when we have an army of potential volunteers on the ground to give information about it, that is where we should go. It is that group of people that we need to be drawing our guidelines from and picking up the clues from.

There is the whole question of people with specialty birds. It can be proven that many of these specialty birds are very expensive to the particular breeders. I will not say they are immune but there can be no proof that the virus is into any of their production areas, yet they are targeted also.

Let us remember that these are people who do not have the advantage of supply management. The time it took for them to develop some of what are being called irreplaceable breeds is very significant. They have now lost the niche markets which they may not be able to regain, at least not in the near future. Others who are not affected will move into that market. We know that the avian influenza does not affect ducks and geese. They should be exempt from the kill.

These are clear questions that people are raising. We ask the government to focus on the issues. Do not leave people in the lurch, people who have gone bankrupt or are at the stage of going bankrupt. Listen to all the people who have been involved. Develop a three D approach: define what caused the virus; declare what spread it; and develop a national strategy to prepare for the future so that should this happen again, the devastation on the people in the industry will not be as massive as it is now. We ask the government to move quickly on the compensation and on the three D approach to this problem.

• (2135)

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak tonight in the emergency debate on the avian influenza that is affecting so many in our farm community in the Fraser Valley.

We heard a good number of speakers this evening, a lot of them from the Fraser Valley and elsewhere in British Columbia. This is just one more crisis that our province has had to face. We have had our economic challenges with softwood lumber, with the forest fires in the interior, with BSE on some of our more rural larger farms, and now this. It is the last thing we needed in our province.

S. O. 52

Like many others, I just want to put a human face on this. For all of these farmers, there are families involved. They are small entrepreneurs, small business people. They depend on supply management to make sure that they are competitive, that they can stay in business. They depend on government support in times of crisis.

As many of my colleagues have mentioned, some of the programs that are set up for other areas of the agricultural community do not really make sense when transposed into this latest crisis. There has to be a different approach to the influenza crisis in the poultry industry.

It is not good enough to use a program intended for the potato crops in P.E.I. or the cattle in the BSE issue. We need to look at this as an individual case and how it is going to affect Canadian chicken production. It is not just chickens. I do not want to call it an overreaction because I think it is a natural attempt by the people who have been given the responsibility to contain this to get rid of anything that has feathers on it, but that overreaction has made the challenge of compensation even more difficult.

Part of the problem is in treating this like one would treat everything else, by getting rid of all of the stock and everything else with feathers on it. This is going to have a real impact not only in the Fraser Valley and not only in British Columbia but certainly in the whole country. The production that has just been lost in British Columbia will have to be replaced by the production in other provinces. We will have to deal with somehow increasing the production in the other provinces without taking away the production in the Fraser Valley, or in British Columbia. At some point, and hopefully sooner than later, British Columbia will need to retain its position and its percentage of production in the supply management of poultry and of egg producing.

It is a matter of making sure that our farmers and our small business people who are related to the poultry industry are compensated but also that the future production level will be replaced and will be kept. A colleague across the way is making commitments and assuring me that will happen, but we have learned from past experience that sometimes it does not happen. Once something is taken away we never quite get it back. I would want to make sure that the government has made assurances that the percentage of production that is guaranteed or given to the British Columbia producers is secure, that when this crisis is over they can depend on the fact that they have not lost some of their market.

I also want to share with Canadian consumers that it is still okay to eat chicken. For heaven's sake, do not stop using the product simply because of this issue. The Canadian government and the people who are hired to protect our food supply are doing a very good job of making sure that any of the product that reaches our store shelves, restaurants and kitchens is good healthy stock. The last thing we want is Canadians to stop using the product.

● (2140)

I want to personalize this. My area is at the far west end of the Fraser Valley. My area is probably the last one where we would find large production houses in poultry. We thought that this had been isolated to the eastern part of the Fraser Valley. It was with great

surprise last week that one of the producers in my area, the Friesen family, found that it had travelled. It had travelled approximately 45 kilometres away, which enlarges the whole issue of how this is being transported.

My colleague who spoke before me raised a good point. There are a lot of questions that need to be answered. It is not good enough to react to a situation. We have to be asking ourselves how did it happen? How did this thing get out of control, when they thought they had it in a controlled hot zone? How do we make sure that what we are doing is effective?

Perhaps those questions are being asked. Maybe there are people who are dealing with it. However, that communication is not getting out to the people who need to know.

The people in the communities need to be part of the dialogue. Right now we are getting repeated stories in the newspapers highlighting the spread of the disease. There has to be better communication from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency as to what is happening and what is being done. There needs to be greater discussion on the cooperation that we hope is there between the federal government and the provincial government in dealing with this.

A good communication plan would help the communities better understand what is being done for them. The communities would better understand that the threat to the health of people is being addressed. This would ease the concern of the consumer. This would ease the concern of not only the domestic market, but also the international market, that we do have it under control, that we are looking after it. There needs to be a better communication plan, so that there is a feeling that someone is in control, that it is being dealt with and the health of our food supply is being secured.

The compensation issue certainly has to be addressed. As a small business person myself, often the bottom line is very thin. The margins of profit and loss are very fine. The producers cannot afford to wait. Producers cannot afford to be given a small pittance of money to destroy a few chickens. What about replacing the stock when their barns are clean? What about buying feed? What about paying their suppliers? What about the suppliers? What about all the people who depend on the industry now? How are they going to survive potentially for six months, maybe eight months?

There are many questions about compensation that have to be answered. The questions have to be answered quickly so that people can make plans. If small business people are to be asked to be without income for six or eight months, they have to start making plans now on how they are going to get through that period without a cash flow.

I do not know if people are getting these answers. I do not know that there is even communication in place to explain to people what is available. I do not know if the government has come up with a plan for them. I do know that the producers cannot wait for an indefinite period of time to get some of these answers, so that they can start doing their planning to see that they get through this crisis.

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I hope the government is putting its mind to this compensation issue and to a communication plan. I hope the government will make sure that all of the producers are well aware of what their options are and that they are given options. I hope the producers are able to see their way through this crisis and continue the level of production that is guaranteed to them.

In closing, I would like to see the government put in writing that there is protection of the B.C. market in the poultry industry.

● (2145)

Ms. Sophia Leung (Vancouver Kingsway, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate on the avian flu. As the member for Vancouver Kingsway in B.C., I know that this problem has deeply affected the farmers in the Fraser Valley. I have deep concerns for their suffering and loss.

We all are worried about the avian flu, which is contagious and infectious to all species of birds. However, it is important to remember it can spread to humans only in rare occasions.

We would also like to ask one very important question. What strain of bird flu is in B.C.? I understand that low and high pathogenic strains of H7N3 have been discovered in B.C. This is not the same virus that is causing the human illness in Asia. It is also different from the strain of bird flu found in the United States.

When we refer to the bird flu, its pathogenicity varies in different degrees of the surface proteins on the influenza virus by H and N type. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency, CFIA, in consultation with Health Canada and the local medical officer of health, has taken extensive precautions to protect the health of workers in B.C.

Currently, personal protective equipment, such as masks, goggles and clothing, antiviral drugs and vaccinations with the current season's flu vaccine are required for workers when they are in contact with high risk flocks.

In our communities we always wonder if it is safe to eat poultry from areas affected by the bird flu. Health Canada advises that poultry products and eggs from outbreak areas do not pose a risk to human health for bird flu. We also know that there is no public health risk associated in the eating of cooked poultry meat or eggs.

The CFIA has now detected avian flu on 31 commercial farms and 10 smaller premises. The CFIA has depopulated all of those premises to stop the spread of infection. The CFIA will also assess on a case by case basis. Efforts will be made to eliminate the highest risk birds as quickly as possible so we will see less and less cases of infection in the targeted areas. Tests will be conducted on birds from all flocks being depopulated. We can fully understand that depopulation is very difficult for all affected bird owners, especially those with small flocks and some kept as pets.

The decision to depopulate was made after consultation with agriculture minister John van Dongen of B.C. and the poultry industry, and it also was recommended by the CFIA. This action can ensure it will stop further spread of infection. It is very encouraging to see that federal and provincial government officials are in close and ongoing contact with the industry. They will continue to monitor the situation and assess its impact.

● (2150)

Under the Health of Animals Act, poultry farmers will be eligible for compensation at market value for birds destroyed. The federal government understands that the suffering and losses of B.C. farmers must be met with appropriate compensation.

I have confidence that the federal government will make the best effort to work with the affected farmers in the Fraser Valley area. We have to provide intervention to stop the infection. Meanwhile, farmers can continue to safely supply the poultry meat and eggs for public consumption.

The CFIA will continue to work closely with Health Canada, the B.C. Centre for Disease Control, the B.C. Ministry of Health Services and local health officials throughout the depopulation efforts, and work to protect the health of farmers and local inhabitants.

I want to express my concern and support for the affected poultry farmers in the Fraser Valley. I share with them their suffering and losses. In Ottawa, we will seek ways to help and support them

● (2155)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to be here tonight to take part in this debate.

Unfortunately, there have been too many similar debates over the past few years. I recall that just a few months ago we had a debate in the House about BSE and the damage that it did to our cattlemen and agricultural sector, including small communities. I recall that about a year and a bit ago we were here talking about a drought which had just devastated not only livestock producers, cattlemen, elk and bison producers, but also grain crop farmers in western Canada.

Here we are tonight, once again, all too soon, with another group of farmers having their operations just destroyed by this terrible disease. We are here tonight to take part in an emergency debate on avian influenza.

Many speakers tonight have talked about the damage that it has done to these particular producers, to the industry, and to consumers who cannot or will not be able to get the product they want. It is not just a matter of these operations being damaged or shut down for now. There will be a long term impact from this as well.

Madam Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be splitting my time. I do not know if I have to say that, but I will, just so the House is aware of that.

S. O. 52

So here we are again. None of us like this. We all are here to offer our support to the people whose livelihoods are being so damaged by this terrible disease. We are here to offer that support, and I hope that members of all parties will seriously provide what is needed to help these chicken producers through this terrible situation, to allow them to rebuild, and to carry on as best they can after they go through a rebuilding process. It is not just a matter of quickly filling the barns again and getting on with business. It is much more than that.

Our farmers have gone through difficult situations and are still going through them now. BSE is nowhere near over. People are still losing their cattle operations. They are losing their businesses and farms over that. The impacts of the droughts, particularly the drought of two years ago, are still being felt. People are still losing their farms from that. Through all of these situations, we have heard the government say that it is going to be there and that it is going to help them through this.

Tonight is certainly not the time to become partisan and start beating up on the government. It is simply not an appropriate time to do that, but it is important and it is a responsibility to judge what is likely to happen with this situation by what has happened with those past similar situations, situations which have been devastating to the farmers, and to the livestock and grain producers involved.

The unfortunate reality is that when we look at it that way, sadly, chicken farmers have to be aware that they are probably not going to get what they need from the government to help them through this situation in a way that is reasonable. Why would we think it would be different in this situation than what it has been over the past 11 years? It is only responsible that I, as a member of the official opposition, would point out that, sadly, that is the case. That is what we can expect.

We have seen the government in the past promise that it is going to compensate farmers for losses which are beyond their control, as is certainly the case with avian flu. From everything I have heard, it is not the fault of chicken farmers at all.

• (2200)

As well, the BSE situation is no fault of the cattle producers at all. In fact, it is a political situation. BSE really has nothing to do with a food safety issue or a health issue, yet it has devastated the industry.

However, now that it has happened, what kind of help will these people get from government to get them through this very difficult time? That is the real question. History has shown that they should not expect to get what the government makes it sound like they will get. I say this so that the chicken producers involved can prepare themselves for that reality. I think that is important.

For example, with the new farm program the government refers to, we have seen situations where farmers have actually received a pretty substantial amount of money from the government only to find out that they have been overpaid under the rules that are there. Some were overpaid by tens of thousands of dollars. So farmers received the money and paid some of their bills. The money is gone. Now they are getting the message that they were overpaid and overpaid substantially and the government wants the money back. Where are they going to get the money? They have used it to pay off some of their bills. The money will not be there. As a result, we have

really in many ways put these farmers into a situation that is worse than what they were facing before.

There is a history of the government promising \$500 million, delivering maybe \$200 million and never paying out the rest. This is the kind of thing we have seen over the last four or five years. Based on the government record on these issues, I caution chicken producers to be aware of this and to really hold the government to account right now. They should have really in-depth, detailed discussions with the government over what they expect.

When they get a promise from the government they should take notes carefully and really have an in-depth conversation about what the promise is and what will be delivered so that they do not find out down the road they were expecting a lot more than they would ever receive in terms of assistance from the government. Again, based on the reality of what we have seen in the past, I really encourage chicken producers to be very careful about this.

It is my hope that the government will behave quite differently on this one. It is my sincere hope that as a starting point it will compensate chicken producers for the birds they have lost. I hope it will go beyond that and help pay the costs, maybe not all the costs—I do not think anybody expects that—but I hope it helps in a substantial way to cover the costs for cleaning up after the disease, closing down the barns, doing the cleanup and starting up the operations again. These chicken producers will need help with this. I sincerely hope that this time they will receive that help from government.

Again, the details of what has happened have been talked about already. I am here tonight to just encourage chicken producers not to make decisions based on some vague government promise, when we know from what has happened over the past several years that it is quite likely what they actually receive will be very dissimilar from what was promised.

I think the worst thing that could happen is that chicken producers hear what the government has to say and from that make a judgment that leads them to believe they are going to receive a certain amount of compensation, only to find that the compensation falls far, far short and the plans they have made were based on something that never will materialize. In many ways—and I have seen this in the past—that actually makes things worse.

• (2205)

I sincerely hope that this time it will be different. I encourage the government to make it different and to ensure that it will help the chicken producers through this very difficult situation so they can carry on and continue to add to the economy as they have in such a major and substantial way, especially in B.C., through the good work they do.

S. O. 52

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be able to address this very important issue this evening. As we all know, this virus, as we are told, is probably spread by wild birds and has struck chicken and turkey operations in British Columbia's Fraser Valley. I think the Fraser Valley alone represents 84% of B.C.'s \$1 billion poultry industry. That is a huge industry. The impact on our communities in the Fraser Valley at large will be significant.

We should emphasize that this virus is not the same strain as the influenza that jumped the species barrier in Southeast Asia and infected 34 people, killing 23. There is some comfort to be taken from that particular fact.

We are told that on Monday, April 5, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency ordered a cull of the 19 million birds to determine the bird-to-bird vector of the disease. Visitors, workers and vehicles from farm sites are being disinfected as a result. Warning notices are being posted throughout the region. Farms that have been depopulated and disinfected will then have sentry birds posted in them for 21 days. Those birds will then be tested. If they are found to be clean, the farmer may begin to rebuild his operation. Poultry industry officials are in agreement with these actions.

To date, we are told, 13 commercial barns have been infected. It is suggested that there are 10 backyard flocks infected as well. We are not too sure of the definition of "backyard flocks". We are told, for example, that in Cloverdale a barn was shut down but there were some 10,000 birds in there. This farmer apparently did not have a commercial quota. He dealt with a specialty product so he was not considered a commercial operation.

The concern for the commercial operations in British Columbia cannot be overemphasized, as I mentioned just a moment ago. We are talking about a \$1 billion industry here. But there are other concerns as well, which I think are equally important, and they have to do with many of the small operators and collectors, for example, who have birds in backyard operations, some exotic species and so on.

Just as an example to show how significant this problem is, I would like to bring to members' attention the issue of Clayton Botkin. Clayton is a young man who lives in my riding on his dad's acreage. Back in 2002, he was a recipient of one of the millennium scholarships. He was a local excellence award winner. This is a young man who is a good scholar and, as members will see, he is a very enterprising young man as well.

Clayton is an avid aviculturist. He has a collection of over 200 birds, including many endangered and threatened species. Since 1999 he has been the junior director of the Fraser Valley Poultry Fanciers Association, and from 1999 to 2000 he was junior director of the Vancouver Poultry and Fancy Pigeon Association. Under his leadership, the number of active members in the Fraser Valley Poultry Fanciers Association has tripled.

I have visited this young man's facility and I have seen the birds he has. They are absolutely amazing to see. Obviously I am not an expert in these matters, but it is quite intriguing to take a look at the variety of birds that he has. He has birds from around the world there. Essentially, these birds are irreplaceable. They are expensive.

He has managed to gather this collection there, yet he is concerned because since this outbreak of avian flu nobody has contacted him. Nobody has given him any specific instructions on what he should do to protect these unusual birds he has. He attended an information night about a week ago at the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Abbotsford, but that was of his own volition. He has searched the net for any information he can find that would protect him and his flock, yet that information is not being made readily available to him.

● (2210)

I think there is a real concern here. This is tragic. In many respects, these birds are pets. They certainly are exotic species. Whether or not this flu is transferable to them no one knows, but the sad story is that Clayton has received no instruction from the government, no directions on what he can do to ensure the survival of his birds. Certainly there is no indication from the government that if his birds are to be culled he is going to receive compensation. I have heard estimates that the 200 birds he has in his backyard may be worth in the neighbourhood of \$50,000, so this is not a trifling matter.

This is a young man in his early twenties. He is a very enterprising young man and, I might add, a good scientist as well, because he is very knowledgeable in these matters. His only asset is at risk and he has received no help and no instructions at all from the government.

There is another organization in my riding that again is not a commercial operation but is an operation that is at risk. For all intents and purposes it has received no instructions from the government on what to do. I am speaking of a woman by the name of Bev Day who runs the Orphaned Wildlife Rehabilitation Society in Delta, or OWL as it is commonly known.

OWL is a non-profit organization that operates in Delta. It is a rescue organization. At any one time OWL will have any number of eagles and owls and other birds that have been injured and brought to the centre for rehabilitation and a return to health. It is an amazing operation and a great concern because it has great support not only in my community of Delta but throughout the lower mainland. Many school groups visit to be educated about the birds and the importance of maintaining a habitat for the birds. It is a remarkable operation.

Bev has a couple of birds that I think are rather interesting. There is a barn owl, two bald eagles with some disabilities, two snowy owls, and other birds that are actually permanent fixtures at the OWL rehabilitation centre, because due to their injuries they are not able to survive in the wild any longer. They are maintained at OWL and are there for the public to view and to help us learn more about our feathered friends.

The problem is that Day has contacted one veterinary official who was unable to provide her with any answers as to what she can do to protect the birds. It is a tragedy, because there are wild species, some of which are at risk in some parts of the world, such as the bald eagles, and this is the refuge for these birds. Because of this outbreak there is uncertainty. It has also interfered tragically with the fundraising. For example, Bev had to cancel the open house fundraiser this year, which is OWL's largest fundraiser. Ordinarily they would collect about \$10,000. They had to cancel school tours and so on because of the fear of what may happen to the rest of the flock.

S. O. 52

It is really upsetting to people that the government has not been a little more forthcoming in giving direction and in assisting these people. Not only are we concerned for the commercial producers who have a significant effect on our community, but we are also concerned about the smaller flocks, the specialty flocks like Clayton Botkin's or the OWL rehabilitation birds at Bev Day's facility and other backyard and small time hobby farmers who have flocks they would like to protect. I think the onus is on the government to give these people some clear direction on what they can do to protect their flocks and protect the public.

• (2215)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciated the remarks by my friend from Delta—South Richmond who I had the opportunity to work with on the fisheries committee. I heard him speak passionately about the plight of fishermen many times. I really appreciate the fact that he is on his feet talking about the plight of farmers in his riding and surrounding areas and also the other people who are affected by the measures that have had to be taken as a result of the avian flu crisis.

It will take very strong measures to get through this crisis and to get it behind us. There will indeed be a number of birds destroyed, be they pets or be they commercial or whatever. We know that causes stress and strain on the individuals affected. It also has financial consequences.

I want to thank colleagues for bringing this serious issue forward and for the opportunity to discuss this important matter.

There is no other job like farming. If it is not the vagaries of the weather, it is a worldwide downturn in prices. If it is not high subsidies from other countries, it is the closing of borders. What other industry has to contend with any of these issues, if not at all, as does the agriculture sector?

Being a farmer myself and having faced economic hardship that can be caused by a crisis beyond my control, and I have faced those, I extend my concern to all those farmers affected, to their families and to their communities which are affected greatly as well. I extend to them my personal willingness as well as the willingness of the government to work to get through this crisis, put it behind us and establish a firmer foundation under the industry so that we can move forward into the future in a positive way.

I am pleased to see, to the greatest extent possible tonight, members speaking on the issue and trying to deal with it. They have tried to avoid some of the partisanship that can so often happen in this place.

The past year has been a challenging one for Canada's farmers and farm families. We all know them, from the BSE, to drought, to trade issues and now the avian influenza.

My constituency of Malpeque has faced a difficult winter in the farm sector as well, starting with BSE and the shutting of the border. The beef industry has seen a tremendous price downturn as a result. We have been unable to move live cattle across the border. In my particular riding and in my province dairy heifers are a fairly large

export to the United States. As a result of being unable to move live cattle across the border, the heifer market is virtually lost.

We have a strange situation. In the New England states, where dairy prices have risen substantially, the dairy producers are crying for additional breeding stock. They need those heifers and we cannot move them across the border. The Americans are continuing to play politics with the BSE issue. They are not allowing the good science to prevail which would mean our cattle could move across that border. We have the beef industry affected as well as the dairy industry.

I started out in the farm movement in the early seventies. I have never seen a time when all three commodities, beef, potatoes and pork, have been down in price at the same time as they have been this past winter. Therefore, we are seeing some troubling circumstances in my province as well.

• (2220)

That seems to be the nature of the industry. As a government, we have to be there for the farmers in their time of need, whether it is in the province of Prince Edward Island or in British Columbia as a result of the avian flu.

Farmers are also faced with challenges related to increasing demands by consumers. Consumers are seeking greater assurances about the safety and the quality of their food and how it is produced. There is no place in the world where people will find the security in the food safety system that we have Canada. We can be proud that we have such a safe, secure food supply system, and consumers need to recognize that.

The sector is also concerned about new advances in science and increasing international competition. Again, to a great extent it is the nature of the industry. We are dealing with a global market. There are vagaries in the international marketplace such as politics and subsidy trade wars. These can certainly have an impact on producers down in the local hometown.

There are new advances in science. We see the dispute over GMOs. GMOs have their advantages, yet there are some who are fearful of them. We have to take every advantage of the new science and technologies that are out there. As a government, we need to continue to increase our funding toward research for new technologies for the agriculture sector.

The federal government intends to ensure that Canadian farmers have every opportunity to keep their businesses viable and to build a strong sector that can meet those challenges it faces. I have talked about what many of those challenges are.

While the federal government takes measures to help the poultry sector, we are also working with the provinces and with industry for long term success of the entire agriculture and agrifood industry through the agricultural policy framework. This future oriented approach to managing risks looks at the farm's potential. It has been a long time coming and we have had a difficult and twisting road to get the APF included. The future oriented approach also takes into consideration all activities of the farm business and actively encourages innovation, diversification and value added production.

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I have long said that the Government of Canada must be there for farmers in their time of need. I was very pleased to have the opportunity to be a member and work on the task force for the future of farming in Canada. Some other members who are in the House this evening also served on the task force. The task force met with producers in many communities across the country. As a result of the recommendations of the task force, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien made a great announcement on additional funding for the industry about two years ago.

New funding of \$5.2 billion over five years has been dedicated to the APF to help our farmers and farm families strive for greater profitability in their industry.

The APF is designed to make Canada's agriculture and agrifood industry proactive instead of reactive. It is designed to make us known throughout the world as innovative both in our production methods and in the products that we produce.

Canada is the best producer of safe, high quality food and in that, Canadian farmers can be proud of what they produce and Canadian consumers can feel secure in going to the marketplace, purchasing that product and being assured that it is a safe, quality product.

• (2225)

As well, producers want to be environmentally sustainable. We have seen some great environmental farm plans worked out in various provinces across the country. I really believe the province of Ontario and its farm community are leading the way. In cooperation and co-ordination with its industry, it has developed environmental plans that farmers have to work under to be considered environmentally sustainable producers.

The agricultural policy framework provides an organized framework, one that looks ahead into the 21st century with a broader agenda, beyond crisis management so to speak. Although the APF tries to move us beyond crisis management, as we know in the industry, we do run into a situation from time to time, as with the avian flu and other crises in the past, where something strange comes out of the blue and causes other havoc in the industry. In those kind of instances the governments have to be there for the farm community. Sometimes they have to step in with additional funding, but in a way that does not affect the trade.

The Government of Canada, in cooperation with provincial governments, has to be there to assist producers in their time of need. We have a responsibility and an obligation to be there for the farm community. It is such an important economic generator in the country, and important for the food security of the nation. It is an important exporter and generator of foreign dollars into our economy.

The APF though creates a more cooperative relationship between governments and with industry.

For our farmers to excel over the long term in this highly competitive business, it requires the right tools for their business, such as a risk management tool, skills and capital. It takes huge amounts of capital in the farming business today. They require a

bankable reputation for quality, delivery, innovation and market responsiveness.

The APF integrates a set of elements for success, food safety and quality innovation, innovation itself and environmental stewardship. It will be our mark or our brand in our industry of excellence. We will develop markets using this brand, helping the industry to do the same thing. Value chain round tables allow the industry to chart that course.

We are providing the industry with the tools to get the job done. That is why there is a renewable component to the APF, to help family farms develop the skills and enterprise required. Of course there is certainly the need to manage risk, and we have seen lots of risk in this industry.

Programs has been designed, through consultation with the industry, to be more flexible, to take a whole farm approach that leaves more choice with the producer, that integrates disaster relief and stabilization and is more insurance-like.

A broad framework, such as APF, commits governments to develop and fund national programs, establish goals and measurable performance indicators for these programs and assigns accountability. The accountability is to report to Canadians on their progress. I think Canadians want to see progress. They want to see the farm industry have a return on its investment and labour, to be economically viable, to receive just rewards for the work and effort that farmers put into producing farm products.

Under the APF, the new Canadian agricultural income stabilization program, or CAIS as it is often called, is now available. The CAIS program provides permanent stabilization and disaster coverage and is available to producers across the country.

• (2230)

I want to point out that the CAIS program provides disaster coverage to a degree. As I have said earlier, there are times when other events occur and the government may have to step in in other ways. I want to underline the fact that sometimes the coverage under these programs is not enough and the government must be there with other funding should disaster happen that is beyond what these programs were designed to do. The government must be there for the farm community.

The CAIS program helps protect farm businesses against large, to a certain extent, and small fluctuations in farm income margins. It can also provide assistance to producers who have experienced a loss of income because of extreme circumstances, such as BSE, avian flu or other factors.

Federal officials are working very closely with provincial officials and industry leaders to help producers better understand how the disaster component of CAISP could support their income during this difficult period. Information sessions on CAISP are being held for farmers on April 26 and April 27 in Chilliwack and Abbotsford. That is important for producers in that area.

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In addition, a federal-provincial letter with a simplified application form has been sent to all producers to make it easier for them. It is a fact that often the central bureaucracy designs things that are much too complicated. We must keep it simple and this form was designed to keep it simple and hopefully user friendly.

A federal-provincial avian flu working group has also been struck to examine the economic impacts created by the flu outbreak. No doubt those economic impacts are high. There is the farmer himself, the farm, the farm family, the community and the workers who work on the farm; the spinoff industries, the equipment companies, the feed companies, the trucking companies and the processing industry. It goes well down the food chain. All those players have to be looked at.

As part of the \$5.2 billion in new federal investments to implement the APF, the Government of Canada provided \$1.2 billion over two years to help farmers make the transition to the new business risk management program.

In December, cheques for the second instalment of that \$1.2 billion started going out to producers. Over \$450 million of that has already been paid.

In all, the measures under the APF will help producers strengthen their business, increase prosperity, build on their diversification and value-added activities, and meet the demands of consumers at home and around the world.

There are certainly many challenges out there. Some might say that it comes with the territory but there are a great many opportunities out there as well. The Government of Canada must help the industry capture those opportunities.

To a great extent, my remarks have been general on the economic situation that farmers face in the B.C. area as a result of the avian flu and the many crises that the industry has faced generally across the country.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency must be congratulated for its work. The producers in the area must be congratulated for their co-operation. I want to recognize and say to the government as a whole that farmers are a great generator of wealth to our economy and to the country. As I indicated, the many players affected by the avian flu, be it the workers, the equipment industry, the feed industry, right down the grocery chain, we can see that wealth spread through the economy.

● (2235)

We have an obligation and a responsibility to stand by those farmers in their time of need. We must ensure that we help them out financially and with programs so they can continue to create the kind of prosperity that they have created in the past for this country and hopefully have a return in that prosperity for themselves, their families, and their communities. We do indeed have to stand with them.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise on behalf of the constituents of Surrey Central to participate in today's emergency debate on avian flu.

I would like to thank my colleague from Langley—Abbotsford for taking the initiative to bring this very important issue to the floor of

the House. This issue is non-partisan, like any other national crisis or emergency.

I have visited numerous farms, particularly in my constituency of Surrey. The city of Surrey or the municipality often organize farm and agricultural trips in the riding. These visits have been very informative and have given me firsthand information in getting to know the farmers as well as the farming practices in my constituency.

My first degree is an agriculture honours degree with a specialization in animal sciences. I have firsthand experience in raising poultry as a practicum in my graduation degree.

Last month I attended a reception at the Chateau Laurier hosted by the poultry farmers of Canada. I met and discussed the upcoming outbreak of avian flu with many poultry farmers from the Fraser Valley. At that time the crisis had not developed to the extent that we see today. It has been almost a month, and from my experience I knew that the effects of this crisis would mount and would be a bigger crisis than what we saw in those days. That was probably the time to take preventive measures.

When I was speaking to the farmers about it, we were somewhat concerned about what the weak Liberal government would do about it. In our experience dealing with the government, whether it was SARS, softwood lumber or agricultural crises in the past, we have seen that the government's action has not been adequate. We all know what happened with BSE. We were a little concerned at that time when we were having this discussion at the reception.

I have also spoken to many local veterinarians, particularly a friend of mine in my constituency, Dr. Ravi Mann. I was just talking to him about what the government should do and how we could deal with the situation.

From time to time I have been talking to farmers and I am very concerned about the magnitude of this crisis that has developed. Farmers and other local concerned people have told me that the virus in the valley is very serious. The Fraser Valley, for those who do not know about it, is surrounded by hills and mountains, and the effects of a virus in a valley become significant. In fact, most of the infectious diseases, like the flu, even during the normal flu season, we see that it originates from that part and then it moves toward the other areas. I do not mean to demean the situation, but what I mean is that when there is a viral outbreak in a valley it has to be taken seriously.

Virology is changing rapidly and a virus has the ability to alter, even with vaccination. With mutation and the changing of a virus strain from one to another, vaccination does not become an effective tool in preventing this serious disease. After five weeks now, the virus continues to spread. We do not see an immediate end and the situation is still not contained as we speak.

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Avian influenza, also known as bird flu, is a contagious disease. It is caused by type A strains of influenza virus that normally infect only birds but sometimes pigs as well. Avian influenza has two forms: one that causes mild illness in birds, and the other one, known as highly pathogenic avian influenza, which is extremely contagious and rapidly fatal for infected birds.

• (2240)

The highly pathogenic form of bird flu first appeared in Italy more than 100 years ago. It was first recognized in the United States in 1924-25 and occurred again in the United States in 1929. It was eradicated both times.

Recent outbreaks have occurred in Australia, Pakistan, Hong Kong, Italy, Chile, Mexico and the United States.

A serious outbreak of avian influenza in the Netherlands in 2003, spreading to Belgium and Germany, affected some 250 farms and necessitated the slaughter of more than 28 million poultry.

Since mid-December 2003, an increasing number of Asian countries, including Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Vietnam, have reported outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza in chickens and ducks.

The World Health Organization reports that the rapid spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza is unprecedented and is a great concern for human health as well as agriculture.

Bird flu has been in Canada in the past and was successfully eliminated. We have a history. Highly pathogenic avian influenza was isolated in poultry in Ontario in 1966, the only occurrence ever for Canada. Low pathogenic avian influenza has been isolated in poultry in Canada three times since 1975.

What we have now, however, is the worst outbreak of avian flu in Canadian history.

Since February, a highly infectious strain of avian flu has struck 29 commercial poultry farms in the Fraser Valley as well as 10 backyard flocks. The disease, which can kill a flock within days, has jumped from farm to farm despite efforts to hold it to its original five-kilometre-wide zone. Outbreaks have been confirmed as far west as Surrey and as far east as Chilliwack.

The latest outbreak was found on a South Surrey bird farm at 176th Street. Those people who are watching in Surrey and the surrounding area will know that where the five kilometre zone ends and where 176th Street in South Surrey, probably around the 1500 block, is. This farmer's entire flock, 30,000 chickens, was ordered to be killed on Friday. This outbreak has officials worried because the newest infection site is about 45 kilometres west of the original hot zone in the eastern Fraser Valley.

We do not know how the virus got into British Columbia's modern chicken farms and how it spread despite a biosecurity crackdown. I believe the provincial government is trying to do its best but I do not see much action or commitment from the federal government. As a result, the government does not tell how it can be stopped. We probably do not know how it can be stopped at this juncture.

An estimated 1 million sick birds will be slaughtered and another 18 million poultry will be rushed to commercial slaughter to remove

them from the infected area. Sampling will be done in each flock four days before slaughter and a visual inspection 24 hours before slaughter. The cull is expected to take at least six to eight weeks.

I would also like to mention that the Fraser Valley is responsible for over 80% or 85% of B.C.'s billion dollar poultry industry. A significant chunk of B.C.'s poultry industry is in the Fraser Valley.

About 600 chicken and turkey farmers will be affected by the cull and the direct cost of the cull to the farmers could be as high as \$45 million, according to industry spokesmen.

However we also know there are many other types of costs associated with this crisis: the capital cost for the equipment that is idle; the cost to dispose of the manure; and the cost to disinfect the farm, the buildings and the equipment.

• (2245)

Even in the processing industries, they will be operating under capacity or they will probably shut down for some time. There are different types of costs. There are associated opportunity costs. There could be long lead times before the farmers can repopulate their poultry farms. This is going to cost a huge amount to the farmers as well as the associated people in the industry.

There will be real economic and non-economic impacts. There will be various types of direct and indirect costs and losses. Killing all types of birds means killing the livelihood of many farmers, whether small or large operations. Thousands in the industry will lose jobs, and producers and processors will be seriously affected. Some may even go broke financially. We are talking about a serious crisis.

There are about 3,000 people employed on the processing side of the poultry industry and about 2,000 workers on farms. Many people, almost every farming family, will be affected.

Many workers in the poultry industry will have to be laid off. Earlier this month Sunrise Poultry, in my constituency of Surrey Central, gave layoff notices to 30 workers in the plant and issued a warning to the remaining 420 employees that further layoffs may be imminent.

It will take six to eight weeks to destroy the birds. Following that, it could take several months to cleanse the affected farms and areas, and re-establish new flocks, the vast majority of which are grown in enclosed barns. After the farms are cleared of chicken carcasses, it takes days for the manure to be cleared out. Farmers must then wait 21 days before beginning to rebuild their flocks if the farms and surrounding farms receive a clean bill of health. Industry officials said it could take months before producers could begin operations again.

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It does not mean that since the crisis happened west of the Rockies, it is not a serious national issue. The workers in the forest industry have still not seen any compensation from this weak and arrogant Liberal government. We know what happened in the forest industry. Because of the inaction of this weak government, the forestry workers in British Columbia are suffering. Forestry used to be the number one industry in British Columbia. I have seen mills devastated, closing one after the other and workers being laid off.

We have other issues and the avian flu is just one more. Who says that western alienation is not real and that it is a myth? It is real. This will be a litmus test for the government to prove that it can follow through and make a commitment on this issue. We will be looking forward to any meaningful action and commitment from the government in a timely fashion.

Last year the Canadian Food Inspection Agency began meeting with the poultry producers across the country advising them of the dangers of this disease. The CFIA suggested a bank of avian flu vaccine, but the idea went nowhere.

After the initial outbreak, the CFIA moved quickly to quarantine barns and exterminate flocks. However, these measures failed to stop the spread. Soon there was a cluster of five infected farms. The CFIA set up roadblocks to control traffic and established decontamination stations where vehicles had their tires sprayed with disinfectant, but the virus continued to spread.

● (2250)

A lot of human movement was not caught by the biosecurity measures because the security measures were probably not efficient and effective.

Since the outbreak was discovered, the U.S. has placed restrictions on basic poultry and eggs, and the European Union has banned Canadian poultry products. In total, nearly 40 countries have restricted imports of Canadian poultry due to the outbreak. We know that our border with the U.S. has not been properly opened for beef and now 40 countries have restricted imports of Canadian poultry due to the outbreak. We need serious action on that.

The federal government has declared the Fraser Valley, from Hope to Vancouver, an avian influenza control zone, restricting all movement of any live birds in captivity, including chickens, turkeys, pet birds and eggs to prevent the spread of the deadly bird flu. We do not know what to tell our farmers because we did not hear a proper commitment from the government.

The Conservative Party of Canada supports the compensation of affected producers on the same principle as any other disaster beyond their control. There exists a protocol of compensation according to the animal involved, but the agriculture minister was unable to provide any information on how or when producers in British Columbia might be compensated.

In Canada, we need a national strategy to deal with this kind of crisis on this type of issue. We should have learned some lessons from the SARS crisis. The government must consult local specialists, farmers and other stakeholders. That should be part of the process. There must be special consideration for rare or genetic treasures and specialty birds. The compensation package should reflect that.

What about pigeons? They are very difficult to breed. The government is looking at \$33 or \$35 per bird according to the Health Act, but what about pigeons? They probably cost at least \$65.

Therefore, we need to see what we should do about the rare or genetic birds. It may be so devastating that a whole species of a particular bird may be eradicated. It is going to cost on the environmental front as well. We need to look into this very seriously.

The other thing is the long term implication of the avian flu, which is the worst in Canadian history. The long term implication must be part of the compensation decision making process because once we depopulate a particular farm the farmers need time to re-establish, refurbish and repopulate their farms.

In fact, considering the failure of previous Liberal agriculture programs to actually deliver amounts promised to those most in need, we in the Conservative Party suggest B.C. farmers begin now to document their inventories and to encourage their industry representatives to pressure the Liberals into developing a workable program of compensation that will flow quickly and effectively to producers.

In conclusion, I would like to urge the Liberal government not to sit on its hands. It must do whatever is necessary to conserve and preserve this devastated industry at this moment. Farmers need the help of the government, whether it is in the form of tax deferrals or compensation package. Whatever it is, the government must act efficiently and effectively as soon as possible.

● (2255)

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is getting a little late in the evening. I was pleased that the hon. member who just spoke outlined some of the valuable work of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency on the ground in relation to the outbreak of avian flu.

As the member pointed out, it is a serious outbreak. I am not so sure his comments that the federal government has not done anything, cannot do anything, does not want to do anything, is responsible for western alienation, et cetera, are on the mark. It actually sounded quite clichéd.

The fact of the matter is the federal government is on the ground, very much so, visibly so, conspicuously so, and just as importantly is working with its partners provincially and municipally. To suggest otherwise is simply not an accurate reflection of the reality out there.

The first objective is to stop the outbreak, stop the spread and to achieve a status on the ground where we are 21 days free of the virus. We are still seeking that threshold. The accepted technique internationally of dealing with this type of an outbreak is depopulation and slaughter of the poultry involved, and that process is being followed. Although not spreading in a major way, it is frustrating to see the outbreak spread, but the efforts to contain it have not reached their total end game of fully and finally stopping the spread.

Because this type of flu affects other types of birds, there may have to be other steps taken in relation to those birds. While that does not seem to be a major issue, it could be. On the ground there has been very conspicuous cooperation by all the producers. It is in their interests and the interests of the Fraser Valley itself to ensure that the outbreak is contained and terminated.

There is a compensation regime which will thus far apply to the 23 producers who have been affected by this. The compensation mechanism involves payment of market value for the slaughtered flocks.

There is a plan for recovery. It has been designed and put in place in consultation with the entire producer group in British Columbia and beyond. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada is also currently working with the industry to encourage all eligible B.C. producers to sign up for the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program for disaster relief coverage for the year 2004. They will benefit from this coverage if the production margin for the individual farm is down 30% or more. Of course that is looking into the future. That may be the case for many affected farms. Four information sessions are currently being scheduled for the week of April 26.

The plan for recovery has been developed and is in the process of being implemented. Of course we do not get to recovery until we have terminated the outbreak. However, the long run goals should be obvious and are embedded in that plan. They goals are to bring the B.C. producers, the processing and local economy back into the market conditions that existed previously, helping market conditions, and to restore the status of our poultry production and regional and

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international high standards and reputation, as has been the case for B.C. and the Fraser Valley.

● (2300)

The federal government's main actor on the ground here has been mentioned and thankfully outlined—I will not do it here—by the member who just spoke. The essential work of the CFIA has been recognized. That work could not carry on alone. It of course happens through and with the cooperation and on the groundwork of the other partners in the zones affected.

While it is sometimes difficult from this place in the House to reach out and provide absolute assurance to people on the ground across Canada when situations like this develop, I want to assure colleagues in the House that my colleagues on this side and, I am sure, colleagues on the other side are prepared to encourage the government officials, government departments and agencies to ensure that the procedures now in place are fully implemented, the goals accomplished and the B.C. producers in the Fraser Valley are back in business, with the workers fully employed again and producing the quality poultry that they have a good reputation for producing.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): There being no members rising for further debate, I declare the motion carried.

Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:02 p.m.)

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

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