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(Part A)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, December 13, 2004

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

•(1100)

[*English*]

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP) moved that Bill C-272, an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (sponsorship of relative), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to my private member's bill, Bill C-272, an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. I would like to acknowledge the help and support of my colleague from Vancouver East and pay tribute to her hard work, especially on immigration issues. She and her staff have worked tirelessly for family reunification and her bills from previous parliaments have paved the way for this bill.

As well, the commitments in the bill are a key component of the NDP platform from the recent federal election. This has been a long-standing commitment of the New Democratic Party and I know it was important to our leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, as well as to my colleague from Winnipeg North and my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh in the recent campaign, something that people in their ridings were particularly interested in and found particularly important.

Family reunification is a key objective of our current immigration law, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, sometimes called IRPA. Section 3 of the act says that one of IRPA's goals is "to see families are reunited in Canada". With regard to the refugee program, section 4 of IRPA says that an objective should be "to support the self-sufficiency and the social and economic well-being of refugees by facilitating reunification with their family members in Canada".

Family reunification is particularly important to refugees given the experience of dislocation that their families have experienced when they became a refugee. This bill and the whole discussion of family reunification is of particular importance to refugees in Canada.

Family reunification is a cornerstone of immigration policy in Canada because it recognizes that families are key to building this

nation. That is the way immigration has always functioned in Canada. Families bring the important multicultural values. The family is the focus for multiculturalism that is now so important to our national understanding of who we are as Canadians.

•(1105)

Bill C-272 is very important, not only for people in my riding, but for people across Canada. It would allow a Canadian citizen or permanent resident a once in a lifetime opportunity to sponsor a relative who does not fit into the current definition of the family class under IRPA to come to Canada.

IRPA currently defines the following as a family member: a spouse, a common-law or conjugal partner who is at least 16 years old; a dependent child under the age of 22; a child who is a full time student and is dependent upon a parent for financial support; a child who is disabled, a parent or grandparent; a child to be adopted under the age of 18; a brother, sister, niece, nephew or grandchild who has been orphaned, is under 18 and is not a spouse or a common-law partner; and one relative of any age if there are no family members who fall into the above categories.

My bill would expand the definitions in the family class and allow a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident once in their lifetime to sponsor a son or a daughter over the age of 22 who is not a dependant, who is independent in other words, an aunt or an uncle, a brother or a sister, a niece or nephew and a first cousin.

The bill is similar to one debated in the last Parliament which was introduced by my colleague from Vancouver East. However there has been a crucial improvement. We listened to the concerns expressed by the members in the debate then and have made changes.

The old bill did not define "relatives" but left it completely open so that any relative might be sponsored. At the time, while there was significant interest from other members in the ideas contained in the bill, members were concerned that this definition was far too broad. That is why we have been much more explicit in delineating just which relatives are eligible for this once in a lifetime sponsorship. We have acted on the concerns that members expressed in the debate and hope that this makes the bill something that they can accept and support fully.

Private Members' Business

I would like to talk a little about why this bill is so vital. It is because the bill has one main aim and that is simply to reunite families: families who have spent years apart, families who never had the chance to be together, who never had the chance to live and settle near each other, and families for whom separation is a daily reality. We would like to ease some of that heartache and stress.

In my riding, there are families who have not seen a loved one for years and who have no hope of being united. This is both unfair and unacceptable. As I have pointed out, a stated goal at the heart of Canada's immigration policy is the desire to reunite families, but despite this goal, immigration legislation has created a narrow definition of family. The family class must be expanded because it is simply too restrictive.

Family structures are complicated and varied. Many people in my riding can attest that a brother can be as close to a person as a grandfather and an aunt can mean as much to someone as a parent. The current family class does not respect how our families work today. It does not recognize family histories, cultural differences or changing times. The current family class definition excludes family members who surely we would all consider close.

• (1110)

Let us take, for instance, the requirement that a child must be under 22 years of age to be sponsored. This line of 22 years of age seems entirely arbitrary. For parents, their sons or daughters never stop being their children, and for children, no matter what age they are and no matter how financially independent they may be, separation from their parents can be difficult. A parent never stops caring for a child, no matter how old the child is. Being a parent is a lifelong commitment. It does not stop simply because a child moves out, gets married, has his or her own child, gets a job or moves to another country.

I know many members will recognize this as I say it. At no matter what stage they are in their lives, whether they are buying a house, having a child, going through a difficult patch, getting a job or losing a job, our children always need our support, and in later years we hope children will be there to support their parents. That is how our society functions. Expanding the definition of family to allow parents to sponsor their adult children to immigrate to Canada can be of great benefit to families and to our society.

I hear stories from my constituents which I am sure are familiar to most MPs. People tell me that they have completed their families, their children have moved out and their partners have perhaps passed on, and they would like to be reunited with a brother or sister who might be in another country and in the same situation they are. This bill would allow them that opportunity, the opportunity for companionship, friendship and mutual support. Above all, it would allow them the opportunity to be with their loved ones.

On a more practical note, another of the positive aspects of the bill is that it would help Canada reach its yearly immigration target. The government acknowledges that the target for immigration to Canada should be 1% of our population per year. That would put it at somewhere around 325,000 if we use the current population statistics, and yet we never reach that goal. In 2003 approximately 221,000 new immigrants were welcomed into Canada. That is only 66% of the target number, which means we are not doing very well.

We have not ever really managed to reach that target of 1% of the population.

The government also acknowledges that by the year 2011 immigration will be the only source of growth for Canada's labour force. By 2026 to 2030, the government also notes, any population growth in Canada will come solely from immigration. These are significant changes in our employment and population base. We need to make sure we have the base to work from to ensure that jobs are filled in Canada and there is the population base to support our important programs and our way of life in Canada.

We need to encourage immigration to Canada. We need to be looking forward to those important markers that are not too far off in the distant future. We need to build the foundations for those changes now. What better foundation can there be than family reunification?

I know we will hear from some members that the bill would only increase the backlog of immigration applications. I do not want to do anything that would further delay applications which in many cases already take far too long to process. This backlog has haunted us for years, but it exists only because the government refuses to put the necessary resources into the department. Rather than government addressing the needs of Canadian families and Canadian society, there have been cutbacks and shortfalls and wait times are often therefore unacceptable, but this can be addressed should the government choose to or should it have the political will to make those changes.

The existence of this backlog should in no way be used to squelch the legitimate hopes of families for reunification or the important needs of Canadian society. I think it is interesting to hear the government refer to this backlog as the inventory of applications. The inventory could certainly be reduced and it is probable that we are carrying far too high an immigration inventory given the hopes and needs of Canadian society and Canadian families.

• (1115)

Family sponsorship comes with a promise. Under this program, sponsors promise to support family members who come to Canada, for three to ten years depending on their relationship. This means that families bear a huge part of the cost of reunification themselves.

I do recognize that there are settlement costs and language training costs, but the fact remains that there can be no better group to ensure the effective integration of new immigrants into Canadian society than their already established Canadian families. This is a win-win-win situation: for families, for Canadian society and for new immigrants.

Nothing can be better than to be welcomed at the airport or at a port of entry by family members, who then take home these new immigrants and help establish them in Canadian society. They can help them with living arrangements, job requirements and the cultural differences that they will no doubt face as they integrate into Canadian society. This is the best way to ensure that people integrate into our society and take their full place as participating members of society.

Canadian families want to be reunited with their family members. All too often they experience the definition of family in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act as arbitrary and exclusive. They do not see it as appropriately reflecting the complex relationships that comprise their own families.

The bill seeks to recognize those realities and expand the possibilities for family reunification under IRPA. This would have obvious benefits for families but it would have benefits for Canadian society too. Canada needs immigration. It will need an even larger number of immigrants in the coming decades. We must ensure our ability to welcome the best immigrants possible. We must ensure that we maintain our place in the worldwide competition for immigrants, the competition that we have with Australia and with the United States. To do that, we must ensure that our immigration legislation recognizes the hopes and realities of families.

I think this bill would be an important contribution to Canada's immigration law. It would be an important expansion of the understanding of what family means in our immigration act. I hope hon. members will support the bill.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his remarks and congratulate him on introducing into the House a bill that would alter our immigration framework or at least the numbers in our immigration intake.

I do not disagree with his description of the sentiments surrounding family and the desire of families to have close family members reunited either in Canada or in the country of origin. We can all relate to that.

In his remarks, however, he has not addressed a couple of other fundamental pieces of the immigration program. He has mentioned the current pipeline of applicant immigrants at about three-quarters of a million people. No matter what we do, we will have people who will want to come to Canada, hopefully, but the member has not addressed the need to maintain on a policy basis the 40:60 balance between family class and economic immigrants. The government and Parliament have accepted the 40:60 balance as being suited to Canada. Expanding the family class as he suggests would throw that balance out of kilter.

Second, although the member wants to increase the annual immigration levels, he has not addressed the ability of the receiving communities to take substantial new numbers of immigrants. These are Canadian communities that take in the immigrants and he has not addressed this at all in regard to if there were to be a substantial increase in the volume of immigration and/or family class immigrants.

I am wondering if the member could at least acknowledge that these are issues even if he might be unprepared to address them in detail.

• (1120)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to address both issues.

With regard to the 40:60 balance between family class and economic or skilled worker immigrants, that was not always the balance between family class and skilled workers. Only in recent years have we had that 40:60 balance.

Private Members' Business

I think a lot of Canadians will appreciate that family class immigration really is the foundation of building a nation, even more so than economic immigrants. I do not want to downplay the importance of having skilled workers coming here to address certain economic needs, but it is family that really builds this nation. I think that is the important part of our immigration policy. I would not mind if that balance shifted, if there were some change. I believe that Canadians want to see that kind of change as well, given the overwhelming importance of family and family reunification.

With regard to the ability of communities to settle new immigrants and to deal with the immigrants who arrive on our shores, I think the indications are nothing but positive when it comes to their willingness and ability to integrate new immigrants into our communities.

One great example of that is the private refugee sponsorship program, where there are actually people waiting for years to take part in the settlement process for refugees and help them and their families integrate fully into the community. There is a huge waiting list of people who want to undertake that kind of responsibility. They want to find those opportunities for people in their communities, settle them in, get them to work, get them into appropriate living quarters, and help them to understand the aspects of Canadian culture that may be new to them. I think those possibilities are all there.

I also believe that study after study has shown that immigration is a positive for the Canadian economy. When new people come to Canada, they need housing, appliances, a car perhaps, or they need to use public transit. All those things stimulate our economy and ensure that Canada has a healthy economy going into the future.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Burnaby—Douglas for bringing this issue to the House. I am going to add to the comments of my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River. I know that members on this side examined this very proposition that the member has proposed, which is to have a once in a lifetime sponsorship. Issues along the lines that my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River raised were highlighted, but there was another one as well and I wonder if the member has looked at it.

That is, if there is a once in a lifetime sponsorship, there is a sort of geometric effect, because new Canadians can then sponsor someone. We would have a geometric growth in sponsorship of the family class, which could become quite a challenge. I wonder if he has actually looked at that and projected the numbers on what the impact would be into the future.

• (1125)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I just cannot conceal my enthusiasm for giving people that chance, that chance to make sure that the people who are important to them and make up their family are here.

Private Members' Business

Yes, it will mean an increase in the immigration level, but we are only meeting 66% of the target that the government sets now. Why does the government consistently miss that target? Why can it meet its targets in other areas like deficit reduction or debt reduction, let us say, but not the target around reuniting families in Canada?

I think it is time we put as much effort into that target as we do with these other targets. If we did that, we would go a long way to ensuring that families have the people who are most important to them, who are closest to them and who supported them in Canada here with them.

Hon. Sue Barnes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for this opportunity to speak to Bill C-272, a private member's bill before the House. I am grateful because it is important to recognize the initiatives of individual parliamentarians. I know that the parliamentarian who has sponsored this bill here today is well intentioned, but I have some thoughts on this bill.

I am speaking not only as a parliamentarian and a member of the House but also as an immigrant to Canada. I am now a Canadian citizen, but my family and I immigrated from the Mediterranean island of Malta. I am certainly very grateful to this country for everything it has provided to me and my own children.

The bill seeks to amend Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act by granting every citizen or permanent resident the opportunity to sponsor, once in the sponsor's lifetime, one foreign national who is a relative but not a member of the family class. The concept of a once in a lifetime sponsorship is not new. Governments and stakeholders have debated and analyzed whether such a provision would be workable for very many years now. All of us believe in the principle of strengthening the family class and making it easier for people to sponsor loved ones who now live abroad. However, the one time sponsorship option as presented in Bill C-272 is fundamentally flawed for a number of reasons.

Past experience indicates that even with more resources, the increase in backlogs and processing time for this and other categories of immigrants that could be generated by such an open-ended system would seriously undermine the integrity and the credibility of the whole immigration program. The bill before us today addresses one of the many shortcomings of earlier legislation from another honourable member by defining an eligible relative as a brother or sister of the sponsor, an aunt or uncle, nephew or niece, first cousin or child of the sponsor who is 22 years of age or older, and is not dependent upon the sponsor.

However, past experience indicates that such an expansion of the family class would be unsustainable, unmanageable, and seriously impede the government's ability to uphold the will of Parliament by maintaining the current sixty-forty mix of economic to non-economic immigration. This has also been noted by other parliamentarians in the House.

In 1988, family intake nearly doubled over two years, thanks to a similar arrangement to include all unmarried sons and daughters in the family class. The escalated number of backlogs rising out of that program, despite its termination in 1993, is still having an impact

and effect on the Department of Citizenship and Immigration even today.

We have already made provision for processing applications from relatives who would not normally fall under the family class, under certain circumstances. There is little reason to duplicate this in a separate piece of legislation with such serious problems. Canadians and permanent residents today can sponsor a relative, regardless of relationship or age, if they have no family residing in Canada or abroad. Section 117(1)(h) of the new immigration and refugee protection regulations defines a foreign national as a member of the family class with respect to a sponsor if he or she is "a relative of the sponsor, regardless of age, if the sponsor does not have a spouse, a common-law partner, a conjugal partner", or any other immediate family member in Canada or abroad.

In addition, section 25 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act can be used to permit the sponsorship of a foreign national relative who would not otherwise qualify as a member of the family class, if exceptional humanitarian and compassionate grounds exist. Furthermore, foreign nationals who apply as skilled workers and have close family members in Canada are given the advantage of five additional points on the selection grid.

The government passed a series of new regulations in 2002 to make it much easier for Canadians and permanent residents to sponsor their loved ones from abroad, and significantly expanded the family class in a well managed and sustainable way, even though I and other colleagues in the House still have backlog problems with this department.

These changes provided for equal treatment under the law for common-law couples of the opposite and same sex by expanding the family class to include the term "common-law partners and conjugal partners". They also expand the definition of dependent child to better reflect longer child dependencies. They reduce the age at which Canadians citizens or permanent residents are eligible to sponsor from 19 to 18 years of age.

These enhancements to the family class reflect the government's policy intention of easing family reunification while ensuring that the immigration program itself maintains an appropriate balance between the intake of refugees as well as economic and family class immigrants. We have expanded the family class in a well planned and responsible way. The government has also made provision for individuals who wish to sponsor an individual not included in the family class without jeopardizing the integrity of the immigration program itself.

I find it difficult to support the concept of a once in a lifetime sponsorship and will not vote in favour of what I still consider a flawed scheme as set out in Bill C-272.

Private Members' Business

•(1130)

I also know that in every community there is stress on the receiving end for municipalities and other levels of government that must put the programs in place. I see it in some of the relocation and training programs, whether it is skills or language. We want to properly resource on location when people come to this country. I think we do have a proper balance in this country. There could be more resources so that the system could run smoother.

I thank the hon. member for bringing this up. He has good intentions. I know he contributes in a meaningful way in the House and will continue to do so. With regard to this situation and in these particular set of circumstances, I do not agree with him, but there may be another time when I will.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak to my colleague's bill. I sit with my colleague on the immigration committee. I have conceived a great respect for my colleague and for his knowledge of the immigration system. His heart is for people and I know that is what motivates his bill today.

The issue before us is whether there is a hardship for newcomers in not being able to bring family members to Canada who are not normally in the family class. Also, whether that hardship should be addressed by the measures that my colleague has put forward. This is an important question. Canada is a country of compassion. It is a country that believes in the family unit.

The issues are whether this would be in the best interests of the country and whether it would be in the best interests of newcomers and their families. That is the area I would like to address in my remarks this morning.

First of all, I think it is fair to point out that the people who are already in the immigration and citizenship system are dealing with some very severe stresses and frustrations. We know, for example, that there are, as has already been mentioned, lengthy time lines for processing people already in the queue.

The time lines are not only lengthy, but they are often exceeded. The official word on how long it is going to take to process an application is exceeded sometimes by years, not just months. There are almost a million people in the queue lined up to receive their entrance to Canada, with many of these in the family class. The hardship and the heartache that is caused by these long line-ups is a real concern to all members of Parliament. We see it and we hear it every day.

One of the questions we have to ask ourselves is, would the hardship and the frustration, already experienced by people in the queue, be exacerbated to a large degree, to an unacceptable degree, by expanding the class to involve many more people?

Unfortunately, I believe the answer to that is yes. If every person in Canada who is either a citizen or a permanent resident were to bring in or sponsor another individual, this would involve many millions of people. Canada is a country built by immigration. Many of us, myself included, were not born in Canada and have family members in other countries, and perhaps would like to have them come to our country.

It seems to me that we are setting up people for a lot of disappointment, a lot of grief, and a lot more frustration if we expand a system that is already stumbling and struggling, to process and respond to the people who are already in the system. We know that the officials in our system are struggling. We must be conscious of the load on these individuals.

I have been a member of Parliament now for 11 years. I used to obtain a very quick response from CIC officials, both at the local level and at the Ottawa level. That has now changed. It has changed not because these officials have changed. They are still the same good, hardworking people they always were. However, the load on them is increasing and the resources for them are decreasing.

My colleague says that the answer is to give more resources. That is only part of the puzzle. The resources would have to be significantly beefed up in a whole bunch of areas, not only the number of officials. These officials must be trained and given the proper infrastructure.

The people coming to Canada must be given more settlement programs. My colleague knows that we are talking in committee about the terrible situation where people come to Canada and cannot get a process given to them whereby they can upgrade their international credentials and experience, so that they can practice their trade and profession in Canada. Unless that is addressed, we again have a terrible situation where people are frustrated and harmed. Our whole settlement process and process for credentials needs a sharp and complete upgrade.

We also have difficulty in getting good information to people. There are so many parts of our system that need to be completely overhauled, focused and made better in order to serve. It would be so unkind to bring many millions more people into a system that is already failing those who are here.

•(1135)

I have a question for my colleague, and maybe he will address it later. Sometimes people from other countries come to Canada both for opportunities for themselves and to get a new start. Would his bill create a feeling of obligation in newcomers to sponsor a family member not presently in the family class who might be unwelcome to some newcomers?

Members of my family have moved to jobs in other parts of the world. One is in Hong Kong and the other in England. I would not want to say that they were trying to get away from us, but sometimes people need their own space and life. Maybe we should think about whether we want to create in the minds of some an obligation to bring in other family members, which would not be there presently.

It is just a thought I had. Our current system sometimes allows, in special circumstances, members of families who are not in the present family class to come in under humanitarian and compassionate grounds or on grounds under section 127. Is that not sufficient to address the strong needs of people, newcomers, to bring in family members outside the family class without creating such a wide system that can put extra pressure on families instead of helping them?

Private Members' Business

I really believe this is a good debate. It is a debate that we want to have. We have a very generous heart toward bringing people to Canada, both to augment our workforce and to reunify families. However, in this case, when we have some labour shortage needs, where a lot of the motivation for our immigration program is to enhance our economic viability and workforce and our ability to compete in the international marketplace, we must remember the balance of those needs with the kinds of issues about which my colleagues has spoken, as far as expanding family class opportunities. This is a serious debate. We need more facts and more figures too on exactly what would be in Canada's best interest as far as defining our immigration needs, our immigration focus and our immigration priorities.

I welcome the debate my colleague has opened up to the House. I believe at this point the problems in our system are such that they are the highest priority. We must get a system that works well for the people already in it before we expand that to many millions more, only to have them experience the frustrations and the disappointment that others already have when they have sought to enter our country.

I know we will learn a great deal from the debate. Again, I commend my colleague for opening it. At this point, I would not recommend supporting his initiative, but the issues that are raised and the discussion of them will be very helpful to us.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas for giving us the opportunity to talk about Bill C-272, an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (sponsorship of relative).

It is a pleasure to consider again a motion that has already been discussed in the House. We are pleased to see that our recommendations were heard and have led to measures to remedy the lack of clarity the bill originally suffered from.

Our greatest reservation was that the concept of family was vague. This concept has been defined, and this has greatly improved the bill under consideration today.

I remind the House that, for refugees who have found protection in Canada, one of their most pressing concerns is their families, who currently must wait an extremely long time abroad. There are long delays and so many people must live separated, against their will, from their closest family members.

It is understandable that they are so eager to be re-united. Being refugees adds to their worries. In many cases, family members were left in precarious and even dangerous situations. As long as their loved ones are in danger, refugees cannot enjoy the security they have found in Canada.

At a time when we applaud the speed at which information travels around the world, we are frequently presented with the same atrocities that these individuals have fled. Members can understand how distress can grow and push many of these people into despair. The government encourages the reunification of families but we must consider the day-to-day reality of those who are waiting, in order to understand.

I would underscore the depth of love demonstrated by those waiting for their file to receive approval.

All too often, the experiences of refugees trying to bring their families here are at painful odds with the good intentions of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and of the civil servants applying it. The tales of these refugees reflect a cruelty that is a disgrace to Canada and that, we believe, would be considered unacceptable by the vast majority of Canadians if they were to learn what refugees face.

In half of all asylum claims, it takes over 13 months to process the claims of family members. One out of five cases takes over 26 months. At the slowest visa office, 50% of all cases take more than 27 months. Some refugees wait much longer than that.

When asked about the consequences of slow processing, the Canadian Council for Refugees indicated the following:

The long delays prolong risks to family members overseas, who may be in conflict zones or refugee camps. Families are often subject to the same risk of persecution that caused their spouse or parent to be granted Canada's protection. Living conditions may endanger their health and the children's education, leading to increased social costs when they finally come to Canada. Psychologically, the toll of such long separations is heavy. Many refugees say that their family members suspect them of not wanting them to come, because they cannot believe that a country like Canada could be so inefficient in its processing. Families that finally reunite after years of separation face the stress of trying to live together after having grown apart. Some families' ties don't survive.

Since this bill will, among other things, contribute to reconstituting a group of persons that will bring stability to life and help people move on to the happier times of integration and making a contribution to society, the House must support this motion.

Protection of the family is an obligation upon society and the state, according to the international human rights texts ratified by Canada. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State".

Similar terms are repeated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 10(1) states that "The widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family, which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, particularly for its establishment and while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children."

● (1145)

The Convention on the Rights of the Child contains very explicit provisions regarding the reunification of refugee families. Article 9, paragraph 1 reads:

States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child.—

Article 10, paragraph 1 reads:

Private Members' Business

In accordance with the obligation of States Parties under article 9, paragraph 1, applications by a child or his or her parents to enter or leave a State Party for the purpose of family reunification shall be dealt with by States Parties in a positive, humane and expeditious manner.—

That demonstrates how important this motion is in relation to the role Canada claims to play on the international scene, with respect to the protection of refugees and the rights of children. Thus, the choice facing the House is unequivocal and leads us to some important reflection on the family.

As for the priority given to refugee claimants, Canada's immigration plan is divided in a 60:40 ratio, which means that immigrants are selected in the following way: 60% of our immigration comes from the economic category, that is, business people, self-employed and skilled workers, and the other 40% involves family reunification, refugees and others.

Of the 40%, 30% involves family reunification, 9% is refugees and 1% is others.

Almost every week the headlines tell us of the deportation of refugee claimants who have been refused. Clearly, the many conflicts and civil wars being waged in a growing number of countries make it necessary for democratic countries to listen more attentively to refugee claimants. Inappropriate funding mean that Canada refuses thousands of refugee claimants every year, although their lives are in danger in their home countries. With bigger budgets, Canada could better honour its obligations as a signatory to the Geneva convention on refugee protection.

Insufficient resources is the major problem with the whole immigration issue. Insufficient resources for immigration is the reason we support this bill in order to have the opportunity to discuss it in committee. In fact, if it is passed at second reading, there will have to be a debate in committee and we would then be in a position to prove that the Department of Citizenship and Immigration is incapable of meeting its responsibilities because of insufficient funds.

By recognizing the humanitarian aspect of Bill C-272, and by accepting its referral to a committee, the Bloc Québécois would help prove that common sense and responsibility dictate that we ask for sufficient funding to provide proper settlement services for those who are admitted, while not ignoring our humanitarian duty to asylum seekers. They must be given priority access to resources.

No one wants families of refugees to remain separated. International standards in human rights advocate speedy reunification. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act aims at reuniting families. We need to bring meaning back to the expression "human compassion", far too often rendered meaningless by acts that are not consistent with the family reunification programs. The social costs of prolonged periods of separation must not be forgotten in our decision. Let us work together on reducing the wait times starting today.

The government has tried to speed up family reunification by making a few minor amendments to its policies. Unfortunately, these efforts have not resolved the problem. The time has come for change.

I call on this House to support Bill C-272.

● (1150)

[English]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on a bill introduced by my colleague, the member for Burnaby—Douglas.

This is the second time the New Democratic Party has introduced legislation to convince Parliament of the importance of expanding the definition of family for the purpose of family reunification under our immigration program. This issue of vital importance to new Canadians who are here and established and to the country as a whole.

I understand from the debate to this point that there are some real concerns on the part of Conservative and Liberal members. I hope to be able to persuade them to see the wisdom of at least allowing for a further review of this critical issue so that a thorough vetting can take place at committee level and so that Canadians who have real expertise in this area will have their voices heard and considered.

This is a matter of great importance for immigrants now in Canada because nothing is stronger than the bonds of family. Nothing makes more sense in terms of building a community and a country than allowing new Canadians who are established here to bring in close family relatives.

As part of this approach, we are asking Parliament not to judge what constitutes family and not to apply a narrow cultural definition of family. We are asking Parliament to look at this from the point of view of people around the world who see family on a broad basis, who see family encompassing many relatives within that unit as part of the support they give one another and as part of the bonds of love that exist within that unit.

We are pleading with parliamentarians today to recognize that family is more than the typical nuclear two parent, a couple of kids and a house with a white picket fence. We are saying to parliamentarians that for many new Canadians it is critically important to have sons, daughters, brothers and sisters who are over the age of 22 with them here in this country.

On that point, I should remind the House that there are many in the system who are now ineligible to join with family because the system is backlogged. The process may have been started when they were 9 or 10 years of age but they were not able to get into the country, and now, because they are over the age of 22, they are automatically excluded. Is there no justice when it comes to uniting families in terms of brothers, sisters, sons and daughters? That is just one element of what is wrong with our current system.

Equally important, let us not judge the importance of having uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews. For many immigrants those family members are considered to be intimate members of the family. They bring support, they nurture and they care for one another, and hence reduce the burden on the state because of the built in mechanisms for ensuring that there are ways to break down the barriers of isolation, loneliness and despair when one enters a new country.

Let us look at this from the national point of view as well.

Private Members' Business

As my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas has already said, the government has failed to meet its 1993 election promise of a 1% population target for immigration. The government has yet to accomplish that fundamental goal of allowing 225,000 to 250,000 new immigrants every year into this country. That policy was put in place for a good reason. We need immigrants to come to Canada. We need them for the sake of ensuring our survival and ensuring that we are able to pay for the programs we will need when we get old, such as social security and pensions.

Let us not lose sight of the fact that at the rate things are going, by the year 2010 or 2011 our only growth in the labour force will happen because of immigration. By the year 2025, given the way our birth rate is in this country, our only population growth will come about as a result of new immigration.

Let us not be short-sighted. Let us not cut off our nose to spite our face. Let us not assume that we will be flooded with so many new applications that we will not be able to handle them.

● (1155)

I want to remind members of the Liberal government that they changed the definition of family in Bill C-11 to include grandparents but there was no deluge of grandparents knocking at the door trying to get in. People come on a basis that is reasonable, as the need arises and according to the needs of the family. Similarly, we will not see a deluge of people suddenly knocking down the doors of immigration demanding to get into this country because of one little bill that calls for a more enlightened and broader definition of family.

I urge members of the government and the Conservative Party to look at the wisdom of studying this matter further.

My constituency of Winnipeg North is probably one of the most diverse communities in a spectacularly diverse nation. People have come from all over the world and settled in my community of Winnipeg North. They have contributed in numerous ways to the health and well-being of our whole society and have made an enormous contribution to our identity, to our economic survival and to our ability to reflect the values of diversity, tolerance and understanding.

My constituency has said with one voice that we should listen to them, that we should expand the definition of family so they can bring loved ones here who are now not eligible. They ask that we listen to their voices by way of their pleas, their stories and the hundreds and hundreds of signatures that they have delivered to Parliament in support of a once in a lifetime provision for family reunification.

I urge members of the House to support this very important contribution to our immigration policy.

● (1200)

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to commend my colleague, the critic from the NDP, on the issue of immigration and citizenship, and the member for Burnaby—Douglas on his initiative, as well as the member for Winnipeg North who has been working on this over the years.

When we look at Canada, there is no question that we are a nation of immigrants. More than 50 members who sit in the chamber came

to Canada as immigrants and, of course, there are all sorts of other members whose parents or grandparents came to this nation. We are a nation of immigrants.

Ironically, what we really are talking about is giving recognition to the extended family. In some sense we are talking about family values, which is an important component that we have to put into our immigration policy.

The present cutoff is 60% economic and 40% other. There is nothing magical about those numbers. I think the department and the government should be re-examining them. The reason I say that is, as we know, our immigration policy on the economic side is heavily tilted toward credentials and higher qualifications.

A number of years ago when the shift was made in the point system, we demanded more qualifications from people coming into this country. It has not always been successful because we have not given recognition to the fact that in many cases the country is not ready to absorb all the professionals that we are bringing in. All one has to do is witness the fact that we probably have the highest qualified taxi driving force in the world, and it does not reflect upon us very well.

The other issue I want to touch on is the whole issue of settlement. It seems to me that it would make sense to Canadians that when people come here who have ties to this country, such as relatives, they will have an easier time settling. Settlement is a real challenge for us. I think it is important that we put a focus on that whole issue.

Getting back to immigration itself, it is not something that we do because we are a humanitarian country. We do it because immigration represents the lifeblood to this country. As was mentioned before, if we look at the demographics of this country, any growth in the workforce in the next decade will come through immigration. In terms of immigration itself, we have to recognize that the way we have the point system structured we do not pay enough attention to things like skilled trades. We pay too much attention to university degrees. As I mentioned before, we have the problem with brain waste that occurs.

I can tell the House that when someone comes to this country who might be a high tech worker, that person is going to drive services, such as housing, which involves tradespeople who do not necessarily qualify under the point system. It also triggers demand in the service industries.

It seems to me that the whole issue of family reunification would serve the purpose of enabling success for the new immigrant in terms of settlement, enhancing the quality of life of Canadians in this country by providing them with an extended family, and certainly it is an issue that we very much want to get to committee to have extensive debate on. The policy we set in terms of immigration to this country will determine the future of this nation.

I think this is a win-win bill and it is something that we in the committee could work with to enhance our Immigration Act and immigration practices.

One of the points I want to make very strongly is that just because a policy exists, it does not necessarily make it right. I only have to point us to what happened when we changed the point system on immigration. What happened was the committee strongly recommended against it. The bureaucrats pushed it forward and the government stayed in that position.

I can say that once the appeals started going through the courts, the unjust process by which we were judging immigrants coming to this country, was turned around but was not turned around because of any will of Parliament. It was turned around because the courts said so.

• (1205)

In closing my address on this particular issue, I think it would really enhance our debate on immigration. It would really be helpful for the quality of life of citizens in this country who have families who could come here to make a contribution.

[Translation]

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

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

MIGRATORY BIRDS CONVENTION ACT, 1994

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-15, An Act to amend the Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994 and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

[English]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): There is one motion in amendment standing on the Notice Paper for the report stage of Bill C-15. Motion No. 1 will be debated and voted upon.

MOTION IN AMENDMENT

Hon. Ken Dryden (for the Minister of the Environment) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-15, in Clause 9, be amended by adding after line 24 on page 15 the following:

"(6) All fines received by the Receiver General in respect of the commission of an offence under this Act shall be received for the special purpose of protecting and conserving migratory birds or the environment and credited to the Environmental Damages Fund, an account in the accounts of Canada."

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I address Bill C-15, an act to amend the Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994 and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999.

Although I am pleased to address the important provisions of the proposal before us, it is also an honour to address the recommendations of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the

Government Orders

Environment and Sustainable Development following its careful deliberations on the bill.

The bill received strong support from the committee. In essence, what is before us are measures that not only make substantial improvements to the environmental legislative regime in Canada, but they also enhance the competitiveness of our economy, improve the general well-being of Canadians and better protect our nation's rich natural heritage. In other words, the bill supports our vision for the environment.

I would like to also recognize the fine work of several members of this chamber. The member for Victoria, when he was the minister of the environment, introduced a version of this proposal in May of this year. It was his clear guidance and direction that were instrumental in getting us here today. We must also recognize it was the members of Parliament, particularly from Atlantic Canada, who worked so hard to address the tragic situation that occurs so unnecessarily every winter on the seas off our coastline. They did the hard work and we now have before us a viable bill that will make a difference .

When the current Minister of the Environment appeared before the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development, he emphasized the importance he attaches to the conservation and the protection of Canada's migratory birds and the protection of the marine environment. The committee clearly supported these principles as well.

It is gratifying to see that the conservation and protection of migratory birds are so strongly held. As a result, there was constructive and focused discussion in the committee. I commend our colleagues for their fine work. This is the spirit of collaboration on which we can build a sustainable society, one that values nature and remains competitive. In that spirit, I would like to elaborate on some key points.

The bill will accomplish several important things as we move toward more effective enforcement in our marine waters of the amended Migratory Birds Conservation Act, 1994 and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999. First and foremost, it addresses a serious problem that affects us all: the loss each year of hundreds of thousands of seabirds that die a slow and painful death from cold and starvation because of oil discharged illegally by ships in our waters.

Our scientists say that a conservative estimate is that 300,000 seabirds are killed every winter: thick-billed murres, common murres, Atlantic puffins, herring gulls, great black-backed gulls, common eiders, and many others. We know these birds are also dying off the Pacific coast, but we do not have reliable or accurate estimates of numbers because the winds and currents bring few birds to shore. We do know oil is being dumped at sea there as well, in areas where many seabirds are concentrated.

The oil gets into the plumage of the birds and decreases their insulation, their waterproofing and buoyancy. This is why they starve and freeze to death. A few hundred thousand deaths each year, out of the millions that feed in the waters every winter, why is there so much concern?

Government Orders

Let me use the thick-billed murre as an example. Oiling is the most important known human induced stress on the population numbers of these birds. The models show us that the potential growth rate in the population of this species is reduced to 1% per year because of oil dumping. We also know that climate variability and other factors can and do shift the population balance to the negative side in many years. This means that with ongoing oil pollution, there is no buffer against any threats to these birds, so their overall populations can be reduced.

In order to understand what Bill C-15 does to address this problem, allow me to explain some key points about the Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994, and the migratory birds convention, the international agreement which the act itself implements. These instruments go back to 1916 and 1917 to a treaty with the United States to stop indiscriminate killing of migratory birds and ensure their future.

The migratory birds convention in fact is held up as one of the best examples in the world of an international strategy to protect nature. It is an example that has been followed time and again, as in the case of the international convention on biodiversity, or the North American bird conservation initiative among Mexico, the United States and Canada, just to cite a few examples.

Because the birds travel among jurisdictions, their management is frequently accomplished in treaties and implemented primarily by federal levels of government. These birds are sentinels and flagships of conservation efforts that reach all kinds of biodiversity. Birds fly and so they can react quickly to ecosystem changes. Birds are also highly visible and they can be counted with greater accuracy than can many other species.

This also applies to seabirds in marine environments. The birds protected by Bill C-15 are excellent indicators. For example, seabird eggs have been used to assess contaminant levels in the Arctic monitoring and assessment program and the Great Lakes monitoring program.

● (1210)

We shall look after the conservation of birds, confident that this approach will have much wider benefits. If we can make sure that the bird population continues to survive and prosper, then in a large measure we can be confident that the environments in which they live remain healthy for a wide range of life.

With that in mind, allow me to address some of what the committee had to say about Bill C-15. The committee put forward an amendment that would include a minimum fine for illegal pollution by the largest ships. I am happy to support this proposed amendment. It restricts the application of the minimum fine only to the larger ships, those over 5,000 tonnes. It would leave intact the flexibility for the courts to use the sentencing options in the amended Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994 in the majority of cases brought under this legislation.

At the same time as amended, the bill will certainly send a strong message, one that should be heard loudly and clearly by the few in the international shipping industry that continue to view Canada's waters as fair game for the illegal discharge of their oily waste. The committee's proposed amendment shows that Canadians will not

stand for a continued illegal discharge of oil into our marine environment and they want the illegal polluters to pay heavily.

The amendment sends a strong message that Canadians want the polluters to be subject to fines that are large enough to deter them from similar or repeated illegal actions. The amounts proposed by the committee's amendment ensure that these fines represent much more than just what some might consider the cost of doing business.

Much as I support this amendment, I would like to propose a further refinement. The committee's amendment establishes minimum fines for ships over 5,000 tonnes. As it stands now, fines are paid to the Receiver General and go directly into the consolidated revenue fund. There is no option to direct the fines to programs for environmental remediation or restoration.

This further amendment goes against some of the changes to the sentencing considerations and options now in the Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994 and proposed in Bill C-15. There the court has the option to fine an offender a nominal amount and then make an order directing the offender to pay the bulk of the penalty into a program of environmental damage assessment or restoration.

My proposal maintains the spirit of the committee's amendment. It is drafted to ensure that fines received by the Receiver General for an offence that is committed under the Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994 be directed to the environmental damages fund. This is an existing fund that was established in 1995 for the purpose of supporting environmental restoration. I hope that members will see the merit in this amendment.

I would also like to address some of the concerns that have been expressed by stakeholders in the shipping industry. I believe that some of their concerns result from a misunderstanding of certain aspects of the bill. I have two points to make.

The Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994 and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 1999 already apply to the discharge of oil into Canada's territorial seas. These two laws deal with the protection of natural resources. They apply in Canada's 200 mile exclusive economic zone.

The question is not whether to apply them because they do. The difficulty lies in whether the existing act has the necessary authority to effectively enforce these acts in the 200 mile exclusive economic zone. Bill C-15 enforces that gap. It is very important.

Again, I would like to commend the committee for its fine work. These measures are good for Canadians and for our economy. They are good for preserving our rich natural heritage and the migratory birds that are such an important part of the heritage.

I would hope that the House would accept the committee's report and its amendments to Bill C-15. Further, I would request the House to consider the additional amendment that I have proposed.

● (1215)

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to the amendment, which we support. It is only right that we do anything we can do to prevent the disasters that happen year after year.

Government Orders

It is probably very appropriate that we deal with such a bill and amendment at this time. We just witnessed a major spill off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador in relation to leakage from two of oil rigs, one a minor one to some extent, although no oil spill is minor, and the other a fairly major one. The drastic thing about it is the spill occurred because nobody was minding the shop and oil was leaking for quite some time before anybody noticed it. That is unforgiveable.

I listened to the parliamentary secretary try to give his voice around the names of some of the birds. It is quite evident that he did not do a lot of gunning on the cliffs of Baccalieu. We appreciate that because each part of the country has its distinct wildlife. Some of the birds that live on and off the Atlantic coast are entirely different from what we would find in other areas. However, year after year we see several thousand, in some cases hundreds of thousands, of migratory birds destroyed because of carelessness and by uncaring individuals.

Every now and then an accident happens. Undoubtedly, the recent oil spills from the oil rigs were accidents, but maybe unpreventable ones. That is not the case with the oil that is dumped by ships quite often. They do that intentionally to get rid of the old oil. They go out where they think nobody can see them and dump the oil.

Oil leaves a smooth sheen on the waters. Birds flock to smooth water. We often hear about putting oil on troubled waters. That is exactly what happens. The oil has a smoothing effect. Birds flock there, oil gets on their feathers, the feathers become matted, the birds cannot then keep the heat in their bodies and they freeze. Usually they head for shore.

I can remember growing up in the area where I still live. Hunting in the winter was extremely important. It was not a sport. It could be very dangerous and we had many accidents. Some people lost their lives trying to hunt from slippery cliffs. In those days people hunted for subsistence, and sea birds added tremendously to the food supply. At certain times during the winter, one would find hundreds of birds flocking to the shore covered with oil. Some had a small amount on them which at that stage had not hurt them. Others were completely and utterly coated. These birds suffered terrible deaths because of carelessness. Hundreds and in some cases hundreds of thousands were found. However, how many really were destroyed is something about which we do not know. With our huge coastlines, many would be eaten by predators at sea or even sink?

It is all well and good that the fines we will impose on these ships will be put into a fund that will help deal with the situation and with the environment generally. However, we are forgetting one thing. In order to levy a fine on any of the boats, we have to catch them. Then we have to prove they dumped the oil into the ocean. We have seen in recent years a number of occasions where boats have been discovered dumping oil. We have seen the skippers and owners of the boats being taken to courts. Many of them get away because it can not be proved that boat or its owner or the skipper is responsible for dumping that oil.

● (1220)

I suggest the members should look at one story of the *Tecam Sea*, which was tracked by satellite. Pictures showed oil flowing from the boat into the water. This was all the evidence we would ever want to have first-hand. Yet when the case came to court, it was dropped because of infighting between the Department of the Environment

and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Coast Guard. Perhaps the Department of Justice was involved also.

We have to get our act together. We need one department that will be responsible for the prosecution of these boats. We have to stop the infighting, the political games and favouritism of whom owns the ships. Unless we do that, it will not matter how much of a fine we impose or where the fine goes. There will be no charges against owners or skippers of the boats, and they will not be held responsible in the eyes of the court because we will be unable to prove those charges.

One concern we have is what is happening to our coast guard. We know full well over the years that funding to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Coast Guard has been cut tremendously. This has had a very negative effect on guarding our coasts, which protects us from this very thing and allows us to identify and prosecute.

One thing the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has done over the last few years is arrange overflights from the St. John's area by provincial airlines. They have done a tremendous job, with the best technology in the world, of not only watching foreign trawlers as they fish off our coast to see if they abuse the rules, but also identifying any laws that might be broken in relation to dumping at sea. Now we have seen again tremendous cutbacks and now the Department of Transport is responsible for the overflights originating from Moncton. There is a minuscule amount of flights compared to what there was earlier. Therefore, again that ability to spot oil on the water, which can easily be done by overflights, has now been lessened.

The bottom line is we support the amendment because it is a good one. The bill itself is a good one provided that the fines are heavy enough. However, unless we have the ability to go out there to identify and prosecute and unless we have the intestinal fortitude to stand up for what is right, then all is in vain.

Perhaps we will take the issue seriously and start to deal with this in the manner it should. We are doing a grave injustice to our wildlife, our coasts and to the people of our country by being so negligent in prosecuting those who do not care about these things.

* * *

● (1225)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe you would find consent for the following motion. I move:

That when the House begins debate on Government Business No. 7 pursuant to Standing Order 53.1(3) later this day, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be entertained by the Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[*Translation*]

MIGRATORY BIRDS CONVENTION ACT, 1994

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-15, an act to amend the Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994 and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, as reported (with amendment) from the committee and of Motion No. 1.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise in this House today to speak on Bill C-15, to amend the legislation concerning migratory birds and marine ecosystems.

This bill was discussed at length in committee. We have always maintained that there was a basis for this legislation, and that it was vital that the government bring it in. Why? Because, in recent years, too many birds have been the victims of the irresponsibility of vessel owners who, often deliberately and intentionally, discharged oil into Canadian waters.

It is estimated that more than 300,000 birds were killed by discharges by vessel owners in recent years. It is important to realize that a single quarter is enough to kill a bird. So, given that fact, it was time for the government to assume its responsibility and introduce legislation. This bill may not necessarily provide all the guarantees. There will be inspections and monitoring and better control will have to be enhanced in the coming years. However, from a statutory point of view, it was clear that the current legislation had to be strengthened.

How? First, by increasing penalties for owners who are responsible for discharges. With this bill, we are quadrupling the penalty and fine that would be imposed on guilty owners. Shipowners who commit such offences could be ordered to pay a \$1 million fine.

Second, we are trying to eliminate loopholes to the extent that we can by clearly specifying that, when an offence is committed, the owner is not the only one who could be charged, but also the employees. Why? We know the shipping industry in Canada and, of course, around the world. We are well aware that numbered companies are prevalent in this industry, thus making it increasingly difficult to identify responsible parties, find them and initiate proceedings against them.

Therefore, charges will no longer apply only to shipowners; indeed, the responsibility has been extended to ensure that there are individuals who are actually held responsible and who have to pay the fines set in the bill.

Third, we expand Canada's exclusive economic zone to beyond 200 miles. Why? Again, because major shipowners are too irresponsible. In the past, when they wanted to intentionally discharge hydrocarbons in our waters, they would go outside Canada's zone to do so. The bill will extend the control zone to beyond 200 miles and this will allow us to monitor shipowners' activities.

The bill also broadens the powers of Environment Canada when it comes to monitoring activities, and also arresting and detaining ships.

• (1230)

Until now, the Department of the Environment did not have enough authority to take action with regard to shipowners. So, the bill provides such guarantees so that Environment Canada will have the necessary authority to act.

I must remind the House of another aspect. Earlier, I was discussing and debating the sanctions set out in the bill, the quadrupling of fines, up to \$1 million, for shipowners. However, experience to date has shown that, quite often, it is impossible to identify the guilty parties. The judiciary has the latitude to impose a penalty, but there was no minimum fine or sanction. The fine has been quadrupled, but only the maximum fine; there is no minimum fine. So the imposition of a penalty was left to the discretion of the judiciary.

The average fine previously imposed in Canada on shipowners who dumped oily waste, is only \$30,000. Only a \$30,000 fine for major Canadian or foreign shipowners, because they dumped significant amounts of oily waste in our waters, causing the death of over 30,000 birds per year. That is ridiculous.

When we compare the average in Canada to that of Great Britain or even the United States, believe it or not, we can see that the average fine in these two countries is between \$400,000 and \$500,000. In Canada, however, it was up to the judge to decide the monetary penalty, which, on average, was \$30,000. What is \$30,000 for a major Canadian shipping company like Canada Steamship Lines? That is nothing.

What did the Bloc Québécois do? Under the circumstances, my hon. colleague from Beauport—Limoilou decided to move an amendment. This was a first in the environmental field. This amendment establishes a minimum fine prescribed by law, so that the judges no longer have total discretion. A minimum will be prescribed by law: \$500,000 or \$100,000, depending on the type of vessel.

Why? Because the maximum is already provided for. But this amendment will ensure, first, that a fine is imposed, which was not necessarily the case with the previous system, second, that there will be a minimum fine and, third, that the fine imposed on the shipowner or shipping business will be three or four times higher than what has been the average in Canada until now.

This amendment put forward by the Bloc Québécois, by the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou, which is a first in the environmental field, has the support of the committee. I think we are on the right track.

Government Orders

Ultimately, this government bill and amendment are designed to ensure that all amounts collected through fines imposed on the various shipowners do not end up in the consolidated revenue fund, the government's general fund, but are deposited directly in a special fund, a conservation fund for migratory birds and the environment. This will be an environmental damages fund, a government proposal which I have the pleasure of supporting today. It is our intention to support this government amendment.

We have succeeded in going in the right direction with a more stringent bill, an amendment put forward by the Bloc Québécois to set a minimum fine and, today, a further amendment by the government to ensure that all fines received will go directly to the environmental damages fund, and not to the government's consolidated revenue fund.

• (1235)

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague across the floor for his excellent speech and for his ability to concisely put together a number of things that have come together under Bill C-15.

Both the amendment and the bill say a great deal to me in terms of how this new government is meant to function. This legislation encourages the government to resist certain pressures it receives from some of its more corporate-minded friends. It also speaks to me of the ability, in this minority government, to put through amendments at committee stage that strengthen the bill and give it teeth.

Clearly in having environmental legislation in this country that is voluntary or is meant to be at the lowest common denominator, we find that industry time and again falls to that lowest common denominator and falls into the voluntary status. Industry does not rise to the place that we Canadians would like to hold it to. This is an example of reality versus perception.

For many years the Liberals have said during election campaigns that they were the protectors of the environment, that they were the great defenders of our environmental status. Yet what we have seen, as recently as last week, is that pollution numbers in this country are going up consistently. To me, this speaks to inefficiencies. When I see pollution coming out of a stack, when I see it leaving the tailpipe of a car, that speaks to me of a machine or an operation that is not working as well as it could or ought to. I am speaking about noise pollution, chemical pollution and all the rest.

Bill C-15 speaks very specifically to the intentional and deliberate pollution of our ocean waters. Clearly for many members in the House this is not the most riveting debate, yet at the same time this is an indicator of how we need to be considering our environment and starting to increase the seriousness of the discussion and the seriousness of the consequences for those companies that deliberately pollute the environment simply out of convenience or cost savings.

The most recent example is the oil spill off the east coast, which has been talked about. The Minister of Natural Resources has called it a tragedy. He called it a tragedy only because of the fact that at \$50

a barrel it was a shame to have lost all that oil into our ocean. He is missing the point entirely of what it means to have a spill in this modern day and age.

Here is what we noticed when the thousands of ocean birds started washing up on shore. When the oil was tested it was found not to have come from the rig that had broken down but from ships that had passed through the spill. Captains of those ships decided that the best way to operate their ships was to go through a known spill, dump their bilge oil rather than go into port and properly take care of it, and then get away scot-free. This is the way business has come to operate.

While there are many strong and environmentally sound players out there, we know that the shipping industry also operates on the law of the high seas, which is based upon "if you can't catch us then you can't fine us", and if they cannot be fined, then no one knows it has been done.

While I rise in support of the bill, the minimum fine precedent that my hon. colleague spoke of is very important when we look at other considerations in the environment. What is it when a company spills intentionally into a community's drinking water? What is it when an oil pipeline is not constructed properly and eventually leaks or breaks, contaminating an entire area? What is it when a car manufacturing company builds a car that it knows could be more efficient and decides not to?

At what point will we decide to use the power of this place, the power of legislation at hand, to encourage companies, politely yet forcefully, to act in ways that are more responsible, respectable and efficient, whether that company is a smelting operation, a car manufacturer or any such operation within our country?

We have forgotten a basic principle, which is that to operate a company within this country is not a right but a privilege. It is a privilege that is given by society as a collective whole. Whether it is a shoe making company, a company that makes lollipops or a company that makes oil tankers, we as a society decide that the business is permitted to operate within our borders.

When we get into the international shipping reality, as my hon. colleague mentioned, and fine a company like Canada Steamship Lines whose former owner is worth hundreds of millions of dollars and may spend \$20,000 or \$30,000 on Christmas cards in any given year, it is not serious. That suddenly becomes a cost of doing business. We need to stop externalizing the cost of doing business in this country. If a company is allowed to run its costs up the smokestack into the air or out into the water or into the oceans and not pay for those costs of doing business, then we as consumers are not paying properly for the things we acquire and we as a governing body are not upholding our responsibility to Canadians.

Government Orders

There is a second part to this. It arose in committee and I am looking forward to the actual and accurate piece of legislation. What happens when these fines are levied? In the past, environmental fines have been written off against a company's taxes, again as a part of doing business. A calculation is done on whether it is worth it to the company to pollute because the cost can simply be written off whatever taxes it is meant to pay to whatever level of government. It simply becomes an order of the day, a cold and calculated measurement, which we as society end up paying for twice. We pay for it first through the pollution in the environment and second through taxes and revenues that do not accrue to roads and health care and all those things our tax money is meant to go toward.

• (1240)

As for the birds that we have been talking about, a lot of people visit the ocean very rarely so they see few of these waterfowl, which mean very little to them, but I have been considering them as an indicator species for the way we are treating our environment. They are visible. They are seen and known. People see them when they wash up. As has been mentioned many times in the House, it does not take much, just a small drop, on the body of an ocean-going bird to kill it, to ruin its ability to live and survive. These are simply the indicators, the things that we are able to see. The effects of pollution, whether it is in a child's asthma or increased cancer rates around a smelter, are much harder to detect and connect.

Finally, after many years of trying, it was in a minority government that it was pushed. A government was able to take recommendations and changes from the minority parties. That is what pushed this bill through. Hopefully it will pass in the Senate and get royal assent.

Let us look again at the shipping organizations. This is probably a clear message to them as well: simply lobbying their corporate friends in business and friends within the ruling government of the day, making sure that they are well taken care of, is no longer enough. These corporations actually have to make their case to the Conservatives, the Bloc and the NDP. They actually have to make their case, in this instance like many of the non-government organizations did. Clearly they made a better case for having something like a minimum fine, which, as has been said already, is a precedent in Canadian environmental law. We have finally said that if businesses do this and get caught, they will be paying a minimum fine of \$500,000.

We do have some concerns about where this fine ends up. If this were to end up hitting the workers on board the ships, who did not make the decision, who were not involved or did not have the power to stop the bilge dumping, we would have a problem with that. We need to go to the top of the food chain and find out who has the money and who is making the decisions to operate their business in such a way.

The only other major concern we have with this is the inability to actually enforce this piece of legislation. I come from a coastal riding. We have put together legislation with teeth. We have put together a piece of legislation that is going to fine businesses and cause them to reconsider their options when they are not sure what to do with all their extra oil, but the second part of it is our actual ability to catch these guys.

If the Coast Guard in my community and my riding is representative of how we are funding our Coast Guard across this country, we have a long way to go in getting to the point where we are actually able to see this happening, catch the people aboard the ships and make sure that the fines stick. This government has been consistent year in and year out in its lack of funding and support for our Canadian Coast Guard.

We have one of the largest coasts in the entire world. With the effects of global warming, we are soon going to be looking at the possible opening of the Northwest Passage. We have absolutely no ability to enforce our sovereignty in that area. We have seen this just recently with a number of European nations starting to make some claims about some of our northern islands. As preposterous as this sounds to Canadians, that we could lose territory simply by not being there, it is becoming a reality.

As the ice starts to break up more and more and ships are trying to get through on a more consistent basis, sovereignty comes into question, because we have absolutely no ability to actually be out on the water watching the polluters, the shipping traffic and the submarines of other countries go through our coastal waters in the north. Certainly our submarines cannot go out there anymore.

• (1245)

We need to start supporting our Coast Guard in a serious way. If we are actually going to enforce what we think is good legislation and a good amendment to that legislation, we need to at some point get serious about the notion that we have enormous, beautiful and resilient coasts that need our protection.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The question is on Motion No. 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion No. 1 agreed to)

• (1250)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in at the report stage and read the second time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[English]

TELEFILM CANADA ACT

Hon. Jean Lapierre (for the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Minister responsible for Status of Women) moved that Bill C-18, an act to amend the Telefilm Canada Act and another act, be read the third time and passed.

Hon. Sarmite Bulte (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-18, amendments to the Telefilm Canada Act.

I will begin by thanking the members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage for their excellent work on this bill. In keeping with the debate on second reading of the bill in the House, the discussion in committee was both constructive and succinct. As a result, we have arrived at third reading in a very timely fashion.

Bill C-18 is straightforward legislation. It is my hope that the bill will continue to move through the parliamentary process in a straightforward manner.

Telefilm Canada supports the production of high quality Canadian products that celebrate and reflect our cultural and regional diversity to Canadians and to the world. In this way, it plays a key role in helping the government to achieve our cultural policy objectives.

I want to remind members that Telefilm Canada was created in 1967 as the Canadian Film Development Corporation with a mandate "to foster and promote the development of a feature film industry in Canada."

Telefilm fulfills this mandate in a most worthy way.

However Telefilm Canada's mandate as a cultural investor has, over recent years, extended beyond feature films. Telefilm is now also dedicated to the development, production, promotion and distribution of popular Canadian television programs and new media products. It is involved to some extent in the sound record industry as well.

Many of the high quality cultural products that Telefilm has helped bring to fruition have not only captivated Canadians of all ages, they have attracted audiences and acclaim around the world. These successes underline the fact that good storytelling transcends borders, language and also cultures.

I will mention some of the productions that have benefited from Telefilm's expertise and funding.

•(1255)

[Translation]

In the film world, *Les invasions barbares*, the *Barbarian Invasions* walked off with the Oscar for best foreign film in 2003. *Séraphin, Un homme et son péché* was a phenomenal box office success in Canada, with receipts of close to \$10 million.

[English]

Mambo Italiano is the most lucrative English Canada film ever, having been screened in more than 50 countries, and *Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner* was awarded the prestigious Gold Camera Award for a first feature film at the 2001 Cannes International Film Festival. Imagine, the first Canadian feature film in the Inuktitut language won one of the world's most prestigious film awards.

In television, the popular *Da Vinci's Inquest* is enjoyed in 45 countries across the world. The mini-series *Trudeau* attracted record-breaking audiences, proving that Canadians hunger for Canadian stories.

[Translation]

The format for *Un gars, une fille* has been sold and resold to 30 countries including Germany, France and Italy.

[English]

In the new media sector, Telefilm has invested in a new media content associated with popular television programs such as *Degrassi* and *The Toy Castle*, a wonderful Canadian program for young children.

Telefilm has also invested in new media content ranging from interactive educational games such *Mia Mouse*, to databases full of information about Canada and Canadians. In the sound recording industry, 13 music labels have benefited since 2001 from Telefilm's support for the implementation of forward looking business plans.

As technology has evolved, Telefilm has also evolved to meet the needs of Canadian creators in the audio-visual sector. Its original mandate, however, was never formally updated in recognition of its expanded role. Bill C-18 would simply formally extend the mandate of Telefilm to the entire audio-visual sector.

The proposed amendments to the Telefilm Act, thus, would simply confirm in law Telefilm's current activities.

[Translation]

Some members have wondered whether we do not need to go further in modernizing the Telefilm Canada Act. This is true. Bill C-18 has one specific objective, but as soon as it is passed, we fully intend to complete that process.

For the moment, we have the possibility of clarifying the important role Telefilm plays in the cultural life of our country, as it has evolved over time. The Auditor General has encouraged clarification of the Telefilm mandate, and the members of this House agree on the need for this.

[English]

Further, as a government, we have greater ambitions. For example, the government will be responding in detail to the Lincoln report on Canadian broadcasting. The report contained no fewer than 97 recommendations. Developing our response to such a great body of work is an exacting but most valuable exercise. However by the end of April the government will have made clear its overreaching priorities concerning broadcasting and how it plans to act on these priorities.

Government Orders

Canada's cultural institutions, both private and public, face complex new challenges and new possibilities in the digital age. At the same time, the demographics of our country are changing. We are more multicultural than ever before and their diversity needs to be reflected in our cultural policies and our cultural institutions.

Simply put, we need to ensure the clarity of the mandates of all of the cultural agencies in the Canadian Heritage portfolio but for now we must send to Telefilm the message that we want it to continue in its role in helping to bring Canadian experiences and viewpoints to Canadians and the world. We can do this by supporting Bill C-18.

It is heartening that during the course of debate on the bill no one has questioned the success of Telefilm. No one questions the invaluable contribution of the arts and culture to the economy and the life of our country. No one questions the importance of the audio visual sector.

I am delighted at the degree of unanimity on culture matters that has been demonstrated thus far in the House but this support of culture should not come as any surprise given the contribution of the sector to our communities and to our economy.

The audio visual sectors keep 225,000 Canadians at work in creative skilled jobs. These innovative Canadians are very much part of the knowledge based economy that is critical to Canada's future prosperity. Cultural industries help create culture rich communities, and these are exactly the kinds of places that are most attractive to today's business investors.

Let there be no doubt about where the government stands on cultural matters, whether it is film, TV, music or new media, our cultural products speak for us in words and images that reverberate across our country, in cities and in rural and remote areas, but most important, around the world. They reflect our aspirations, our values and our vision as a country. They deepen our mutual understanding across diverse cultural backgrounds. They enrich our lives and contribute to our economy.

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

The government unreservedly supports Canadian culture and the cultural institutions like Telefilm that serve it well.

We are not alone in that, I know. Many members of all parties and from all regions of the country support us.

I would therefore call upon all hon. members in this House to support Bill C-18.

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I take the opportunity of this debate on Bill C-18 to speak about the surplus announced by the Minister of Finance. The Department of Finance has cut back on funding credits to Telefilm Canada, among others. This is a cut in the funding of a crown corporation whose activities contribute directly to the work of a great many artists and cultural creators in general. These cuts affect the quality of these people's professional lives, and these are people who contribute to the improvement of everyone's quality of life in Canadian and Quebec society.

At the same time as this reallocation exercise, the Minister of Finance is announcing an unexpected surplus of around \$8 billion. It

is disgraceful to attack a group of people so essential to the country's identity, who face real financial difficulties, while enjoying surpluses in the billions of dollars.

Elementary decency would tell the government to review its supplementary estimates in light of its new-found room to manoeuvre. However, it does not want the cultural sector to get its hopes up too high. The government has identified its priorities clearly. On a factual basis, it does not see the cultural sector as one of its priorities.

I would like to hear what the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage has to say to our fellow citizens, to those listening at home, about the coherent nature of her vision as a minister, if she has one.

[*English*]

Hon. Sarmite Bulte: Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to unequivocally state that indeed culture is definitely part of the government's priorities. It was made clear in the Speech from the Throne which was delivered by Her Excellency, the Right Hon. Adrienne Clarkson in October. In fact, it was a priority under the communities and cities agendas which acknowledged that culture was the essence of our communities and cities.

The Prime Minister has made it absolutely clear to everyone in this country that the government has three major priorities: first, health care, a deal which he has achieved already; second, child care, and he has put into place a framework which the Minister of Social Development is working on; and third, cities and communities, part of which is culture.

It is interesting to note that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities recently passed a unanimous resolution calling for the Minister of Finance to renew the Tomorrow Starts Today program. A few weeks ago, when the Federation of Canadian Municipalities was in Ottawa, I was delighted to see that even the federation saw culture as integral to the vibrancy, strength and vitality of communities. To say that culture is not part of the government's vision would be absolutely incorrect.

I would like to take this opportunity to address the member's comment about cutbacks to Telefilm. Let us be clear. Those were not cutbacks. When we looked at the supplementary estimates in committee, we looked at \$1 billion which had been part of a review of all government programs. Each department had been asked to see how we could make the departments more efficient.

I could not agree more with the member and I would ask him to help me to advocate to the Minister of Finance how we should increase the envelope, not just for Telefilm but for other important cultural institutions such as the Canada Council, the Canada Broadcasting Corporation and Radio-Canada. It is important that we have this debate in the House to demonstrate how arts and culture is integral to our country. It is not something that we get on the side. It is as integral as our health and educational systems.

Again, I welcome the member's comments. I hope that we can work together to ensure that in the next budget the cultural component is indeed increased.

Government Orders

• (1305)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up on my colleague's question because I was listening very closely, but I did not hear a straight answer.

We are talking about estimates that show major cuts to Telefilm, to the National Film Board, and to the CBC over the next two or three years. These are the estimates that the people in these organizations must be dealing with for plans. Is the money going to be restored and will it be restored fully? I appreciate the fact that it is the job of the opposition to push the government to do this, but surely if this is a commitment that was laid out in the throne speech, will this money be put back and will it be put back before March 31?

Hon. Sarmite Bulte: Mr. Speaker, let us be clear about what we looked at. We looked at supplementary estimates going up to March 31. These are moneys that were taken away in the past as part of the whole government looking at how to increase its efficiencies and reduce costs. It was part of a great exercise. I believe that the CBC put in \$10 million. I do not have the actual estimates in front of me.

Nobody wants to see cuts and I definitely agree with that; however, to say that this is something for two and three years is incorrect. Not only is it misleading, but it is totally incorrect. One of the commitments that the government made was to look at the important role that our cultural institutions play, such as Telefilm.

As we said in committee, and as I said here today in the House, we will be moving forward to look at the role and mandate of Telefilm. Hopefully, at that time, we can look at increasing its mandate as well, that the funds will be there so that it can carry out the new mandate that I hope all parties will look at.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the hon. member's speech, questions and comments. I remember sitting with her on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. I remember her as a woman who, at the time, fought with great conviction to protect artists. That was seven years ago already.

Today, I am concerned by her speech, because she did not say much about artists, about their happiness, their well-being and the well-being that they provide to the community. Instead, she spoke about the Prime Minister's priorities, including health, municipalities and communities, in which she includes culture.

I do not know how she can reconcile her original interests, namely culture and artists, with communities and municipalities. I would really like her to clarify that point.

How can the hon. member rise in this House and not condemn her government, which in fact has made cuts to its funding? I wonder if the hon. member could elaborate on this.

[*English*]

Hon. Sarmite Bulte: Mr. Speaker, let us not forget that it was this government in 2001 who reinvested the largest amount into the arts and cultural sectors with an investment of \$560 million. It was the largest investment since the creation of the Canada Council almost 50 years ago. It was originally a three year program which was then renewed for another year. As I have said before in the House, we are

working through program review and hoping to work with the finance minister to renew this program as soon as possible.

With respect to defending the artists, well I do defend the artists. I personally contribute thousands of dollars to support cultural institutions for a very good reason. We must ensure that our cultural institutions are there to survive, to pay fairly what the artists deserve, to ensure that they have continuing work, and to ensure that they are able to participate in various parts of the sector from theatre, to television, to film. If those institutions are strong, then it will ensure that our artists are strong and our artists have voices, that they are paid properly. I would submit those two things go hand in hand.

• (1310)

Ms. Bev Oda (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this amendment to the Telefilm Canada Act is a technical bill, an exercise in housekeeping for this agency.

Telefilm was created as the Canadian Film Development Corporation in 1967. Its mandate was to foster and promote the development of a feature film industry in Canada. Originally, it was given \$10 million to invest in the film industry as a loan fund. In 1984 it was renamed Telefilm Canada.

Over the years it has nurtured creative minds in Canada who wanted to be part of our country's legacy in the field of film. The government's investment into this organization has grown from \$10 million to \$19 million in 1977, to \$165 million in 1980, and to today's allocation of \$250 million.

From its first years its attempts to create a viable film industry have been valiant and we have seen many successes. However, today, as over past decades, many films made by Canadians are unseen by Canadians. I look forward to a review of the Canadian film industry to be undertaken by the heritage committee in the new year.

Although government support for feature film development has increased over the years, it does not represent the major portion of the \$250 million of Telefilm's budget. Over the years as technology evolved Telefilm has been assigned new responsibilities not by mandate nor legislative reform but by convention. These responsibilities are in other film related fields but fields not mandated through legislation to this agency. In fact, these activities are being done without a legal mandate, in some cases for over 20 years.

As its activities expanded the government directed more and more funds toward these non-legislated activities and not until the Auditor General identified these technical inconsistencies has the government acted to legalize these activities.

As the government stated earlier, through the parliamentary secretary, Bill C-18 simply places in law what it has been doing out of the legislative framework. Why does the government consistently disregard their responsibility for accountability in the use of taxpayers' dollars? The bill finally provides the legislative authority to expand Telefilm's mandate from only feature film into television programming, new media and sound recording.

Government Orders

Today we have an amendment to the act in response to the Auditor General's remarks, but this bill is only a first step. The ministry cannot plan to replace a real dialogue on the future of the film industry in Canada with only this exercise in housekeeping.

If the government were serious about governing and not only addressing inconsistencies when it is caught, this legislation would be bringing forward a new vision for Telefilm and not simply correcting the past. This bill should be part of a greater process. It should be part of the process of ensuring that Telefilm is relevant for the next 35 years, not simply catching up for the past 35 years.

Although Bill C-18 is better than the status quo, it is a housekeeping bill which I believe should lead to a bigger process, a process that we have been demanding in so many of the broadcasting and cultural areas.

As the parliamentary secretary stated, a review is called for, if only the government would determine its priorities. If Bill C-18 is bringing into the legislative framework activities the government has allowed it to carry on, we wonder what other activities the government is allowing to be carried on outside of the legislative framework.

What will happen to Telefilm in the future? What will happen to Telefilm Canada if its television production support program is now moved to the Canadian Television Fund to address the challenges faced by that fund? Will Telefilm's recent policy changes, to increase box office share by making movies with broader appeal, be maintained by its new executive director Wayne Clarkson?

In its annual report for 2003-04 the board of Telefilm itself also asks for a revision of the Telefilm Canada Act in order to modernize its framework and financial mechanism. Bill C-18 responds to that request. This bill is adequate for what it is, a first step. However, support for this bill should not imply that the challenges ahead have been met. There is more work to be done.

• (1315)

Now that Telefilm has been given a mandate that matches its activities, Canadians would like to be assured that Telefilm is not only acting in a way that is accountable to the Canadian, but that it is successful in meeting its mandate as well. The government is responsible for taking a leadership role. What Canadians need from our federal government is a vision and the courage to take hold of the future and to ensure that Canadian creators have a significant part to play in that future. I look forward to working on the future together with the creative and production community in Canada.

The audio visual industries are critical to Canada and each sector deserves the needed support through effective and meaningful programs. I find it interesting that the government has asked the opposition parties for support to convince the finance minister to ensure there is funding for the cultural communities. Support for the cultural communities was referred to in the throne speech. We would like to be convinced that not only are the cultural industries being supported by the minister and the parliamentary secretary, but by the entire government as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Madam Speaker, we as democratic sovereignists are here today, December 13, 2004, to

debate Bill C-18 not just out of respect for Canada's institutions, nor out of the respect and admiration we have for you, Madam Speaker, or all the parliamentarians here. We are here mainly to defend the interests of Quebec and its move to full and complete sovereignty.

Like many on this side of the House, it is not because of some folk tale longing or fanatical reflex that I am committed to creating the country of Quebec, but from a conscious decision. Now more than ever Quebec wants to be freed from the shackles of this Confederation in which it is trapped.

To make myself understood in the present situation, let us put a few things in perspective.

After October 1995, with hands over their hearts, they promised to improve the functioning of Canada in order to satisfy Quebec's demands concerning its interaction with the central government. They did not keep their word. They continued to run Canada as though nothing significant had happened in Quebec one night in October 1995.

In their eyes, the desire for change as expressed democratically by half the population of Quebec was nothing more than a tempest in a teapot in the government's efforts to standardize—or weaken—Quebec culturally, politically, economically and socially. What contempt.

In 1999, there was nothing but contempt in the Clarity Act, which was full of rhetoric and ideas from unenlightened dictators, an act that ridiculed Quebec's democracy and the integrity of its National Assembly. What contempt.

Also in 1999, nothing but contempt in the framework agreement on the social union, which is crushing the aspirations of Quebec. This agreement was not validated by Quebec, it does not recognize the existence of the Quebec people, but instead recognizes the equality of the provinces as such, Quebec being considered just a province, a conquered territory.

This agreement recognizes Ottawa's right to spend and deal directly with organizations or individuals without consideration for Quebec's areas of jurisdiction, even if the matters involved are under Quebec's exclusive jurisdiction.

This agreement forces Quebec to concur with Ottawa on the development of new programs in areas under Quebec's jurisdiction and then to meet Canadian standards set by the centralist government.

This agreement obliges Quebec to report to the federal government on the management of various programs; there is, however, no reciprocal arrangement.

This agreement excludes all possibility of Quebec opting out with financial compensation if, given its uniqueness and responsibilities, it wanted to implement its own such programs.

The list goes on with Ottawa's persistent refusal over the past 40 years to negotiate the transfer of responsibility for culture, communications and telecommunications.

All this reflection engendered by Bill C-18 serves to remind members that they are building a highly centralized Canada, impotently united at the expense of a beleaguered Quebec, brought to its knees and constitutionally humiliated with the complicity of its own provincialists.

Quebec is a house. It is our house and we are very attached to it. It has walls—

• (1320)

[English]

Mr. Derek Lee: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do not mind occasionally listening to separatist rhetoric and mythology, but this is a bill about Telefilm Canada. The member insists on using this as a forum to spew separatist mythology and rhetoric. I would ask you, Madam Speaker, to insist on the rule of relevance and ensure that he is relevant in his comments. I am not prepared to listen to things that are not relevant to the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): This is a point of debate, but at the same time I would—

Mr. Derek Lee: Madam Speaker, I have raised a matter of relevance. Relevance is not a matter of debate, it is a matter of order. I insist that the Chair allow the House to hear debate on the subject relevant to the bill in front of the House, not the separatist rhetoric that we are getting now. It is not a matter—

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): The Chair has heard the member for Scarborough—Rouge River. The Chair rules that this is a point of debate, although we would ask members to keep to what is relevant to the present debate. The issue of Quebec is relevant and, therefore, I will ask the member to keep his remarks relevant to the debate.

• (1325)

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Madam Speaker, to continue, if our colleague over there had listened to the end, he would have seen the connection immediately. I trust he will have the patience to do so.

Quebec, as I was saying, is a house, our house. We are attached to it. It is a house with walls and a roof. We should be free to do whatever work we want on it, whenever we want to. We should be free to put in place the cultural regulations that we want.

We in Quebec live according to principles that are recognized by the great majority of “family members”. We need to be free to reflect our own image in our creativity, in our writings, to reflect our own image in our productions, our broadcasts. We have values that are ours alone, a genius that is ours alone, a sense of solidarity that is ours alone, a shared public language that is ours alone, and above all a culture that is ours alone.

Mr. Speaker, the world we live in is media saturated, globalized, dominated by market logic; it is a world exposed to cultural Darwinism, a world where film and other audiovisual media are extremely popular and powerful means of communication.

For years, in keeping with Ottawa's approach of intruding into other realms of responsibility, Telefilm Canada has imposed itself upon Quebec as a federal cultural body with a mandate for the development and promotion of the film and television industries.

Government Orders

Bill C-18, which we have before us here in third reading, is intended to integrate into the mandate of Telefilm Canada the entire audiovisual industry, that is film, television and new media. Among other things, it gives Telefilm the authority to act in the sound recording industry under agreements made with the Department of Canadian Heritage.

In fact, all Bill C-18 does is to update and make official the increased responsibilities Telefilm Canada already has. The current legislation does not reflect the real mandate of this intrusive agency, Telefilm Canada and needs to be updated. So Bill C-18 makes official the new Telefilm mission that has been in place for years.

In its annual report for 1997-1998, Telefilm Canada described its mission as including the development and promotion of the Canadian film and television industry and new media products. In a March 2002 survey on client satisfaction and needs, 21% of respondents said that they worked in the new media sector among others.

The main purpose of the bill is to act in audiovisual industries including film, television and new media and to provide authority to act in the sound recording industry under agreements made with the Department of Canadian Heritage. The Bloc Québécois does not have a problem with the main purpose of the bill. We have some reservations as previously mentioned.

Essentially the bill replaces the expressions “pecuniary interest in film activity” and “feature film production” with “audiovisual industry” and “film” with “audiovisual”. Let us also recall that it provides Telefilm with the authority to act in the sound recording industry under agreements made with the Department of Canadian Heritage, and provides it with the powers of a natural person. As well, everything done before the coming into force of this enactment is deemed to be valid to the same extent as it would be if it were done after this enactment comes into force.

The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-18. However, I repeat, the Bloc Québécois also believes that culture is a provincial jurisdiction and that the Department of Canadian Heritage is interfering in matters of the department of Quebec culture.

Part of the mission of the Quebec department of culture reads:

The mission of the ministère de la Culture et des Communications (MCC), in partnership with government corporations and other public bodies, is to foster within Québec the affirmation, expression and democratization of culture as well as the development of communications, and to contribute to their distribution within Quebec and abroad.

• (1330)

It does so while respecting the values of Quebec society. It also accomplishes its mission by maximizing benefits in artistic quality, community enrichment, and encouragement of regional, national and international development of businesses and agencies involved in culture and communications.

The ministry's mission always keeps the people of Quebec at the heart of its concerns. In order to promote public access to the arts, culture and communications, the ministry and its agencies rely on a group of partners, which primarily consist of organizations and people whose activities take place at one of the stages of the cultural and communications chain, creation, broadcasting, training, production, conservation, distribution and marketing, exports and promotion.

Government Orders

That should make clear to those who were not aware of it that there is a real machine in Quebec, a culture machine that is operational and sufficiently mature to stand alone, without a tutor, without a guardian.

To fulfil its mission, the government of Quebec must possess all the tools it needs for the development of culture in Quebec. That is obviously not possible given its situation of dependence.

First, I want to take this opportunity to ask, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, for the complete repatriation of powers related to culture and telecommunications, which are considered an essential support for culture. The Bloc Québécois is a sovereignist party that believes Quebec must have all necessary powers to determine its own future as it wishes.

I shall read part of an open letter signed by our leader, which appeared in *La Presse* on June 23, 2004.

—the decisions made in Ottawa too often prevent our cinema, our theatre, our television, our literature or the songs of Quebec from developing and making the impact they deserve. In addition, electronic distribution of our culture is threatened by the federal government's laissez-faire attitude and its inability to recognize our cultural uniqueness. Regulation of telecommunications includes the regulation of radio and television as the means of distributing culture.

If we cannot achieve complete repatriation, at a minimum, the Bloc supports the unanimous report from the Quebec National Assembly requesting “a new federal-provincial administrative agreement... in the field of communications”.

The purpose of such an agreement is to clarify the responsibilities of both levels of government in the field of communications and to affirm their common desire to promote, through coordinated actions, diversity in voices and choices. More specifically, it is to give Quebec a say in the licensing of the electronic media.

Ideally, Quebec should have its own regulatory and licensing body. Federal budgetary envelopes in this area should be transferred to allow Quebec to develop a cultural policy that truly reflects its reality.

This position was clearly stated in the Bloc's complementary opinion to the Canadian heritage committee's 2003 report on broadcasting.

The Bloc Québécois asks that the federal government respond positively to the request from the Quebec Government, which is unanimous in demanding a new federal-provincial administrative agreement [...] in the field of the communications.

The Government of Quebec is in the best position to defend its culture. It is completely reasonable that this is the government to address the cultural development of Quebecers. All Quebec governments, regardless of their political allegiance, have defended their autonomy and maintained that culture is an area of exclusive provincial jurisdiction.

The Bloc Québécois recommends that the federal government recognize that Quebec has sole responsibility for arts and culture in Quebec, and to sign a framework agreement with the Government of Quebec acknowledging this responsibility and transferring the necessary funds to Quebec.

The Bloc Québécois recommends that the federal government negotiate an agreement with the Government of Quebec to make the province solely responsible for communications and telecommunications undertakings.

This position is also consistent with Quebec's demands in this respect for the past 40 years.

Repatriating powers over culture and communications is in line with Quebec's demands over this period.

Frequency allocation cannot and must not be the prerogative of the federal government. Quebec can no longer tolerate exclusion from an area where it so obviously has a vital interest.

This is a quote from Daniel Johnson senior. It is found in a submission presented at the federal-provincial conference held in Ottawa, from February 5 to 7, 1968.

The Quebec government also presented the following position in July 1980:

Quebec is asking that the provinces' legislative authority in the area of communications and communication systems be entrenched in the Constitution—

● (1335)

What transitional measures could be implemented to give more room to Quebec? I am putting the question as a show of reaching out to members opposite. We think that only by negotiating a partial or full delegation of powers will Quebec be able to regulate as it wants to do the use of its cultural tools, the airwaves and the broadcasting of the Quebec culture.

What can the Minister of Canadian Heritage do to give more room to Quebec? She must be consistent with herself. In 1992, the Minister of Canadian Heritage wrote the following in Quebec's cultural policy:

In the current constitutional context, I, as the Minister of Cultural Affairs, intend to reaffirm the need for Quebec to obtain full control over its own culture. Culture is of paramount importance to Quebec. Therefore, it is important that its government have the exclusive powers that it needs to fulfill its responsibilities.

Now, we are waiting for concrete action.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today and speak in the House, as it always is.

I will begin by saying that the New Democratic Party supports Bill C-18, the act to amend Telefilm.

We have come a long way since Telefilm was formed in the 1960s. I think there is a recognition out there of the convergence of new media and the need to adapt to respond to new media and to continue in our fundamental obligation as government to work in cultural industries to promote our identity.

These amendments to change the act of course also came from recommendations from the Auditor General. I think they are very well put forward.

The discussion we are having today comes at a time of a fundamental watershed in Canadian cultural identity. We see ourselves as having built a very successful entertainment export industry. In fact, I would say that our number one export in the world is our artists. We have been very successful at that. We have had a somewhat more mixed success in terms of our ability to compete internationally in our film and television, particularly because we are so close to the United States.

Government Orders

I think there has always been a sort of false discussion about bad U.S. content and good Canada content. The fact is that in the United States we have seen the development of massive industries of entertainment. Over the last number of years a vertical integration has happened in these various media outlets from Hollywood and in music and television, such that it is making it incredibly difficult for other voices to be heard regionally across the United States, for example, but right across Canada.

I will give an example that I read about in Benjamin Barber's book *Jihad Vs. McWorld*. He describes the impact of the global U.S. entertainment culture. He says that this SpongeBob culture we are seeing is of a depth of only about three or four inches, like water, and it runs on a smooth plane, right across the community. If we look across the community we will still see the church steeples, we will still see the municipal buildings and the schools, and we will ask what kind of effect this mass popular culture has.

But what he concludes with is that children can drown in even six inches of water and we are looking at the spread of this thin layer of what we call popular culture coming out of Hollywood and other massive entertainment industries. Thus we have to ask ourselves, "Where is the room for our story?" A fundamental of any country is its ability to tell its own story. And it is not just to entertain, because we have come to see culture as entertainment; culture is how people group together. It is how they understand themselves. It is how they tell their history. It is how they can reflect their politics. It is how they can see where to go forward. We have to view culture as a multi-dimensional aspect of life. It is not simply our legends. It is not simply our songs. It is a whole fabric of the way a community interprets who it is.

In which case, I would bring us to where we are with the Telefilm discussion. Telefilm has been one of Canada's great success stories. We need to find ways to start improving the tools that we Canadians have in our cultural industries. What we are looking at with Telefilm is being able to move into the new mediums that they are already having to deal with, because, again, it is not just film and it is not just television. Our new mediums go from the web to PC games; there is a whole variety. That is where Canadians are moving. We need our institutions to have the tools to do that.

I fully support where we are going in terms of the Telefilm direction. To give an example of what we are looking at, we are talking about \$85 million that would be going to film; \$95 million to \$100 million to television; \$8 million to \$9 million to sound recordings; and \$9 million to new media, which could be websites or video games and other new technologies. On that front, I think we are definitely moving in a very positive direction.

However, I am very concerned that what we are doing is not nearly enough. I would not want to have anyone come out of today's debate thinking that the New Democratic Party thinks we are fully on the right road in terms of where we are going with our television and our film industries, because what we have seen over the last number of years is the continual downsizing of our government's support for these industries.

These industries need our support first of all because we are going up against such powerful and sometimes almost predatory heavyweights. It is almost impossible for a small film or television

company to be able to even get the access to compete against the U.S. giants. We need to support our artists.

Second, there is an economic component. We can see that the money that goes into arts and film has created thousands of jobs and has built some fantastic industries right across the country, but these industries are now in crisis and we cannot avoid that fact. We are seeing a major crisis right across the country, from Halifax to Vancouver, in terms of the power that our film and television industries have. We have to make some very clear decisions as a country and as a government about where we are going in terms of our support of our cultural entertainment industries.

● (1340)

There has been a real destabilizing that has gone on in the last 10 years under this Liberal government. There have been major cuts to arts, which have destabilized numerous of our grassroots, the incubators of culture. We are looking now at our upcoming estimates for future cutbacks: cutbacks to Telefilm, cutbacks to the National Film Board and cutbacks to CBC. On the one hand we are saying we support culture, but on the other hand arts groups and film people across the country are saying, "We cannot even make the fundamental decisions in order to make even basic movements forward because we have been so undermined".

When we talk about telling our story, it is almost like kitschy Canadiana in terms of how we like to talk about ourselves, like the roller piano from the Klondike and the happy lumberjack story. But the fact is that a lot of Canadian stories are not being told because there is not the needed funding in the areas where these stories are coming up.

For example, I bring up what happened to CBC. We saw devastating cuts to our regional programming. As someone who lives in an area of Ontario that is very distinct from southern Ontario and has a population the size of Saskatchewan, let me say that we do not have even a single television transmitter in our area of northern Ontario to speak to any of the issues that come out of CBC. We have no ability to even be heard on the national scale. We do not have the reporters up there to do that.

We are looking at undermining the distinct voices right across the country. We have to engage the government. In fact, the parliamentary secretary to the minister said it was the job of the opposition parties to make the case. It is unfortunate, but I seem to agree that it has become the job of the opposition parties to articulate the need for the government to commit to restoring the money that has been cut out of fundamental areas, such as, for example, the Canada Council, where we are seeing major cuts being planned on top of the cuts that have already been made. These are cuts which will come directly out of artists.

It is all fine and well for our government to say it loves artists. Well, I love little children and I like baseball too, but that is not really relevant to the matter. What is relevant is whether the government will put back the money to support these organizations so they can continue their job.

Government Orders

It is particularly distressing when we have such major industries as film, television and the Canadian book publishing industry now three and a half or maybe four months away from the new fiscal year and looking at zero in front of all their budget lines because they are being told there is no money. Is there no money? Maybe there is money, because the hon. minister loves arts; so maybe there will be money, but maybe there will not be. The months are ticking down to the new fiscal year and nobody is being hired, tours are not being planned, books are not being published and films are not being made.

So we can talk about a housekeeping bill, which this is, but the house is in terrible disrepair. I support the efforts to take the broom to the front door and clean up around the door, but I really think the roof needs fixing, because there is water pouring in on all levels of our house.

I would also like to say that I brought forward an amendment and it was shot down, unfortunately, but I think it is very important to raise in terms of Telefilm. We are talking about our support for the artists and we are talking about how much we value them. Yet when these bills come forward and we are talking about who sits on these boards, who sits on Telefilm, who sits on CBC, who sits on CRTC, we have no ability to guarantee that people who are committed to the arts community, people who are committed to arts and know the grassroots issues, the front line issues, have any representation on these boards.

Maybe the Telefilm bill is a housekeeping bill, but it would have been a nice foundational structural change to this housekeeping bill if we had said that someone from the arts community, someone who is involved in the day to day business of making a living and helping create culture, was sitting on that board, but that was shot down. It disturbs me greatly, because again it undermines, I believe, Canadians' confidence in our cultural institutions if we do not know why people are being appointed to these boards and who is making the decisions about appointing them.

I brought that forward as a potential amendment and it was not supported by any of the other parties. It is unfortunate, but I think it should be put on the record that we need to say that if we are going to support our artists it is more than rhetoric. Once again, we all love our artists, do we not? But until we start making some firm commitments as Canadians, we are going to continue to see an undermining of our export industries. We are going to see a continued loss of the jobs that have previously helped many of our urban areas. And we are going to see a continual erosion of what we like to call our story. I think that would be a national travesty.

• (1345)

I will conclude by saying that the NDP will support this bill going forward, but we believe the government has to do more. This government has to commit to coming up very soon with some honest answers about where it is going in terms of its funding for the arts, for film and for Canada's book industry. It has to let these people know so that they can get down to the business of doing what they do well, which is creating culture, creating jobs and creating export investments for us as a nation.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his speech. I understand where he is coming

from. He wants to stimulate and encourage the development of Canadian culture both at home and abroad and that is a very laudable goal.

I do want to point out a model that does exist in the world. I think it is showing very promising results. It is a creation of that famous socialist, Tony Blair, the Prime Minister of Great Britain. In his wisdom, he decided to lift ownership requirements on the media delivery system in Great Britain, to free that up and allow foreign investors and broadcasters to enter the British market and compete with the British broadcasters. In exchange for that change in policy, he had basically one requirement. It was that a certain percentage of the broadcasting that would be produced in Great Britain would be British made.

Since that policy has been initiated in Great Britain, British culture has flourished, not only in Great Britain but worldwide. I saw on the People's Network last fall an outstanding series on Churchill in the 1930s. It was a very high class production. Guess who produced that program? Lo and behold, it was HBO. The production was done with British actors, British directors and British producers. The program was being marketed around the world.

Mr. Murdoch, who I am sure is a villain for the NDP, has also flourished in that environment and has produced tons of high quality British broadcasting. I am only throwing this out because I am curious about what the reaction of the NDP would be to this policy of this famous socialist Prime Minister Tony Blair.

• (1350)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I think that is a very interesting suggestion. I would suggest that there are probably two fundamental differences between Great Britain and us. First and foremost would be the difference in terms of volume of audience. We are in some ways in a very difficult situation in Canada because we have people spread out so far across such a vast territory. We do not have the volume of people living in fairly close areas that the U.K. has.

I would have no problem with foreign television coming in here if it would meet a certain standard or a certain quota in terms of Canadian production. I think that would be very interesting.

However, I would question the hon. member about this, because what we have seen is that people do not seem to want to go out into rural Canada. As a member from a northern rural region, I find it very difficult to imagine that HBO is going to be interested in coming in and serving my market. I think that is a travesty. HBO might want to go in and cherry-pick Toronto because Toronto could look like any American city, and it might want to go to Vancouver or Montreal. But who is going to tell the stories of Saskatchewan? Who is going to tell the stories of Newfoundland?

If there were some way of bringing forward some serious bite in the legislation, it would be interesting. When we changed the CRTC regulations to improve to about 30% Canadian content, to allow more stations to start taking control of the market, that was a trade-off we made as Canadians. If the hon. member thinks the direction should be a 30% basic strictly Canadian content rate for Fox TV, I think that would be very interesting.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Madam Speaker, I have two comments.

The first is on the CBC. A great Canadian cultural institution in this country is curling. Northern Ontario has a rich curling history. Al Hackner was the Canadian curling champion from northern Ontario.

This year, CBC squeezed out a quality private broadcaster, TSN. This curling season we are not going to get any evening draws from the Brier because the CBC does not want to do that. It is carrying American programming in the evening and that is more lucrative. We are not going to get those draws at night. It has a billion dollar subsidy that TSN does not have, so naturally it is going to win those contests. Canadian culture is the loser on that.

On the member's point about selling rural Canada, places like Saskatchewan and northern Ontario, in my riding Brent Butt is from Tisdale, a small community in Saskatchewan. A high quality weekly comedy series called *Corner Gas* is being done on a private broadcaster. Americans are interested in that program. I understand it might be carried in the U.S. as well. This does not have anything to do with government. It is the private system delivering high quality programming to people. It can do the job if government in some areas would get out of the way.

• (1355)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, the Saskatchewan television show the member mentioned is an excellent example of what I have been talking about which is the need to promote art, film and television right across the country.

I have never said that the television and film industries mean the CBC. CBC is one piece of a multidimensional puzzle. That is something we need to move toward on a number of fronts.

As someone who likes *Men with Brooms* it is too bad the CBC did not come up to, I would like to say the plate, but whatever the term is in curling. I think that does not mitigate the fact that we need to support regional programming. We need to support the people who are innovative and who are doing interesting television because they will be exporting it.

If we have any other programming coming out of rural Canada, it should be marketed around the world because it should be the best.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): I declare the motion carried.

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

S. O. 31

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

MARRIAGE

Hon. Sarmite Bulte (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last week the Supreme Court ruled that the draft legislation referred to it by the Government of Canada upholds the right of same sex couples to civil marriage. As a result, the government can either move ahead with legislation to codify civil marriage for same sex couples or use the notwithstanding clause to take away this right.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms is a pillar of Canadian society. The rights protected under the charter are the same rights that protect churches, synagogues, mosques and temples from being obliged to perform marriage ceremonies that are contrary to their beliefs. This is not about religion. It is about equality.

The Prime Minister has stated that he will not use the notwithstanding clause to deny rights guaranteed by the charter. I am proud to say that I will be voting with the government and the Prime Minister to acknowledge same sex civil marriage.

We all have a choice. We can either uphold the charter because we believe in it, or we can abandon it. Parliamentarians must now make that choice.

* * *

• (1400)

CORNWALL CENTENNIAL CHOIR

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank and congratulate the Centennial Choir from the city of Cornwall in my riding Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry for its excellent concert on the Hill, an event that took place earlier this afternoon. The event raised money for SOS Children's Villages Canada, a charity that provides permanent loving homes for children who have been left homeless due to war, natural disasters and other calamities.

The Centennial Choir takes its name from Canada's centennial year, 1967, the year the choir was founded. It has approximately 65 members from throughout the three united counties of Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry. The choir produces annual spring and Christmas concerts and takes part in special events throughout the year in our community.

I encourage everyone to take any opportunity to attend a performance of the Cornwall Centennial Choir. I promise that people will not be disappointed.

* * *

RHODES SCHOLARS

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is with great honour that I stand before the House to share the news about two students from the University of Manitoba who have received the prestigious Rhodes scholarship, which provides two to three years of study at Oxford University in England. The recipients are chosen on the basis of academic achievement, integrity of character, community service, leadership potential and physical ability.

S. O. 31

The first student is Daniel Lussier from my riding of Saint Boniface, a fifth year mechanical and manufacturing engineering student. He is one of only three Rhodes scholarship recipients from the Prairies.

Graham Reynolds, the second recipient, a talented musician and an active volunteer with the Pro Bono Student Association, is currently studying at Dalhousie Law School. He was awarded a Leaders of Tomorrow scholarship in 1999 and earned the Gold Medal when he graduated from arts in 2002 from the University of Manitoba.

I am proud to say that my alma mater, the University of Manitoba, has produced more Rhodes scholars than any university in western Canada and places fourth among all Canadian universities in that category.

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[*Translation*]**SÛRETÉ DU QUÉBEC**

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, in the Mauricie and Centre-du-Québec district, the Sûreté du Québec is now led by a woman. Lieutenant Caroline Guay was recently appointed director for the regional county municipality of L'Érable.

Ms. Guay, who has been a police officer for 15 years, has assumed various responsibilities. She joined the Sûreté du Québec in 1991, as a patrol officer at the Témiscamingue police station, in the Abitibi. She fulfilled the duties of public affairs officer and investigator with the organized crime unit, where she also worked as the acting assistant to the director.

In 2001, she was seconded to the École nationale de police du Québec, where she worked as an instructor, and, in 2002, she was placed in charge of the initial training program for patrol officers.

Lieutenant Caroline Guay is the second woman in Quebec to hold such a position within the Sûreté du Québec. We congratulate her.

* * *

[*English*]**UNIVERSITY OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND**

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to share the news that the University of Prince Edward Island has announced that William E. Andrew of Calgary, Alberta will be appointed as the institution's seventh chancellor.

Mr. Andrew, a native of Milton, Prince Edward Island, is the president of Penn West Petroleum Ltd., a leading Canadian energy company. Mr. Andrew has worked with many community endeavours, including the Alberta Children's Hospital and the United Way. He is also involved in the Canadian harness racing industry. He will bring a wealth of experience to this position.

I know that Mr. Andrew's commitment to education and love for Prince Edward Island will inspire him to excel in his new position. Please join me in congratulating William E. Andrew on his appointment as the chancellor to one of Canada's great universities.

CHRISTMAS LIST

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Newton—North Delta, CPC): Madam Speaker, the holiday season is upon us, and in that spirit my constituents have a Christmas list.

They want a government that recognizes the supremacy of Parliament and lets parliamentarians, not judges, decide issues that matter most to Canadians. They want resources for law enforcement agencies to put a stop to gang violence, grow ops, break and enters, and auto theft. They want a justice system that works with police instead of against them. They want federal funds for vital infrastructure projects such as the South Fraser perimeter road, the Port Mann bridge, and the Fraser port. They want the final 422 acres of Burns Bog bought and protected. They want improved services at Surrey Memorial and Delta Hospitals and an end to waiting lists. They want open borders for the free flow of softwood lumber and beef. They want an efficient immigration system free from political interference. They want jobs and affordable housing for the homeless. They want an end to absurd political correctness that robs Christian holidays of their true meaning.

Merry Christmas, and may everyone's Christmas wishes come true.

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● (1405)

LACROSSE

Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Kawartha-Chrysler Peterborough Lakers won the Mann Cup this year. This revered trophy is emblematic of national supremacy in one of our national sports, lacrosse. After a tough season, the Lakers took on the Victoria Shamrocks and won the final series in six games. I congratulate the team members on their achievement. They gave our community a lift after a summer of floods.

I also congratulate and thank all those who have worked to maintain lacrosse in Peterborough over many years. In particular I thank and congratulate Ted Higgins, the Lakers coaching staff, its board of directors and supporters.

Once again Peterborough leads Canada in lacrosse.

* * *

[*Translation*]**THE GOVERNOR GENERAL**

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am rising in this House today to condemn the remarks made by the Governor General of Canada, Adrienne Clarkson.

The Governor General reacted with arrogance to the democratic vote taken in this House to reduce her budget.

Ms. Clarkson stated that the reduction of over \$400,000 imposed on her by members of Parliament will result in the elimination of events such as the ceremonies for the Order of Canada, and will have an even greater impact on winter events organized especially for children.

These comments are unworthy of the office held by Ms. Clarkson. She should cut her expenditures relating to official trips and lavish banquets, rather than targeting children. Not all children have the chance to enjoy the luxury to which she is entitled. In fact, more than one million children in Canada are living below the poverty line.

On behalf of children and their families, the Bloc Québécois asks for an apology from the Governor General.

* * *

CLUB RICHELIEU IN DALHOUSIE

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize today the 50th anniversary of the Club Richelieu in Dalhousie, New Brunswick. Founded in 1954, this community organization actively contributes to local development through a variety of fundraisers.

Since its creation, the Club Richelieu in Dalhousie has had nearly 200 members, all truly dedicated. Furthermore, in 50 years, the club has given more than \$600,000 to the community through contributions to sports teams, children in need, scout troops, student bursaries and so on.

The hard work of these volunteers helps make our communities proud, and that is why this organization deserves our recognition here today.

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[English]

MARRIAGE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been misleading Canadians, saying that the traditional definition of marriage was unconstitutional. Now we know that the Liberals have been deliberately misleading Canadians. The Supreme Court did not fall for that Liberal trap and has sent the issue of marriage back to Parliament where it belonged. The Conservative Party was right all along.

I agree with the majority of Canadians on the definition of marriage being between a man and a woman. That definition is constitutional, yet the Prime Minister wants to outlaw that definition against the democratic wishes of the majority. He will be tabling his own legislation and has threatened his caucus to vote for it or else.

Will the Prime Minister stop dithering, come clean about his hidden agenda where religious freedoms will be lost, where marijuana will be made legal and supplied by his government, and where child pornography will be considered art? He is wrong. I challenge him to permit a free vote for all members on these important issues.

* * *

RETT SYNDROME

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to pay tribute to a very brave young lady and her parents. Olivia, a constituent of Brant, was diagnosed with Rett syndrome at an early age. Since then, her family has actively petitioned for increased medical funding and has also created a network of support for families affected by Rett syndrome.

S. O. 31

Rett syndrome is a unique developmental disorder which begins in early infancy, almost always affecting females. Those with Rett syndrome lose previously acquired hand and verbal skills and remain dependent on care providers for life. Rett syndrome did not come to international attention until 1983. Since then, remarkable progress has been achieved in understanding the clinical history and pathophysiology of Rett syndrome.

I ask all hon. members to join me in commending Olivia and her family for their tremendous courage and determination.

* * *

• (1410)

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week an Iranian woman, a refugee claimant, was deported back to Iran. She was immediately detained, charged with leaving Iran illegally and could face the death penalty. She had fled Iran because of her activism on student and women's issues.

How could this happen given Canada's position at the UN where just last month Canada again condemned Iran's human rights record and its treatment of women? Has the government forgotten Zahra Kazemi's death?

How could the pre-removal risk assessment process conclude that there was no risk of return to Iran? Only 3% of PRRA reviews are successful, raising serious questions about their effectiveness. That Immigration Canada could be so off base with Canada's foreign affairs policy is appalling.

Two years ago Parliament passed the refugee appeal division, a fact based appeal on the merits of a refugee case. The government has refused to implement it, showing contempt for Parliament and leaving refugees at risk.

Deportations to Iran must stop immediately. Deportations to any country where there is any risk of persecution must end. The refugee appeal division must be implemented now.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Gordon Read, who served in the air force for 32 years, has discovered that his wife of 10 years will not be eligible for his military pension upon his passing. Why? It is because Mr. Read married after the age of 60.

How dare this Liberal government decide if a widow or widower should receive a veterans pension based on the age the veteran marries. This is an atrocity.

Our veterans put their lives on the line for our country. Is this how we repay them, by having them worry about what will happen to their loved ones after they are gone?

S. O. 31

[*Translation*]

IMMIGRATION

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Council for Refugees comprises organizations concerned with defending the rights of asylum-seekers and refugees.

Recently, this organization held a conference in Victoria at which participants wondered if Canada was still an asylum-granting country. I had the opportunity to talk with these people, who live each day in exile and who want only a safe place to live. I saw their disappointment about Canada's lack of consideration for them.

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the way in which it is currently enforced are inhumane. Since 2002, refugee claims are assessed by only one board member, whose decision cannot be appealed. Although the 2002 legislation set out an appeal process, it has never been implemented.

I remind the government, since it seems to have forgotten, that asylum-seekers have a right to dignity, justice and security. For this reason, the Bloc Québécois demands the immediate implementation of the appeals division for refugee claimants.

* * *

[*English*]

MILES SELBY

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I rise today to pay tribute to Captain Miles Selby, a member of the world renowned Canadian Snowbirds, who was killed in a tragic accident while on a training exercise south of the Snowbirds' base at 15 Wing Moose Jaw this past Friday.

Captain Selby was in his second year with the Snowbirds and was a 13 year veteran of the air force. He had logged over 2,600 hours of military flying experience and had bravely served his country in combat missions in Kosovo.

Captain Selby's dedication to his country and skill as a pilot embody the tradition of military excellence and national pride which the Snowbirds represent.

I would ask my fellow members to join with me in extending our hearts and prayers to Captain Selby's wife, Julie, and his family. His service to Canada, the Snowbirds team and 15 Wing Moose Jaw will not be forgotten.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring attention to the important issue of Canada's role in international development.

As one of the globe's most developed and resource and culturally rich nations, there is an inherent responsibility which ethically and humanely requires Canada to continue to enhance its leadership role in funding untied, non-ideological aid and capacity development to lesser developed nations.

As a nation fuelled by cultural, social and political diversity as opposed to archaic and discriminatory religious fundamentalism, it is

important for Canada to utilize its immense capacity to show the world that compassion does exist, and universal, tangible results can be had through the spearheading of those fortunate nation states willing to increase the value they place upon the quality of life.

* * *

● (1415)

[*Translation*]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, can we envision culture without arts and letters, theatre, music, dance, literature, art crafts, and visual and media arts? No. Culture is the heart of every people.

In Quebec, the Mouvement pour les arts et les lettres, which represents 15,000 professional artists, has long been campaigning for increased support for artists, the majority of whom are living below the poverty line.

The government must understand cultural issues and the need for more support to our professional artists. Artists and artisans are not free to create. They generally have a double life imposed upon them by the obligation to earn enough to live on.

So that they may have that freedom to create a culture that will be worthy of protection by an eventual convention on cultural diversity, the budget of the Canada Council for the Arts needs to be raised to \$300 million this very year, and the program "Tomorrow Starts Today" must be restored permanently, and enhanced as well.

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[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are responsible, effective alternatives to Bush's missile defence, alternatives that would accelerate global disarmament instead of fuelling a dangerous arms buildup and weaponization of space. These include: support of a verifiable, negotiated solution between the U.S. and North Korea; formalize and expand the concept of non-interference with verification; urge all space-faring nations to declare that they would not be the first to deploy weapons in space; support a UN code of conduct for prevention of incidents and dangerous military practices in space, which threaten existing space assets; seek consultation with the U.S. under article IX of the Outer Space Treaty, to which Canada is a signatory; and urge all governments with nuclear weapons to agree on decisive measures to reduce and neutralize their nuclear arsenals, and work toward acceptance of these by non-weapon states.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are rapidly nearing Christmas and I am sure the Prime Minister does not want to be known to Atlantic Canadians as the evil grinch who takes their oil and gas and gives them only a lump of coal in return.

Will the Prime Minister stop dithering and deliver on the deal he promised with no eight year moratorium on prosperity?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the objective of this government is to achieve permanent and ongoing prosperity for Atlantic Canadians and for all Canadians. The equalization program is part of that. The offshore accords are part of that. The most recent negotiations are also part of that. The work is ongoing at the very highest level and we anticipate success, but it is not over yet.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the government's objective is to create a have status in Atlantic Canada, it has failed and continues to fail in that area.

Last week Atlantic ministers were here in Ottawa being stonewalled by federal officials. In Halifax the Atlantic premiers were being stalled by the Clerk of the Privy Council. Surprise, the Prime Minister was nowhere to be found.

This is a promise for the Prime Minister, not for his officials, to keep. My question again is for the Prime Minister. Will he show some leadership, not play Scrooge, and get this deal done before Christmas?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the Prime Minister's intention to deliver on exactly what he promised.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that might be his intention but he is clearly incapable of making a decision. He knows how to make a promise. He just does not know how to keep a promise.

It has been six months since he went down to Atlantic Canada, got on bended knee and made this promise. Ever since they have been good, for goodness' sake.

Will the Prime Minister now assure Atlantic Canadians that he will keep this promise and they will finally get what he promised them last June?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's commitment to Atlantic Canada is in fact to increase the level of federal support, unlike the commitment by the Leader of the Opposition that would have benefited one province and harmed three others.

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AIR TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the lack of diligence by the government has, in the words of the Auditor General, created a serious threat to security at our airports.

Oral Questions

Let us look at the facts. As early as last March the Auditor General warned that airport employees could have ties to organized crime. Then airport shields and badges went missing. Now 73 cases of suspicious clearances given to airport workers are deemed serious enough to be forwarded to the RCMP.

Why has the minister allowed this dangerous combination of security breaches to occur?

• (1420)

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member ought to see this in a positive light, since the Auditor General was speaking of some 4,000 or 5,000 potential cases.

Now that 123,000 files have been rechecked, however, the reality is that there are 73 cases. These are not people with criminal records but people with possible ties.

The RCMP is looking into this information and they will advise us if there is any problem. The passes of these people will then be immediately withdrawn. There is not, therefore, any security problem at this time.

[English]

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister's officials themselves indicated the focus of their investigation would be centred on the possibility of airport workers having ties to organized crime.

With the RCMP now investigating 73 cases, could the minister tell us what parameters the department used when it decided to call in the RCMP? Could he also tell us in what positions the workers involved in these security breaches were working, where they were employed and are they now off the job site?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, concerning these 73 cases out of 120,000, yes we are talking of possible ties. Not one tie has yet been demonstrated however, Not one of these people has a criminal record that would imperil this country. The RCMP is therefore looking into these 73 cases at this time.

If anything comes up that casts doubt on national security, the RCMP will advise us accordingly, and we will immediately recall the pass of the employee concerned.

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HOUSING

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been in his position for a year now and has precious little to show for it. While the media unanimously criticize his inaction and hesitation, the Prime Minister has the nerve to talk about momentum, when he has done nothing but avoid the issues.

In terms of social housing, for example, how can the Prime Minister have the nerve to talk about momentum when, despite his campaign promises, he refuses to commit to investing more in the next budget?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Joe Fontana (Minister of Labour and Housing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the leader of the Bloc that the Prime Minister and I have met with numerous organizations in Quebec, including FRAPRU. The government is committed to social and affordable housing. That is why we have initiated \$1 billion worth of initiatives for affordable housing.

I am happy to say that Quebec and British Columbia are doing some remarkable things. We will continue to work with the Government of Quebec to deliver more social and affordable housing to the people of Quebec.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I know they have met with organizations including FRAPRU. In fact, FRAPRU had a lot to say against them on the weekend. That was quite the answer from the minister.

In 1990, 1.3 million families were living in inadequate housing. In the words of the current Prime Minister, we need to “find room”. Those are his very words. Today, according to the CMHC, 1.7 million families need adequate housing. Nonetheless, the Prime Minister does not see the need or urgency to act.

Since the numbers speak for themselves and cannot be denied, could we not obtain a commitment right now that the next budget will actually reflect the promises made during the campaign?

[English]

Hon. Joe Fontana (Minister of Labour and Housing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can appreciate the question. As he will realize, housing is a provincial jurisdiction, and we want to work with our partners. In the election platform, the Prime Minister committed an additional \$1.5 billion. We agree that 1.7 million Canadians are looking for housing solutions. It is this government that is committed to ensuring that we can find some.

[Translation]

Is there still a need in Quebec? Yes. We will be working on it.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the harsh report on the housing situation in 1990, the Prime Minister and the current Minister of Housing criticized the Mulroney government, and I quote:

Since taking office, the Mulroney government has drastically cut housing budgets and programs, transferred its responsibilities to the provinces without the requisite financial resources, and ignored the crying needs of hundreds of thousands of Canadian households.

After such harsh criticism, how does he explain that all he ever did for housing up to 2001 was to withdraw even more than the Mulroney government ever did?

• (1425)

[English]

Hon. Joe Fontana (Minister of Labour and Housing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since 1999, the government has committed \$1.15 billion with regard to finding solutions for the homeless and most vulnerable in our society. We continue to invest \$2 billion each and every year for social housing to look after 636,000 households. We are investing \$1 billion on affordable housing, and we will

continue to do more. The Prime Minister has committed \$1.5 billion more for social housing.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we know that the government refuses to act effectively for social housing. If it wants to stop the number of families with serious housing problems from growing further, it has to boost its funding considerably.

Does the government realize that a significant decrease in the number of families with housing problems requires a commitment of 1% of its spending to social and affordable housing, or nearly \$2 billion a year, and nothing less?

[English]

Hon. Joe Fontana (Minister of Labour and Housing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope I can count on the member's support as well as the support of all members of the House as we move forward with new creative ideas. Over and above the \$1.5 billion, we are looking at new creative ideas of how to engage communities, not for profit organizations and co-ops to help us build on the One Percent Solution. We believe, if everyone comes together, big labour, big business, three levels of government and the not for profit sector, that we can build the houses that the country needs.

* * *

INDUSTRY

Mr. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to housing, when was the last time someone took refuge in a commitment? That is all we can say.

The cozy relationship between lobbyists and the Prime Minister's Office has to stop. Pumping millions into the Prime Minister's campaign will not get people off the hook. Yet the Prime Minister has lifted not a finger to clean things up, letting his friends continue to sell access to a government that they themselves helped to build. The lobbyist watchdog is still not independent. He can be fired by cabinet.

When will the Prime Minister create an independent lobbyist—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Industry.

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the registrar of lobbyists has complete independence from my office. He does not seek advice on any issue that comes before him. Therefore, he conducts his investigations with complete independence, and he will continue to do that.

The bill will be strengthened with regulations that will be gazetted in the next few weeks, and will be implemented early in 2005.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we will believe it when we see it.

Oral Questions

Let us talk about the independent Ethics Commissioner on the immigration minister's file. He has contracted out the investigation to a well known Liberal legal firm that employs a former Liberal cabinet minister. It is the same law firm that the Prime Minister used for his own corporate interests. How convenient: a Liberal law firm investigating a Liberal cabinet minister. Does the Prime Minister not think Canadians have had enough of Liberals investigating themselves?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope the hon. member is not calling into question either the integrity or the credentials of Mr. Shapiro, the independent Ethics Commissioner. We have an independent Ethics Commissioner. He is an officer of this Parliament. That is what everyone in this place sought over a significant period of time, especially members of the opposition. They now have an independent officer of Parliament. It is most unfortunate if the hon. member is calling into question his integrity and ability.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the immigration minister gave special treatment to campaign workers and received campaign cash from others whom she helped into the country, with ministerial permits. Her actions have hurt the reputation of our country and our immigration system.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Before he goes on his next vacation, will he do the right thing and fire the minister of immigration?

• (1430)

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again what we hear are unsubstantiated allegations. Unfortunately, members on the other side do not seem to care what they say and do in relation to the reputations of people, and that is most unfortunate.

Let me say, as we have said before, the Ethics Commissioner is an independent officer of Parliament. He has taken up this matter, and I know that we all await his report.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious to most Canadians that the minister of immigration has to go. In fact, it seems there are only three people who think otherwise: the Deputy Prime Minister, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration herself.

The list is long. She has had people campaigning for her on the public dime. Her assistant visited strip clubs to do business. She gave preferential treatment to campaign workers. She defended the stripper program, after saying these strippers were victims of abuse. This is an embarrassment.

When will the Prime Minister, hopefully before his next vacation, do the right thing and fire the minister of immigration?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only embarrassment is the opposition members and the unsubstantiated accusations they make on the floor of the House under the cover of parliamentary immunity.

The Ethics Commissioner is seized of this matter. I know we all look forward to his report. He is an independent officer of this House. Why do we not just let him do his work?

Mr. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the immigration minister has proven she is not competent to hold office. She let a campaign worker jump the queue ahead of 700,000 other applicants. She accepted a \$5,000 illegal donation from a member of her riding executive who also obtained eight special ministerial permits. Her office used thug tactics to dissuade MPs from further questioning any of these matters, by threatening to withhold special ministerial permits for real cases.

When will the Prime Minister do the right thing and fire the minister?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member actually believes the litany of things he has just said, I encourage him to go outside and say those things to the press. I ask him to have the guts to make those allegations outside this House, free from parliamentary immunity.

Mr. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, rumours are flying outside of the House in the coffee chatter circuit. Rumours are flying around Ottawa about who will be the next immigration minister. The member for Beaches—East York and the member for Parkdale—High Park both have been rumoured to be the next minister of immigration.

The immigration department is directionless, as the current minister spends all her time in damage control. Liberal caucus unity is in disarray, as members openly campaign for the job.

When will the Prime Minister put an end to this uncertainty, put some order and discipline back into his own caucus, and appoint a new minister of immigration?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, the hon. member should spend a lot less time on the cocktail circuit and a whole lot more time working on behalf of his constituents and discharging his responsibilities as a member of Parliament.

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[*Translation*]

PARENTAL LEAVE

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the last election campaign, the government announced that the parental leave issue had been resolved.

What is the explanation for the fact that what should have been a few formalities have not been finalized seven months later? This is not the best example of efficiency we have seen.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I previously stated in the House, I am not in the habit of negotiating with the opposition on a very serious matter.

We are in the midst of very sensitive negotiations, and we are hoping for a positive conclusion.

Oral Questions

●(1435)

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the question of parental leave has dragged on for a long time and young parents in Quebec are the ones who are suffering.

How can he explain that seven months after a pre-election agreement in principle, we are still waiting? Will it take another election campaign to reach a resolution?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the same question deserves the same answer.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the question will be coming up often because it never gets answered.

In the days following the end of this session of Parliament, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities will present its report on the amendments the government should make to the employment insurance system.

Does the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development intend to analyze this report as quickly as possible in order for this House to begin work on this necessary and urgent reform as soon as we return in January? He could draw inspiration from the bills the Bloc has already proposed to make changes in the system.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have already proposed suggestions. I am studying them right now. I still have great respect for the committees of this House and I will await the tabling of the subcommittee's report before making comments or talking about the conclusion.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is not complicated. The question is just whether or not he will respond quickly to the report.

Every time we question the minister on the need for an in-depth review of EI, he talks about jobs that have been created and the health of the economy. Does the minister not understand that the people we are talking about are facing factory closures, have seasonal work, and need to have improvements made to EI.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have said I am always open to suggestions that will improve the system. Still, over the past 10 years, in the current system, we have created 3 million jobs. Even in the first 9 months of this year—we have verified this—there were 39,000 new jobs in Quebec, as well. Across the country, the economy is working and working well, thanks to the system we already have in place.

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[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATIONS

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the immigration system is broken. It seems the minister has

compassion for cases that might help her politically, yet the minister or the system cannot help real refugees.

The credibility of the minister is in shreds. The minister apparently had no compassion for the young lady whom I brought to her attention last week. She now has been deported, subsequently jailed and abused in Iran, just I like I warned her.

When will the minister protect real refugees instead of queue jumpers?

Hon. Hedy Fry (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has a very proud record with regard to refugees. The hon. member also knows that the minister is not allowed to speak about individual cases in the House because it is against the privacy laws. Each case is always judged on its merits.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Newton—North Delta, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the immigration minister has shown her complete contempt for the hundreds of thousands of legitimate refugees and immigrants waiting in the immigration backlog. Rather than fast tracking skilled immigrants, the minister expedites the applications for strippers and campaign workers.

The minister should spend less time dishing out political favours and more time on fixing the visitor visa mess, cleaning up fraud at our overseas missions, and reducing family class waiting times.

When will she admit that the jig is up and resign?

●(1440)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister has said repeatedly that she is dealing with the Citizenship Act. The committee has dealt with it. We have talked about reviewing the whole refugee system in spite of the fact that we are proud of how we deal with refugees abroad.

We always listen to members in the House. The system needs fine tuning and it could be better. We are working with committees and with members from both sides of the House to do exactly that.

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MARRIAGE

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday on CPAC the government House leader and a senior government minister took the position that civil servants, such as justices of the peace or marriage commissioners, should lose their jobs if they fail to take part in same sex marriages on the basis of religious or conscientious beliefs.

Is the minister's position the position of the Liberal government? Is the real agenda of the Liberal government to make the proposed marriage legislation an attack on religious and conscientious freedoms of ordinary citizens?

Oral Questions

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the unanimous judgment of the Supreme Court, which is the decision we will follow, explicitly and manifestly protects freedom of religion in all its respects.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, is the minister's position that anyone who does not take part in the religious ceremony or performs a religious service on the basis of religious freedom will likely get fired? Will he take steps to ensure that these rights are protected and that no individuals will lose their job because they insist on their rights and freedoms?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court judgment was explicit that no religious official will be compelled to perform a same sex marriage. We will be working with our provincial counterparts to ensure that freedom of religion is fully protected.

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GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as everybody knows, accountability for how well we spend our citizens' money is very important. I understand Treasury Board will soon be considering an accountability framework for every government department. Will the minister ensure that the accountability frameworks include a gender based analysis to ensure we are delivering programs equally well for men and women?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as hon. members may know from the report I tabled with the budget, we are moving to a management accountability framework that is designed to hold deputies and senior executives accountable for results, not simply for processes. They will be judged according to their success on delivering on a range of indicators, including gender equity.

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MILLENNIUM PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have been appalled by the Liberal government's sponsorship fund scandal. Now we are learning about the suspicious handling of the Liberals' millennium fund, including improper documentation and a potentially politicized approvals process.

My question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. Some \$500,000 was earmarked for an internal audit of the millennium fund. Was the audit done? If so, where is it? If not, why not?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I answered this question last week. In fact, the millennium program worked extremely well. It was run by a former deputy prime minister of the House, the Right Hon. Herb Gray, who served Canadians extraordinarily well through almost four decades of public service. As a tribute to this fine Canadian, I reject the premise of the hon. member's question.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, without its promised internal audit or program review, there is no evidence that this program met its goals, no evidence that the money was properly spent, and no proof that this was anything more than another Liberal slush fund.

The Prime Minister has claimed that he will lead a more transparent and accountable government. Will the Deputy Prime Minister ask the Auditor General to look into the millennium fund or should we simply cut out this middle step and send it directly to Justice Gomery to sort out?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, an independent millennium bureau actually oversaw the work of the program. It was led by the Right Hon. Herb Gray. The program worked well, supporting community based celebrations across Canada.

In fact, the program does not need to be reviewed now as it is over because the last millennium is over. If the hon. member was not aware of that, I am glad to inform him of that.

Through the millennium program the Government of Canada was proud to help Canadians from coast to coast to coast celebrate the closure of the last millennium at the dawn of an exciting new one.

• (1445)

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has an awful record of being scandal ridden. In the unity fund, there were \$725 million unaccounted for. In the sponsorship scandal, there were \$250 million unaccounted for. Now the millennium bureau has \$150 million for which the accounting is absent, deliberately hidden by Gagliano and his Liberal gang.

Does the Prime Minister expect Canadians to believe that, as finance minister, he knew nothing at all about this hidden Liberal slush fund?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Treasury Board conducted audits of the workings of the millennium partnership program. These audits noted in the reports that there was a very detailed and clear explanation of how its budget was spent and why. The millennium program was operated properly and helped Canadians from coast to coast celebrate the new millennium.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the millennium fund operated much like the sponsorship fund. The Prime Minister claims that he knew nothing as the finance minister about existing slush funds that had no transparency or accountability to taxpayers: \$725 million in the unity fund, \$250 million in the sponsorship scandal, and now another \$150 million in the millennium bureau. There is a disturbing pattern of hiding information and misleading Canadians.

Oral Questions

Is the Prime Minister keeping Canadians in the dark on purpose or is he admitting his incompetence and inability to manage taxpayers' money?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the millennium program was actually operated by an independent bureau under the leadership of the Right Hon. Herb Gray. There were audits conducted and those audits found that the money was directed appropriately. The Government of Canada was proud to play a positive role in helping Canadians and Canadian community based organizations celebrate the new millennium from coast to coast.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a story recently appeared in *The Vancouver Sun* claiming that Canada's recidivism rate was nearly four times higher than the official figure issued by Correctional Service Canada. The story exposed the fact that if the number of convicted criminals who returned to a federal or provincial jail within two years of leaving federal custody was taken into account, the rate actually increases to 37%. It is clear to me that these statistics have been manipulated in order to make it appear that our prison system is reforming hardened criminals.

Will the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness admit that the statistics are flawed and it is time for a serious review?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too reject the premise of this question. Our statistics are straightforward and report recidivism rates of those who leave federal institutions within a certain period of time.

We should be working more closely with our provincial colleagues and collecting statistics in relation to those who are released from provincial institutions as well as federal institutions. If the hon. member is suggesting that this would provide a more complete picture to Canadians about recidivism, I would of course agree with him.

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GOVERNOR GENERAL

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the President of the Treasury Board.

Canadians agree with the opposition. The government must practice proper spending control, including the Governor General. The \$417,000 reduction to the Governor General's budget is not unreasonable. Only an office with the heart of Scrooge would cut a children's program.

Why would the Governor General threaten to cut children's programs at Rideau Hall on the eve of the Christmas season? Why not exercise fiscal responsibility instead of spite?

•(1450)

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is passing strange that the member would raise that question with me when it was he and his party who cut the Governor General's budget. I stood up in the House and tried to warn them of

the problems of making such a large cut in the last quarter of the year.

We have cut 10% with three months to go, some \$400,000. When she cannot lay off staff, the Governor General has a great deal of difficulty maintaining programs. I warned them of that. Despite that fact, they went ahead with the cut. I hope the Governor General can find ways to accommodate this. Frankly, that is what happens when the House makes irresponsible decisions.

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[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the level of international aid accorded by the federal government is being criticized. In a recent report, OXFAM denounced the lack of effort by Canada, which spends the equivalent of 0.26% of its GDP on aid, while the UN target is 0.7%, or nearly three times what Canada is currently spending.

After missing the mark for over 30 years, how can the Prime Minister continue to maintain that Canada is a leader in international aid?

Hon. Paddy Torsney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member very much for her question. She knows that the government has considerably increased the ODA budget.

We also want to improve the situation year after year. I hope that the Minister of Finance is listening, because I think there is a great need in the world.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is going on trip after trip abroad to improve his international aid image in the press. But since the Liberals took office, Canada has been doing very poorly in that respect.

If the Prime Minister wants to be credible, why does he not turn his words into actions and substantially increase international aid, raising this level to 0.7%, as requested by the United Nations?

[*English*]

Hon. Paddy Torsney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has increased its ODA budget and is committed to doing that in each of the next years. Beyond that, we have also better coordinated the aid, received better ownership on a local basis, and made sure that Canada's aid is the most effective possible.

There is a great need in the world. Canada and Canadians play a role from coast to coast in helping others in less fortunate positions. We will continue to be a leader in helping to coordinate that aid dollar.

*Oral Questions***TAXATION**

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a headline in Saturday's *Ottawa Citizen* stated, "Canadian firms fall further in productivity" despite being busier than ever. The Ottawa based Centre for the Study of Living Standards estimates that Canadian businesses were only 73% as productive compared to their U.S. peers over this past year.

Why is the government refusing to provide broad based tax relief to correct the productivity gap between Canada and the U.S.?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has cut taxes in every budget since 1996. Tax reductions so far amount to more than \$100 billion. We are interested in finding further and better ways to reduce the tax burden on Canadians. We are also interested in delivering on our platform for child care, cities, the environment, aboriginals as well as health care and equalization.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, reports in the *National Post* today on the tragic Snowbirds accident indicate that it took an air force rescue team 47 minutes to reach the crash site by truck. Three military helicopters used to be on standby for emergency rescue duties at CFB Moose Jaw, but were discontinued as cost saving measures by the Liberal government in the mid-1990s. In the words of Lieutenant Colonel Laurie Hawn, "That decision was pure dollars. They had to save a few bucks and it should not have happened".

Why is the Liberal government placing the lives of Canadian airmen at risk just to save a few bucks?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I think the members of the House would join me in expressing condolences to Mrs. Selby and to the family of Captain Selby on his tragic death while serving his country, which he did with the Snowbirds. He was very proud of serving in that role.

We wish Captain Mallett a speedy recovery from his injuries.

I reject the allegation that is suggested in the question that the helicopters were not in the area because of financial reasons. We have helicopters on bases where they are necessary, for example, Bagotville, Cold Lake and others.

We do not have them there because there is a road matrix that the air force deems is correct and available to get us—

•(1455)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Brampton—Springdale.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, through his recent travels our current Prime Minister has reaffirmed Canada's commitment to the global human rights agenda.

December 10, 2004 marked the 56th anniversary of the United Nations adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, one of the most important documents ever written.

My question is for the Minister of Justice. Can you please tell us what this House is doing—

The Speaker: The hon. member of course will want to address her question to the Chair, even though it is to the minister.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, will the minister please tell this House what the government is doing to reaffirm its principles for this very important document?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been the source of inspiration for the international bill of human rights and also for our own human rights agenda, which includes: first, the promotion and protection of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; second, the protection of security and human rights, no contradiction between the protection of security and human rights; third, the protection of the most vulnerable among us, women, children, aboriginals, minorities; fourth, the combating of hate speech and hate crimes; and, finally, the building of an international justice system for the 21st century.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been over a year since the devastating fires in British Columbia and still many landowners are caught in a log salvage, higher income, no tax deferment situation.

Will the Minister of Finance help B.C. landowners by allowing income tax on this emergency profit to be deferred and paid over 10 years, yes or no?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue of how best to deal with a whole range of issues flowing from the natural disasters in British Columbia last year, particularly the forest fires, are under examination.

Obviously the Government of Canada wants to treat all of those as generously as it can within its jurisdiction.

* * *

SABLE ISLAND

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only human presence on Sable Island is at the research station and they carry out important studies.

A federal working group has recommended that the federal government maintain the station but last week the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans was non-committal.

Points of order

The trust that is running the station cannot function much longer without a positive decision from the minister. The people working at the station deserve an answer before Christmas. When can we expect an answer and an announcement from the minister?

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue for our minister, our government and our Prime Minister. He is presently working with our Minister of the Environment and with the Province of Nova Scotia, and a decision will be made shortly.

* * *

[Translation]

BORDER CROSSINGS

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the U.S. government has announced massive investments to enhance the Champlain border crossing, in the State of New York, the Canadian government has been neglecting the Lacolle border crossing, to the point of seriously compromising the free movement of goods.

How does the government explain investing \$300 million in the Windsor border crossing, in Ontario, while allowing the situation in Lacolle to deteriorate? Is this another instance of double standard?

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no double standard here. In fact, we are investing in border security and border crossings all over the country.

The Canada Border Services Agency makes an assessment on an ongoing basis as to the border services required and operational decisions are made accordingly.

* * *

UKRAINE

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Ukraine's supreme court dismissed as fraudulent the second round of the presidential election that took place November 21 and has called for a rerun on December 26.

What exactly is the Canadian government doing to help ensure that this rerun is fair and transparent?

• (1500)

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Etobicoke Centre for his very good work on this file. As we have recently announced, we will be sending up to 500 observers to help ensure a free, fair and democratic election in Ukraine. Our observer mission will be sent under the banner of Canada Corps, which is being managed by my colleague, the Minister of International Cooperation.

Canada is promoting a new multilateralism. Canadians want to play a leadership role in the international community. Canada Corps will be a key mechanism, mobilizing Canadians who want to make a difference in the world.

[Translation]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one year ago, the Abitibi-Consol plant closed its facilities in Port-Alfred. Despite numerous verbal commitments made by Liberal ministers, we are still waiting for the financial involvement of the federal government in a possible recovery plan for the company.

Considering that the government was able to announce a \$500 million initiative for Ontario's automobile industry despite a lack of concrete projects, will it pledge to provide financial support to any recovery plan that Consol might unveil in the coming months?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. Like all members in this House, we are very disappointed by the situation in La Baie. However, we are waiting to see some projects. It is impossible to evaluate projects that we do not have before us. Unfortunately, as we are speaking, no recovery plan has been submitted to Canada Economic Development.

* * *

[English]

SECURITIES INDUSTRY

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is getting harder and harder to keep track of broken Liberal promises. We only have to look at the Minister of Finance today on the Nortel file. Today more promises on a national security commission, 11 years of dilly-dallying, meanwhile pensioners and investors are losing millions.

Why does corporate cronyism run so deep in the Liberal ranks that it allows corporate corruption to trump human compassion and any sign of decency by the government? When will the government stand up and protect the hard-earned dollars of Canadian pensioners?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have of course taken action with amendments to the law, working with accountants and auditors in terms of the functioning of that profession, working on stronger corporate governance and so forth. I have also mentioned the need for the idea of a national securities regulator. I am very pleased to have today the clear, unequivocal support of the New Democratic Party for that important notion.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during question period the member for Souris—Moose Mountain, in his question, made reference to my appearance on CPAC. I would like to make two points.

First, it is not true. I did not appear on CPAC on the show to which the member referred. The second point I would like to make is that I never said what the member attributed to me in any forum whatsoever. I just wanted to make sure that the record shows that the member was incorrect in attributing any of his comments to what I may or may not have said.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): That is correct, Mr. Speaker. I made the wrong reference. I meant to refer to the deputy leader of the government and not the House leader, and my apologies to him.

The Speaker: I thank both hon. members for their clarification on this point.

The Chair has received due notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Delta—Richmond East.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

RESPONSE TO QUESTION ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege in relation to an answer to a written question, which answer was tabled in the House on December 8. The response in the House was, in my opinion, a deliberate attempt to mislead the House, an infraction defined by Speaker Jerome in 1978.

The question was first asked on February 3, 2004. It was asked again on October 5, 2004. The question was as follows:

With regard to the environmental and economic issues posed by the development of salmon farm aquaculture sites in bays and inlets along the coast of British Columbia...what...diseases or parasites have been found at salmon net pen sites in each of the years 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003, and what was the location of each farm site having these diseases or parasites—

A response was prepared for the minister by February 17, two weeks after the question was first asked. It was prepared by Dorothee Kieser, a well-known fish health pathobiologist and was as follows:

Canada has no list of reportable fish diseases.

Because there are not reportable diseases, DFO has no regulatory capacity for requiring farms to report disease outbreaks. Nor does the Department have a routine monitoring program to check on the status of disease outbreak on farms. While such monitoring is done by a provincial agency, DFO does not obtain that information.

The department also does not maintain a surveillance program to detect pathogens/parasites in wild stocks or detect a change in the rate of infection/infestation. Hence there is no ability to state whether diseases in wild stocks are "new" or whether there is a greater prevalence of pathogens in wild stocks.

According to a departmental document received under access to information, Sharon Ashley, the acting director general of the executive secretariat determined that the scientist's answer for the minister was too negative. The directive demanded that Sharon McGladdery, the senior science advisor for aquatic animal health, prepare a more positive response to this question. That response given in this House on December 8 was:

This information is collected by the British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, whose veterinary services are responsible for aquaculture fish health surveillance and diagnosis.

A question was asked about a matter pertaining to the mandate of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, that is, the protection of wild fish and their habitat. An answer was prepared by the department's senior fish health pathobiologist who advised that the department

Privilege

was not fulfilling its constitutional mandate to protect wild fish and their habitat.

The answer was deemed too negative. A senior bureaucrat in the minister's executive secretariat found the answer too negative and ordered the preparation of a more positive response to this question. The more positive response is the responsibility of the province, according to the minister.

The minister's answer in Parliament is a serious attempt to mislead Parliament. The truth is that matters affecting the health of fish in the marine environment is the direct responsibility of the Department of Fisheries under statutes enacted by Parliament and is the sole responsibility of the federal government under the Constitution.

The original response prepared by the scientist clearly stated the department's failure to fulfill its obligations. The sanitized response would have us believe that the matter was the responsibility of the province.

In 1978 Speaker Jerome stated:

—in order to found a question of privilege, the allegation would have to be not simply that the House had been misled, but had been deliberately misled.

—an allegation that the House had been misled without deliberateness does not constitute privilege on the face of it.

The minister's December 8 response is not merely a sin of omission, it is one of commission, of deliberateness. The response was rewritten to deliberately remove the embarrassing truth.

I placed the question on the order paper recognizing it was one that required detailed study by Department of Fisheries scientists because I wanted a scientifically accurate answer. In sharp contrast to the answer prepared for the minister by the Department of Fisheries scientist, the minister's answer given in Parliament is devoid of the embarrassing factual material. The minister's answer is devoid of the facts that had been deemed too negative by the director general of the executive secretariat.

The minister's answer was a deliberate attempt to mislead Parliament.

● (1505)

DFO scientists carefully prepare an accurate response to the written question. It should not be acceptable to the House that the response be rejected by senior staff in the minister's office because it is too embarrassing for him to give to the House.

Something less than the truth is not merely embarrassing, it is wrong. The direction given to produce a positive response as opposed to a truthful response to my question is an affront to the House.

Mr. Speaker, should you rule that I have a prima facie case of privilege, I would be prepared to move the appropriate motion to send the issue to a parliamentary committee.

● (1510)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Delta—Richmond East for his interest in this subject.

Routine Proceedings

I had a chance to be on the fisheries committee with him for a number of years. He is very knowledgeable about this industry. He has a great interest in the whole question of salmon aquaculture and I know the government appreciates his comments.

It is incorrect to say that the minister misled the House. What had happened in Question No. 5 the member had posed as he read it to you, Mr. Speaker, and I do not propose to reread the question or the answer, but the question he posed is more appropriately directed to the province of British Columbia and the provincial ministry which in fact collects the data that the member is interested in.

The member uses access to information to get working copies and internal memos of different answers that are being prepared for the minister's signature. The answer which was tabled in the House as signed by the minister is complete and reflects the fact that the member's question should properly be directed to the province of British Columbia. In fact in an effort not to induce the House in error or to mislead the House, the government felt that it was appropriate to refer the member for that specific portion of his very detailed question directly to the provincial ministry which in fact collects this data.

If some internal working documents that were being prepared by various officials may have had different versions of particular facts, the ultimate decision as to what is tabled is made by the minister who has very high regard for the House. In fact the minister has had the job which I presently have. He understands how important are questions on the Order Paper. I have discussed this with him a number of times. The only intention was to provide the member with a clear direction of where he could go to get the most accurate information.

The Government of Canada normally does not provide in written answers to questions information which is properly collected by a provincial department. The information, as the member noted, is collected and monitored but it is done so by the province of British Columbia. That is exactly what the answer to the question reflects.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have just heard about this issue, but in my view this is not a question about fish and it is not a question about the member; this is a question about the right of parliamentarians to have full, complete, objective, unedited information available to them so they can make good decisions about important issues like the fishery. Clearly there was information within the purview of the federal government which the federal government did not want to release because it was, in its own words, too negative.

Why should members of Parliament be sheltered by the government from information that is germane to the issues before us because the government does not want it to come out? That is essentially what happened here. Now it is passing the buck. The real issue is that it would not give us as parliamentarians information that it had because it thought it was too negative. Those are the government's own words. That is in the memo.

I think this is an extremely serious matter because if the government can do this about British Columbia salmon, then it can withhold information from the rest of us that it thinks is too negative.

I am put in mind of a situation that arose in the U.S. where the auditor general for the social security fund was told by the Bush administration not to provide Congress with certain information about the social security system when Congress was dealing with these issues. That hampered members of the Congress from making good decisions about an important issue like social security.

There is a wide variety of matters before the House and before members of the House and committees of the House that can be extremely adversely affected if the government is allowed to get away with withholding information because it deems it too negative for the rest of us to know about. I strongly object to that course of dealing. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to intervene, to put a stop to this kind of sanitizing and editing by a government that does not want to make full disclosure.

• (1515)

The Speaker: I thank hon. members for their submissions on this point. I will take the matter under advisement. I want to review the answers given. The hon. member for Delta—Richmond East was kind enough to deliver a copy of the summary of his argument with the questions on it, which I have had a chance to go through. I will go through them again and come back to the House with an answer on this matter in due course.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Industry, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-37, An Act to amend the Telecommunications Act.

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

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[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Health. The Committee has studied Bill C-12, an act to prevent the introduction and spread of communicable diseases, and has agreed to report it to the House with amendments.

[English]

BANK ACT

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-316, An Act to amend the Bank Act (branch closures).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to reintroduce this bill which deals with the Bank Act and branch closures.

This bill addresses the failure of the Bank Act to provide consumers with meaningful input into decisions by banks to cut off essential financial services by compelling those banks to conduct public consultations before such decisions are made. This is a national issue that touches communities right across Canada, particularly like my own in Winnipeg North. The banks have basically deserted our community, leaving the citizens in my area vulnerable to high interest, unregulated fringe banking alternatives.

I look forward to members in the House debating this bill and supporting this important idea.

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

* * *

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-317, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (mandatory labelling for genetically modified foods).

She said: Mr. Speaker, this bill flows from numerous attempts before me to introduce mandatory labelling legislation, vis-à-vis genetically modified foods, in the House. It also flows from the government's continued refusal to act on the express concerns of Canadians about the rapid entry of GM organisms into the marketplace.

It basically states that our knowledge of the impacts of genetic modification is far from complete and that mandatory labelling to identify and trace these items is the only way, at this time, we can know for certain that safety is verified.

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

* * *

● (1520)

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-318, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act (military dependants).

She said: Mr. Speaker, this bill seeks to amend the Canada Elections Act to fully include the dependants of Canadian Forces personnel within the special voting provisions designed to take into consideration their relocation away from home communities in the service of their country.

Currently under this act, members of the armed forces, including reserves, are permitted to have their votes counted in their normal home electoral constituency simply by filling out a special residency form. However, their spouses and other dependants who accompany them on their postings have no such choice and must vote in the

Routine Proceedings

ridings in which their partners have been posted. The purpose of the bill is to remedy this unfairness.

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

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EXCISE TAX ACT

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-319, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act (feminine hygiene products).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to reintroduce this private member's bill which seeks to eliminate the goods and services tax on feminine hygiene products.

The GST on tampons and sanitary napkins amounts to gender based taxation. The taxing of essential and necessary products used exclusively by women is unfair and discriminatory. It unfairly disadvantages women financially, solely because of our reproductive role. The bill would benefit all Canadian women at some point in their lives and would be of particular value to lower income women.

I urge all members to support this initiative.

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

* * *

PENSION OMBUDSMAN ACT

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-320, an act to establish the office of Pension Ombudsman to investigate administrative difficulties encountered by persons in their dealings with the Government of Canada in respect of benefits under the Canada Pension Plan or the Old Age Security Act or tax liability on such benefits and to review the policies and practices applied in the administration and adjudication of such benefits and liabilities.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to introduce a bill that was formerly before the House by a colleague, the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, who had attempted on several occasions to seek leave of the House to pursue this initiative. It is a very important one in the context of current concerns about our pension provisions.

The purpose of the bill is to establish the office of a pension ombudsman to assist persons dealing with the government on benefits under the Canada pension plan and the Old Age Security Act or tax liabilities thereon in cases where they are dealt with unfairly and unreasonably or with unreasonable delay.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

DO-NOT-CALL REGISTRY ACT

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-321, an act to establish and maintain a national Do-Not-Call Registry.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the bill is to establish and maintain an update of a national registry of Canadian residential telephone subscribers who choose not to receive telephone solicitation.

The bill would prohibit a merchant who engages in telephone solicitation from soliciting or causing a solicitation to a listed residential telephone subscriber. It would authorize legal action against a merchant engaged in telephone solicitation from an offence under the act.

I thank the member for Burlington for allowing me to re-deposit the bill, and I thank the seconder, the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming.

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

* * *

BROADCASTING ACT

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-322, an act to amend the Broadcasting Act (decisions and orders).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is a reintroduction of a bill I introduced in the last session. It proposes an amendment to the Broadcasting Act requiring that any decisions and orders of the CRTC be made within six months after holding a public hearing. Right now the CRTC has unlimited time to render its decision after a public hearing.

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

* * *

• (1525)

PRIVATE MEMBER'S MOTION NO. 70

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after much discussion and deliberation, I have decided to amend my private member's Motion No. 70. The amended Motion No. 204 was placed on notice last Thursday, December 9. Therefore, I request the consent of the House to change the number of my motion from Motion No. 204 to Motion No. 70. I thank the House for its consideration of this request.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to change the number of his motion as indicated.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PETITIONS**AGE OF CONSENT**

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to present. The first two petitions, endorsed by

over 270 constituents of my riding of Okanagan—Shuswap, call upon Parliament to protect our children from sexual exploitation by taking all necessary steps to raise the age of consent from 14 years of age to 18 years of age.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): My third petition, Mr. Speaker, is also from my constituents. The petitioners call upon Parliament and the Government of Canada to oppose U.S. plans for missile defence.

The petitioners request that the United Nations be required to permanently ban missile defence systems and space-based weapons worldwide by October 24, 2005, or to convene a mandatory space preservation treaty signing conference thereafter for that purpose.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a petition signed by literally thousands of Canadians from across the country. The petitioners are very critical that the government, as of January 1, will begin to tax any kind of education moneys given to aboriginal people as an income. We believe this is a shot across the bow in terms of aboriginal treaty rights.

The petitioners urge the government to not go ahead with this move because it will clearly result in fewer first nations aboriginal students going to university, if all their income maintenance and moneys to do with their funding is viewed as income, and therefore taxed.

AUTISM

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to table a petition that has been presented to me by two of my constituents, Armande and Fiorindo Del Bianco, who are preoccupied by the lack of services provided to children diagnosed with autism. Their grandson Steven Mathew Kavchak is one of those children.

The petitioners request that Parliament amend the Canada Health Act and corresponding regulations to include IBI, ABA therapy for children with autism as a necessary medical treatment and require that all provinces provide or fund this essential treatment for autism.

They also ask that Parliament contribute to the creation of academic chairs at universities in each province to teach IBI, ABA treatment at the undergraduate and doctoral levels so Canadian professionals will no longer be forced to leave the country to receive academic training in this field and so Canada will be able to develop the capacity to provide every Canadian with autism with the best IBI, ABA treatment available.

•(1530)

CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon and present the latest of a long series of petitions I presented on behalf of our military families. This is on behalf of citizens from Thamesville and Brockville, Ontario and Yorkton, Saskatchewan.

The petitioners wish Parliament to take note of the fact that the Canadian Forces Housing Agency provides some homes for some of our military families that live on base, that the Canadian Forces Housing Agency however is providing these homes in some cases substandard to acceptable living conditions and that our young military families are facing annual rent increases for these substandard homes.

Therefore, they call upon Parliament to immediately suspend any future rent increases for accommodation provided by the Canadian Forces Housing Agency until the Government of Canada makes substantive improvements to the living conditions of housing provided for our military families.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table two petitions this afternoon. The first is signed by thousands of Canadians who are concerned about the plans by the Canada Revenue Agency to begin taxing, in the year 2005, aboriginal post-secondary students' support funding. This effort by the Canada Revenue Agency clearly will have an impact on funding for aboriginal people and their ability to access education at the post-secondary level.

The petitioners call upon the government to scrap that plan.

LABELLING OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second is a petition signed by several hundred individuals from all over the country who want us to continue trying to find a way to convince the government to implement the private member's motion that was passed in the House three and a half years ago, dealing with fetal alcohol syndrome. They petitioners note the importance of having labels on all alcohol beverage containers warning of the dangers of drinking during pregnancy.

They urge Parliament to implement this well supported effort by parliamentarians, and call for the government to immediately affix those labels on all alcohol beverage containers.

AGE OF CONSENT

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions to the House of Commons that I received from St. Margaret Mary Church, the Parish of St. Padre Pio, the Immaculate Conception Parish and the Woodbridge Presbyterian Church in a well attended and organized ceremony held in Vaughan.

The first petition calls upon the House of Commons to protect children from adult sexual predators by raising the age of consent from 14 to 18 years of age.

Government Orders

PORNOGRAPHY

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls upon the federal government to faithfully and rigorously uphold all existing laws against pornography, and that new laws be passed, as needed, to protect all men, women and children from this crime.

* * *

[Translation]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY ACT

Hon. Bill Graham (for the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness) moved that Bill C-26, an act to establish the Canada Border Services Agency, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the vital importance of the Canada-U.S. border and the very special long-standing relationship it protects came into sharp focus for the citizens of both nations on September 11, 2001. What many of us may have taken for granted in the past suddenly took on a much greater significance. We began to understand that a strong, secure border was essential to our personal health and safety as well as the economic well-being of our country.

We fully grasp that Canada and the United States are linked, not only by geography but also by shared values and a social interconnection. Ensuring the security of the border is in our mutual best interests.

The events of 9/11 cannot be ignored, however, the challenge is much more than the Canada-U.S. border. We live in a global neighbourhood that brings benefits like increased international trade and intercultural exchange, yet it also presents unprecedented challenges from terrorism and cyber crime, to trafficking in illegal weapons and migrants, to globe-trotting viruses that kill people, and infestations of beetles that kill our forests. All these challenges pose a threat to our cherished way of life.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, there is no role more fundamental for government than the protection of its citizens. That protection includes, but extends beyond, their physical safety. It encompasses the security of our economy and society at large. It also recognizes our social interconnection with citizens of other countries.

Government Orders

●(1535)

[English]

The Canada Border Services Agency, the CBSA, has been created to provide integrated border management. The agency's role is to facilitate legitimate cross-border traffic and support economic development while protecting Canada's sovereignty and stopping people or goods that pose a threat to Canada. It is the first line of defence in managing the movement of people and goods into and out of our country.

The CBSA has been designed to improve and accelerate protection initiatives already in place and to develop more strategic approaches to border security that keep pace with new and emerging threats coming at us on all fronts.

The Canada Border Services Agency can more effectively identify and intercept threats so that we can get on with the business of growing the economy and strengthening Canadian society.

The bill before us today establishes the Canada Border Services Agency as a corporate body and defines its mandate, powers and authorities. The bill's key objective is to implement the government's decision of December 12, 2003, to create a border services agency.

Establishing the CBSA as a legal entity is a government machinery change aimed at vesting in the CBSA the same powers and authorities that existed in the three legacy organizations: the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Furthermore, this machinery change reflects a more strategic approach by the government in dealing with border issues. The legislation also includes consequential amendments to various statutes to reflect changes which are generally of an administrative nature.

The Canada Border Services Agency builds on the legacy of the departments and agencies that form it. The new organization is the result of a merger of border-specific responsibilities of three equal partners. It includes customs responsibilities previously vested with the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, as well as portions of the appeals and compliance branches that support customs.

It has assumed the intelligence, interdiction and enforcement programs and the immigration program at ports of entry from Citizenship and Immigration Canada. In addition, it includes the import inspection at ports of entry program, previously with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, to achieve a truly integrated port of entry.

[Translation]

Collectively, the personnel of the CBSA now administer and enforce 90 laws governing trade and travel, as well as international agreements and conventions that were once divided among the three organizations.

The CBSA will provide integrated regulatory services and controls at Canada's border, implementing legislation and programs on behalf of other government departments and agencies.

[English]

The agency also works to advance Canadian economic competitiveness and social and humanitarian interests, both nationally and internationally, through our networks and partnerships.

One of the key objectives of the CBSA is to build on the substantial progress already made under the Canada-U.S. smart border declaration to advance our two nations' shared twin goals of public safety and economic security.

The CBSA takes a multi-faceted approach to border management that builds on the experience and expertise of its founding members. Having all border services centred in one agency means we can share the right information at the right time among ourselves and with our domestic and international partners.

At the same time, the CBSA is committed to upholding Canadians' privacy rights guaranteed under our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The collection and use of personal information under this bill will be managed in accordance with the law.

By strengthening interoperability and intelligence, we can more readily identify high risk arrivals and speed up the processing of the vast majority of people and goods legitimately moving in and out of the country. This is a crucial function within the larger Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada portfolio, operating under the national security umbrella but firmly focused on the border.

The agency is led by a president and executive vice-president, as well as other vice-presidents responsible for the agency's various branches. They report to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada. In turn, the minister reports to Parliament.

The mandate of the Canada Border Services Agency includes the following: promoting and facilitating a level playing field of legitimate travellers and traders; ensuring that all travellers coming into Canada are admissible and comply with Canadian laws and regulations; processing all commercial shipments that cross our ports of entry to ensure that Canadian laws and regulations are adhered to, that no illegal goods enter or leave the country and that related trade statistics are accurate; making sure all applicable duties and taxes are paid; detaining those who may pose a threat to Canada; removing people who may have been determined inadmissible to our country, including those involved in war crimes or crimes against humanity; and finally, ensuring food safety and plant and animal health by identifying and interdicting high risk regulated commodities arriving at our air, land and sea ports.

To carry out this mandate, the CBSA employs about 11,000 public servants who serve some 170,000 commercial importers doing roughly \$2 billion in cross-border trade daily, as well as more than 92 million travellers each year.

Government Orders

The agency's employees are engaged in everything from preventing contaminated goods from entering the food chain to reuniting more than 100 missing children with their families each year, to referring roughly 2.5 million people for secondary immigration inspections, to handling over 11 million commercial releases and 24 million courier shipments, and to conducting seizures of illegal drugs worth in excess of \$400 million on the street.

The Canada Border Services Agency operates in a real-time environment, providing service at over 480 air, sea and land ports of entry, 24 hours a day seven days a week at some of its busiest locations, and at 39 locations overseas. This enables us to deal more quickly and effectively with trade and security concerns, both here at home and abroad.

To give Canadians a sense of just how extensive these responsibilities are, consider that there are nearly 1,400 Canada border service locations across Canada, including air, land and sea crossings.

Regardless of where they are located, Canada Border Services Agency employees apply a risk management approach to the work they do. By this I mean that the agency operates on the basis that the vast majority of people and companies wants to comply with the law.

Our employees work hard to ensure that these people are able to quickly enter or leave our country so they can go about their business. However, they take strong enforcement action against high risk individuals and businesses that endanger our health and safety or the economy. They do this by getting as much advance information as possible to expedite the passage of people and cargo crossing the border.

The agency has a broad range of pre-approval programs that let us speed up the processing of low risk legitimate travellers so we can concentrate on those who pose a risk.

There is a variety of initiatives aimed at businesses to ensure the fast and secure passage of their cargo, which is absolutely essential to businesses in these days of just in time delivery. The majority of the initiatives were developed in consultation with and are carried out in partnership with the business community.

• (1540)

Similarly, there are numerous pre-screening programs for frequent travellers at our airports and land border crossings. Many of these initiatives use advanced technologies that increase the speed and accuracy of identification so we can quickly process those we know and trust.

This lets us focus on high risk arrivals, whether terrorists or travellers with highly contagious new diseases that put our personal and national security at risk and undermine the confidence of our trading partners.

Another way that CBSA reduces the risks to Canadians is by "pushing the borders out". Borders are no longer limited to lines between countries. In the 21st century, a multiple border strategy is required in order to interdict high risk travellers and cargo even before they arrive in Canada.

The agency works closely with international partners, including the United States and the European Union, to address threats at the earliest opportunity. This work, which is largely carried out by the Canada Border Services Agency officers abroad, includes collaboration on visa policies between our embassies and host governments. We also have a responsibility to our international partners and the broader international community to ensure the security of our border.

It is important to understand that while the Canada Border Services Agency is vigilant in protecting our citizens and economy, it manages our borders in a way that reflects Canadians' values, the rule of law, equality of opportunity, fairness and compassion.

We are not prepared to compromise Canada's international reputation as an open society. We will continue to fully respect our international obligations with regard to persons seeking protection.

Yet neither are we willing to endanger our society by being complacent with respect to high risk individuals and organizations who would exploit our generosity.

The Canada Border Services Agency understands that facilitation and security are not mutually exclusive but equally essential and interdependent. Striking the right balance between facilitation and security will enable Canada to achieve its immigration goals and enhance the North American security agenda.

It is also important to recognize that the CBSA deals strictly with security matters at our ports of entry when it comes to the processing of people.

Refugee advocacy groups may continue to express concern with the move of Citizenship and Immigration Canada's port of entry operations, as well as its enforcement branch, to the Canada Border Services Agency. I recognize their concerns with regard to this issue and offer assurances that those individuals who arrive in Canada seeking protection or admission will be treated fairly and in accordance with our international and legal obligations.

While the Canada Border Services Agency is responsible for the ongoing delivery of immigration operations at ports of entry, Citizenship and Immigration Canada maintains responsibility for functional guidance and policy development.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada will continue to focus on citizenship, selection, settlement and integration of immigrants, while also offering Canada's protection to those in need. It will continue to issue visas and to develop admissibility policies for immigrants, refugees and temporary residents.

The CBSA, on the other hand, will focus on its role with regard to the management and operation of our nation's borders. Part of this role is to prevent people who should not be in Canada from reaching our borders, to detect those who are in Canada but who are in contravention of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, and to ensure these individuals are removed in a timely manner. It is the CBSA's business to protect Canadians and those who need protection arriving at our borders.

Government Orders

There is no question that, to facilitate the movement of low risk travellers and trade and screen out and remove potential threats, we need to be able to access, collect and exchange information. However, there is also no question that the Canada Border Services Agency is committed to doing this in the utmost accordance with the law.

The advantage of amalgamating the various border programs and services into one organization is that our procedures are now streamlined and harmonized.

The bill before us today enables the CBSA, the Canada Border Services Agency, to be firmly established in order to provide integrated border management. It provides the management structure and the legal authorities to get the job done.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Make no mistake. This legislation is absolutely critical to our ability to meet the challenges of securing Canadians' safety in the rapidly changing world in which we live.

[*English*]

New and emerging threats make protecting our borders and managing movement across them both a challenge and a national priority. The bill would give us the tools we need to implement innovative border management programs and services that would ensure Canada is better able to anticipate and respond to these emerging challenges.

• (1550)

I urge my hon. colleagues to speedily pass the legislation.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I commend the parliamentary secretary for his comments with respect to the passage of Bill C-26.

I am quick to note that the bill, like the previous bill that set up the department which he co-represents with the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, comes almost a year to the day after it became functionally operational. I also note that his own department has not exactly moved in a timely fashion or with post-haste in bringing this legislation forward.

Aside from that, the optics and the very high sounding language and references to multifaceted, integrated approach, streamlining and harmonizing are not really supported by the resources to carry out the task. A significant amount of effort has been put into the optics and the glossy brochures, and putting the best face on addressing the current shortcomings with respect to security at our borders, at our ports, at our airports, but there is a growing gap between the promise and the reality.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary to the department whether any internal effort is being made by himself or the minister to ensure that the necessary funds will be available to bring about these important changes to which he referred.

I am not just coming at this as a partisan, as a member of the opposition. I reference the recent report from the Senate, which is headed up in the other place by a Liberal senator. He indicated that a

rust belt would be developing unless the government invested \$1 billion annually over the next decade to address these shortcomings.

He talks about, as the parliamentary secretary referred to, the need to address the "economic crisis along the border, and everybody is spending all their misguided time worrying about missile defence". He went on to say, "We are going to lose jobs and we are going to lose economic growth, and it is right in front of our eyes. It's the economy, stupid". Those were the words of a Liberal senator in the other place.

What efforts has the parliamentary secretary undertaken to ensure that the actual resources are going to be there to implement the technology and, more important, the personnel? Could he tell us at the same time what that doily he is wearing represents?

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, the doily was prepared by a constituent of my colleague from Etobicoke Centre, a young woman I gather from Slovakia. She made these snowflakes and sent them around to all members of Parliament. I am very happy to wear it to commemorate that.

I know the member for Central Nova is not a partisan person at all. I am sure his question was asked fully in the light of the best public policy for Canada and it is in that vein that I will respond.

Managing in government is always a question of dealing with the scarce resources that we have and in some cases the very abundant resources in other respects.

As I indicated in my remarks, the Canada Border Services Agency has some 11,000 employees but I am sure it could always use more employees and more money.

The member will recall that since 9/11 the government committed \$7 billion and then beyond that another \$1 billion or so to deal with the national security agenda, and that has evidenced itself in many different shapes and forms, but border safety and border security is a work in progress.

We can always do better. We are striving to do better. In fact there is a meeting coming up on Friday in Windsor and Detroit with the outgoing homelands security secretary, Tom Ridge. We are hoping to flush out some of the issues, particularly with respect to Detroit-Windsor, and get some momentum moving in that particular context. Yes, we have work to do but much has been accomplished.

• (1555)

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC): Mr. Speaker, listening to the exchange between our two friendly parliamentarians here makes one question the cooperation generally that will be needed to make this a success. I can think of a couple of agencies that will have a direct effect, one being the Coast Guard.

As we know, most of the Coast Guard's operations come under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Some duties have been transferred to the Department of Transport. It has been recommended that it be a stand alone agency and, in a case like this, in relation to security, would be able to operate a lot better in conjunction with the new agency.

The other group would be the port police, which we had some years ago, that did a tremendous job when perhaps security was not the concern that it is today. We do not see them any more.

Government Orders

How, in light of the cuts that we have seen to the Coast Guard in particular, can we talk about beefing up security when the very agencies that have and have had to do a tremendous amount of the on-the-ground, on-the-ocean work are being decimated by budget cuts with one already disappearing? How, in light of that, can we have an agency that will be effective?

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, managing in government is never an easy task. We have many things that we want to implement on behalf of Canadians. We will implement the new health accord, introduce some day care programs, deal with equalization, with which I know the member opposite has a very long-standing interest, and also transfer some of the gas tax to the municipalities and communities. At the same time, we have the government looking at ways in which we can reallocate resources from within.

I thank the member for his question about the Coast Guard. It is an issue that is receiving some attention within the government. As I mentioned earlier, having a strong, effective border that deals with our security issues, as well as our economic issues, is very much a priority of the government. We are working diligently on all aspects of our border management policies and resources. I am sure we will be pursuing that to the best interests of all Canadians.

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to follow up on the previous question. I have to confess straight away that it is not directly relevant to the bill but it is to the Coast Guard.

I wonder if my colleague could tell us whether any thought has ever been given to including the Coast Guard and the armed forces? I have been asked about this quite often with respect to sovereignty, whether it is better to have a coast guard which is essentially civilian in the waters in the Arctic islands, for example, or up the east coast or the west coast. Is it better to have one that is civilian for sovereignty purposes or better to have one that is associated with the armed forces as is the case in the United States?

• (1600)

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I know that where the Coast Guard should be positioned structurally has been and continues to be a matter of some discussion. If my knowledge is correct, in the United States the coast guard is very much integrated with homeland security.

Suggestions have been made that our Coast Guard should be integrated with Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada. A case can also be made for incorporating it into the Department of National Defence. I am not sure that those structural discussions are complete yet, but whatever we do, we need to look at the best positioning of the Coast Guard to deliver on its mandate and to provide the services that it can in a most optimal way, and sometimes the way it is structured organizationally can heavily impact on that.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased and honoured to take part in this important debate on Bill C-26.

I should mention at the outset that I will be splitting my time with my colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl. Following my remarks, he will be giving an eloquent dissertation and enlightening

the House and Canadians with respect to the issue of the Coast Guard for which he has a longstanding affinity and a great deal of knowledge.

This bill is in a bit of a lag in coming a year late and is somewhat short in some areas in setting up this new border services agency. It is aimed in particular at bringing together several existing agencies, including an immigration program for ports of entry at citizenship and immigration, as well as import inspection duties from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Overall it is an attempt to improve, facilitate and bring together some of the existing agencies.

All goods and individuals entering the country today must report through this new service. The responsibility to ensure that travellers, items and services coming into Canada are admissible will fall on this new department. Clearly this is an extremely important agency and one which will have far-reaching powers and responsibilities. It is one which is heavily tasked to meet the new realities post 9/11, the new threats that exist in the world today.

There is responsibility as well for some of the more technical attempts by our country to augment our security, augment our trade and the speed with which we are able to send goods across the border to the United States, including the smart border initiative, the 30 point action plan that was initially introduced back in December 2001. There is also the FAST program. As well there is the Nexus system, which is aimed at simplifying and streamlining the border crossings for pre-approved low risk travellers.

All of these initiatives are wonderful and ones which we in the Conservative Party certainly endorse and encourage. The difficulty has been that we have seen this ongoing trend of announcements and re-announcements and efforts to garner as much public attention and support without actually doing it, without actually taking the important productive steps of implementing rather than talking about these particular initiatives.

My party would far rather see the actual effort and focus on putting these practices in place, improving the training and technology, and increasing the personnel. This is a problem that is repeatedly encountered. Whether it is Correctional Service Canada, the RCMP or the armed forces, we are seeing a dwindling of resources, the chief resource being individuals who are tasked with carrying out these important jobs.

There are a number of issues I would like to address. In the shortness of time I am going to refer first to the issue of the number of border guards or agents who are working alone at some of the ports of entry. Canada has 147 land and 13 marine border crossings. Some 103 of them are designated as work alone sites and are found mostly in remote parts of the country.

Seventy per cent of the work sites have technical difficulties with respect to communications tools. What I am talking about is the ability to access something as simple as the CPIC system. This causes real problems in terms of accessing important information as to who may have outstanding warrants, who may be seen as a security risk, information about individuals that is relevant to their crossing, such as whether they have a criminal record. I am told that much of that system is either inaccessible or is not up to date.

Government Orders

There was a very tragic incident recently which highlights the fact that many of these border crossings are basically guarded by a single individual. A young man, I believe he was 42 years of age, Adam Angel, who was a border agent, recently died of an illness and an affliction at Roosville, British Columbia, one of the remote crossings. He was working alone. There is no point obviously in speculating whether if somebody else had been there, that other person may have been able to assist him. He was working alone. Those are questions, tragically, that will never be answered. Certainly it is something that his family will have to come to grips with.

The member for Kootenay—Columbia has raised this issue in the House a number of times and has raised issues with respect to female border employees who also work alone at this same crossing. An alarm system was broken at Roosville and a communication network was deemed to be inoperative. These are dangerous situations that are currently being unaddressed or ignored by the government.

We can talk about the sophisticated attempts to improve border security, but it is personnel first and foremost, and shortcomings that would have to be addressed. Border officers are not allowed to carry firearms. If they need backup after encountering a dangerous situation, they are expected to call the RCMP. That is understandable. However in the moment when the danger presents itself, they are currently armed with batons or pepper spray of some sort. I would suggest that is insufficient, particularly if they are working alone at a remote border crossing where they are not able to access information. It is a recipe for disaster plain and simple.

● (1605)

I understand as well that in some of the remote locations it would take over an hour for the RCMP to actually respond. This would exacerbate the situation for an individual who found himself or herself in conflict with somebody entering the country.

Students are being used currently to replace rather than supplement border agents. With the greatest respect and the need we have in the country to employ students, this often puts students at risk. They have very insufficient or superfluous training of up to two weeks. The shadowing of senior border officers varies from location to location, but 90% of these students are put in frontline positions. At one point in time after 9/11, over half of the customs officers at Pearson airport were students. Again, I say that with the greatest respect to those young people who are getting this training, but is the security risk really worth it in this capacity?

The Auditor General in her 2003 report expressed major concern about the safety of the students and the country. She stated:

Because they make critical decisions at the primary inspection line, we remain concerned that the inconsistent training of students could pose an unnecessary risk for Customs.

This comes from the impartial auditor, the watchdog of the country.

Border officials also themselves are on record saying they need more full time indeterminate employees to be hired. The current program renews worries of those employees at the CBSA. In some cases there are less indeterminate full time officers than there were before the planes hit the towers in New York on 9/11.

Last July in Sydney, Nova Scotia, one of the Prime Minister's ships, and I point this out only for illustration, the *Sheila Anne*, was found to have more than \$1 million worth of cocaine in a grate attached to the bottom of the ship. Customs officers indicate that they found this as a fluke and Susan Horne, the president of the Customs Excise Union in Nova Scotia said:

The security is not good... there are not enough officers in Sydney to search a vessel.

I also understand they had to hire a private diver to inspect this particular ship. The disbanding of the ports police as referred to by my colleague from St. John's again highlights the lack of security often found at ports in this country.

We also know that individuals have been identified who have criminal records who are particularly vulnerable to being co-opted or are simply told not to show up at a certain point on the port at a certain point in time when goods are being brought in. Not to sound alarmist, but I have often maintained that the clearest danger, the present danger to this country is not through the air and is not across land; it is on the water.

Anything from child pornography, to trafficking in individuals, or a nuclear bomb can come into this country undetected. We currently inspect less than 3% of the containers coming into the major ports. That is not even touching upon the vast unguarded coastlines in this country. The decimation of our Coast Guard further underscores the need to turn our attention to this.

References to having the additional security for our Coast Guard by putting it into the military is an interesting suggestion or putting it into this particular security envelope is fine, as long as the necessary resources, personnel and equipment accompany that move. Simply banting the Coast Guard back and forth between Transport Canada and Fisheries and Oceans, or if we put it into another department does nothing to increase security. It is merely optics.

Equipment and interoperability of equipment is another issue that has to be addressed. Border officials have told us repeatedly that there are big problems with the current databases that they can access. In some cases we are told that the Americans can access the CPIC system but Canadian officials cannot.

The Auditor General pointed this out again with respect to her 2004 report. She spoke of the 139 LiveScan machines that were purchased to improve turnaround time for fingerprint analysis. She went on to say that the benefits were marginal at best, and the fact that Transport Canada processed four times more fingerprints was not due to the introduction of this new technology but due to the addition of personnel from the RCMP and Transport Canada.

Once again it is an issue of putting the people in place, not simply talking about the benefits, not simply talking about the new equipment but putting actual personnel in place.

There are terrorist watch lists at border controls, yet if we have those lists and cannot access them, they do no good. It is like a tree falling in the forest; if nobody hears it, it did not happen.

Government Orders

•(1610)

These types of approaches repeatedly seem to go unnoticed. They are not pointed out when the government is espousing the virtues of its new system.

I will turn the floor over to my colleague who will speak further about the need to address the rust out of infrastructure and the border delays that he is aware of.

The Conservative Party will be supporting this legislation because at least it is a step in the right direction. There is often a need and ability to amend the legislation which we will undertake to do. We will continue to push the government to hold it to account to do these things rather than simply talk about them.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight a couple of points.

When we talk about our border with the United States it is something like 6,000 or 7,000 kilometres long. I forget the exact length but whatever it is, it is a very long border between Canada and the United States. I suppose if we had immigration and customs officers every few yards, that would be the perfect solution. We cannot do that of course.

Let me point out some of the statistics which I thought I had highlighted in my speech but they are worth going over again. There are approximately 11,000 employees and 1,369 service points across the country and abroad. Last year there were 71 million highway travellers, 18 million air travellers, 276,000 rail passengers, 2.9 million marine passengers, and over 11 million commercial releases. Over \$3.3 billion was collected in import duties and \$22 billion was collected in GST.

This is not a small operation. This is a huge operation that is of critical importance to Canada. That is why our government is focusing on it as a key priority and the resources necessary to perform the function are being made available and will continue to be made available.

The member for Central Nova talked about the customs officers not carrying guns. I am wondering if he is aware of an independent job hazard analysis that was done in June 2003. It was performed for the former Canada Customs and Revenue Agency. It affirmed that firearms were not considered a necessary tool for customs officers. Does the member know about that report?

•(1615)

Mr. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of that report, but I am aware of the anecdotal evidence that I hear from customs officers who feel very much at risk, particularly when they are working alone. That report is not much solace to those who are standing there by themselves, unarmed, and find themselves encountering a dangerous individual who may be on a terrorist watch list or somebody who exhibits aggressive behaviour, and they are facing a serious threat to life and limb.

My colleague referenced the GST which would be the same GST that his government was going to get rid of 10 years ago. The member sitting in front of him used to espouse how important it was

to do just that. He should at least address that shortcoming before swallowing himself whole.

Mr. Scott Brison: How is David Orchard, Peter? You are from the valley; you know something about those orchards.

Mr. Peter MacKay: The member opposite is chirping, Mr. Speaker. He seems to have awoken from his perch.

The member also referenced the fact that there are thousands of miles of unguarded borders just as there are thousands of miles of unguarded coastline. The issue is that the government is not currently staffing the existing posts where there are crossings. I understand there are over 147 land crossings and 13 marine border crossings. Yet, there is insufficient staff as it currently stands to address the day-to-day management of those particular crossings. His reference to having one stationed every kilometre is completely mute.

The current Liberal government is not staffing the 147, which arguably is insufficient, but it is not putting people in those stations as it stands. That is the issue I am trying to highlight. We can have the greatest technology, the greatest plan, the smart plan, and the fast plan, but all of that means nothing if we do not have individuals watching these posts. In some cases a pylon is put on the road in an effort to deter those from entering the country illegally. That is laughable but true. That is the situation we are facing.

Our border is seen as a porous border. It is causing concern on the American side as well. That is not to suggest there are no challenges there. The Americans have obviously taken great steps to improve border security from their perspective. That is why I am encouraged to see that there is a collaborative approach, that we are working now in lockstep with the Americans, and moving in that direction to ensure the border is protected.

We need to look at the broader picture of having a North American security perimeter. If we protect the perimeter, then the border becomes less of a threat. The hon. member and his government should be examining that as a means to improving the overall North American security perimeter. We are not living in splendid isolation here on our northern part of the continent. This is the area in which the government should be looking rather than coming up with some of these antiquated phrases that really mean nothing, if it is not going to put resources and personnel in place.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for sharing his time with me on this extremely important issue.

We wonder sometimes with what importance the government looks upon cases like this. This is an extremely important piece of legislation moving in a positive direction. That is why we support it because any positive move to make our borders more secure would have to be supported by everyone.

However, are we just looking at semantics? Are we looking at smoke and mirrors? Where is the substance? Where is the meat? Let me say to the parliamentary secretary who introduced the bill that we have in this country, on both coasts in particular, the worst protected sections of coastline in the world.

Government Orders

In many parts of Canada the only indicator of any presence of ocean traffic is our radar. Unfortunately, large chunks of the coastline are not covered by radar. What is even more concerning is the fact that cuts in recent years have been so great that many of the radar sites, which operate by way of towers in remote or isolated areas, have no maintenance being done them. All of this is on the public record, by the way, from witnesses who work in these very locations.

The cuts have been so deep that the people who operate in these remote sites are told that there is no regular maintenance until the service goes down. If the problem happens to be in a remote tower, getting to it depends mainly on weather because in quite a number of areas the only way of getting there is by way of helicopter. If the weather is inclement, people wait for days and sometimes weeks in order to service the towers that control the radar sites. If they happen to fly in and they do not have the right part to effect changes or repairs, then they have to wait for another opportunity to get back there again. That is one major concern simply because no money is available for regular maintenance.

A more important gap in the coverage is the fact that if we know and the people in the area involved along the coastlines know what is covered by radar and what is not, would the bad guys not know too? In the past, when we discovered drug shipments landing in remote areas or on occasion where we had boat loads of people being dropped off on our coast, why is it that this always happened just slightly outside of radar coverage? It is because these people know which areas are covered by radar and which are not.

They know where it is safe to land and drop off contraband whether it be material or people, and escape without being detected. It is only when we find people wandering around, or in some cases we would be lucky enough to discover a hiker or someone driving in a remote area, that we would know that these things happened. Suddenly, we would notice a lot of activity, trucks being loaded with bags full of what appeared to be hay and of course it was drugs. When we discover a few hit and miss situations, how much is going on that we know nothing about?

When we talk about this, the ministers involved say they have changed all of this. Any boats approaching our shores, regardless of where they were coming from, had to call ahead to give notice. They used to have to call ahead 24 hours in advance. When they were within 24 hours of our coastline on either side of the country, they would had to call the nearest site to report that they were coming so that the very people we are talking about, the Canada Revenue Agency people and any police that would be involved if there were any concerns, would be available to meet the boat to check it out.

•(1620)

However, they have extended that. Now, any boats coming toward our coast must call ahead 96 hours in advance to let us know, which gives us lots more time to prepare. For what? For the boats that we know are coming.

Mr. Peter MacKay: What if they don't call?

Mr. Loyola Hearn: That is the question. What if they do not call? Of course, the good guys always call. We do not have to worry about the good guys if they have guns in their cupboard. It is the bad guys who do not register their guns. We are spending \$2 billion on the gun

registry and the people from across the floor just voted to put another \$100 million into it to keep it going for another while.

Mr. Peter MacKay: The member for Kings—Hants.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: The member for Kings—Hants, who was against the gun registry, just put another \$100 million into it.

The legitimate vessels that are approaching and calling in advance to tell us they are coming, and if they call 96 hours ahead, it does not make any difference. If we cannot react in 24 hours, then it does not make much of a difference what kind of agency we have, but it looks good. However, the people who are coming here, dropping off illegal immigrants or landing dope on our coast are not calling in 96, 24, 12 or 2 hours in advance. They are just not calling. They know, as everyone else knows, that if they want to come into this country and land, they can easily find a place and nobody will know they are here.

That is what we are concerned about here. I ask members who are questioning this to check the public record and the evidence given by people who work in the very field we are talking about. They will tell us exactly what I am saying because I am speaking directly from evidence on the written record. It is a major concern.

The other way we know that there are some boats approaching our coast that are not calling ahead and preparing us for their arrival is through the overflights. We had regular flights out of Newfoundland by provincial airlines that would monitor oil spills, look out for foreign overfishing, but also keep an eye on ocean going traffic. These flights have been severely curtailed, again because of cost cuts and shifts of responsibility. We now have infrequent flights.

On paper we talk about all these agencies that we need to coordinate in order to serve us, to protect our ports, but we are not putting our money where our mouth is. The very thing we need is a strengthened Coast Guard. We have a tremendous Coast Guard and we have a tremendous individual who looks after our Coast Guard. I have the greatest respect for Mr. Adams, but give the Coast Guard the tools to work with. Give it the funding necessary to have the type of Coast Guard for which a marine country like Canada could be proud.

•(1625)

Yes, we can have a much more secure country. Yes, this bill can help, provided we look after the necessities of putting on the ground the equipment, the personnel and particularly the funding that it takes to do just that.

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am particularly impressed with the nature of the discussion that is happening here. I am sorry that not all of the members who have spoken in the debate are currently available for comment.

I would really like to commend the kind of interaction that is taking place and the basis on which this discussion is taking place. This is a non-partisan discussion yet at the same time one that recognizes the weaknesses and the strengths in our current operation.

Government Orders

In particular, I would like to refer to the last speaker and the degree to which he recognizes that the weaknesses that need to be addressed are weaknesses that need to be addressed by all parties, and they need to be addressed in an objective, non-partisan way. Indeed, they are the problems of security that affect every human being. Whether they are Conservative, Liberal, NDP or from any other party is irrelevant. The significant part here is that we develop an attitude of security and a recognition that our security does not happen only because we have officers at the border, but that we have security because we all care about it.

When the hon. member has to say that some of these people who recognize that they are in danger refuse to call because they feel there will be no one at the other end of the line, that is a serious indictment. I know the hon. member speaks from experience. I would like to ask the hon. member to what degree the neighbourhood and the people who care about one another have filled the vacuum that has been created, in his observation, for a strength, a power and a service that ought to be provided by government.

• (1630)

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Mr. Speaker, we have in this country a tremendously dedicated public service, particularly the people who operate in the agencies mentioned here, who are front line people who put their lives in danger quite often when they go to work. They are always working on the edge. When we look at the support they get, it is heartbreaking.

Perhaps to answer the member's question about lack of coordination and the problems that we run into, I will give him an example of something that happened off his own coast in British Columbia. We had one of the towers down. Because of the weather, the tower could not be repaired. The radar site was inoperable. Communications were out.

There was a fishing boat off the coast. One of the fishermen got a jigger in his eye. The jigger slipped while he was removing it from a fish and became hooked in his eye. One of the fishermen on the boat called to the local radar site to ask to be hooked up with a hospital, which can be done very easily and quickly when the communications set is operating properly.

The tower was down. The staff could not transmit the message to anyone. They could not hook up the boat with the hospital. The only help that could be given was from one of the workers at the site who had a first aid course. She walked the individual through the process as well as she could. That is just an example of what happens when we do not maintain our equipment. The person who told us that was actually the person who was involved. She had tears in her eyes as she told the story.

We heard many heart-wrenching stories from people who want to be able to help. They want to be able to make sure we have a secure nation. They want our borders to be secure. These people work long hours and a lot of overtime because of the areas in which they work, but they are people who beg for some assistance.

We compared what happens in some of our sites along the west coast of Canada, along the coast of British Columbia, with what was happening just south of the border in Seattle, Washington. It was like chalk and cheese in relation to the amount of support and the number

of employees based per geographic area. Luckily, they cooperate with us.

I will say to members that if we would give the tools to the people who are there to do the job they would have no problems doing the work, because we have some great people on the ground. The problem is that we do not have to go any further than this very House to find out what our problem is in this country.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today about Bill C-26. This legislation will have endless repercussions on the lives of everyone in this country. It will have an enormous impact on everyone crossing our borders, including each member of this House, like nearly everyone in this country, as well as everyone who will come here in the future.

This is an ambitious bill, with an extremely broad scope. It is the result of the events of September 11, 2001, and I want to mention that the outline of this bill was drafted in the days after the unfortunate events unfolded in New York City over three years ago already. We must not forget that the world is a very different place now.

The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-26. It is however concerned by two things: in particular, the transfer of important duties and functions from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration to the Canada Border Services Agency, a transfer that could eventually jeopardize the protection of the rights of immigrants and refugees, the right to collect, retain, use and release information with regard to the enforcement of border security legislation and agreements between the Canada Border Services Agency and other national and international entities.

With regard to repressive measures affecting immigrants and refugees, we cannot disagree with an entity that already exists in fact, whether by order in council or whether it has been in existence for ages already. We cannot question a reality. The reality is that the transfer of responsibilities from Citizenship and Immigration Canada to the Canada Border Services Agency, as Bill C-26 seeks to do, has already occurred at our borders.

Nevertheless, we can and must remain critical of the implementation of measures that will transform this system and legally establish it. In the name of protecting individual freedoms, we must ensure that the potential changes in this system will not run counter to the very foundations of our society. After the events of September 11, 2001, discussions essentially concern the fine line between individual freedoms and the protection of national security.

The Bloc Québécois is opposed to national security outweighing individual freedoms. Our sovereign neighbours to the south can evaluate the situation any way they want and make their decisions accordingly. Canada should do that as well—remain sovereign—and it should not feel obliged to make its decisions on the basis of those of its neighbour. Thus, the measures taken in anger and bewilderment, immediately after the events of September 11, must not put Canada's inherent values on the back burner.

Government Orders

Although the Bloc Québécois has disagreed on many points with the decisions made by the federal government in the past, it also recognizes many shared values in the common history of Quebec and Canada. Values such as democracy, peace, privacy, human rights and many others are fundamental to both our cultures.

Such tragic events should not cast their shadow over the values that have built our common history for more than 400 years. We must be very cautious when the time comes to make major changes in the way we see and interpret the world. With respect to the circulation of passengers at the new smart border, I want to point out that, if Bill C-26 were adopted in its present form, some of these fundamental changes would contradict the vision we have had up till now, both in Quebec and in Canadian society.

Until now, we have shared the point of view, in Quebec and in Canada, that it was up to Citizenship and Immigration to manage the flow of new arrivals, whether they are immigrants, refugees or visitors. Under Bill C-26, all of these people will automatically have to deal with officers of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada.

Some try to reassure us by suggesting that these will be the same employees, the same officers, who previously worked for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. However, we must not be fooled. Two things can become one: these officers, with the change of bosses, will eventually change their mandate and their corporate mentality. They cannot change hats without changing their mission.

Furthermore, if these officers are currently the same and we agree that the uniform does not make the officer, then we must obtain assurances that when they change mandates their citizenship training—and I emphasize the word “citizenship”—will stay the same.

•(1635)

What I mean is that it is essential that we get assurances that these officers will not become agents of repression, but that they will uphold the precepts that unequivocally make Canada a welcoming land of liberty and an open country where rights and freedoms take precedence over all the rest.

We have a hard time imagining a public safety guardian—whose mission is to protect national security—becoming a guardian of human and individual rights. We want to stress the fact that these two mandates contradict each other and it is only natural that a person who takes care of one is not best suited to take care of the other.

On the Border Services Agency Web site it says it is “the first line of defence in managing the movement of people and goods into and out of Canada”.

It talks about defence as though an enemy army were flooding the Canadian battle fields. If this is not a way of seeing each passenger, individual, visitor or new arrival as a threat to national security, then I do not know what is.

The presumption of innocence is the foundation of the society we share. A fundamental breach of this tenet is announced here. Posting officers who are concerned with defence is the antithesis of an open border. We believe that the balance between national security and individual liberty is threatened.

We have no right to see every individual crossing our border as an enemy of the nation. While realizing that the world is not as safe a place in 2004 as it was in 1984, the Bloc Québécois nevertheless refuses to agree that it should be less free.

It is dangerous for officers of the new agency to have the authority to decide whether individuals crossing our borders have a right to enter and also to be entitled to stop, detain and deport people, all at the same time. I am talking about a single officer having the power to make all these decisions. That is not worthy of a free and democratic society. It sounds like a repressive society, which Canada is not.

Judging who is entitled to enter and who is not is a judicial responsibility. To date, all individuals dealing with immigration have had the right to defend themselves, the right to counsel and the right to argue their case.

The system may not be perfect, but the right to judicial review exists in immigration matters. This will no longer be the case if Bill C-26 is passed as it stands, because newcomers will simply be prevented from entering.

For Canada to act contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and to deny individuals entering the country their basic rights is contrary to human rights. The Bloc Québécois does not agree with letting this government take that direction.

We reject the idea of initially considering anyone coming into Canada as a potential threat to national security. We want a fair process to be established, not exclusionary thinking. Our concern is that the agency may look for officers with this kind of thinking, whose main qualifications will be investigation, deportation and harassment. We find it most unfortunate that there is no review mechanism for people crossing the borders, no process for appealing the decisions made by these officers, that they are judge and executioner, and that, in other words, they have the power of life and death over people, without anyone overseeing their work.

When certain individuals cross our borders as a last resort and ask for asylum, if they are sent back to their country of origin, they often risk being tortured. Already, under our current system, there are deportation cases that end in real human dramas. And I am not talking about the consequences of the safe third country agreement, which will soon come into effect, and for which these same officers will be responsible. This agreement will have a devastating impact on the lives of many refugee claimants. But that is another issue.

I am not talking either about exceptional situations. Canada is not a country where one life may be less important than another. It is a free and democratic country where humanitarian values are paramount. It is important that Canada define its rules accordingly and not implement legislation that could possibly lead to abuse or to violations of its own intrinsic values.

Government Orders

•(1640)

I will go quickly over clause 118. It provides that the governor in council may take away other powers from Citizenship and Immigration Canada and give them to the Border Services Agency. Of course, it seems risky to leave to a single individual the authority to give powers to the agency, without debating the issue in the House.

We are told by IRB officials that the nationals of 10 foreign countries are specifically targeted. This of course goes against all the principles of our shared society, and we ask that a clause be included in Bill C-26 to prevent racial profiling. The September 11 events have already generated enough abuse and racial tensions. It is critical to put an end to this abuse, instead of encouraging it.

The Bloc Québécois is convinced that the last thing that Canada wants is to be identified as a racist, discriminatory nation, and this is why we want a special reference to this issue included in Bill C-26.

My second point has to do with the measures taken to control the exchange of information. In addition to all the measures that I just mentioned—and I have to hurry if I want to mention them all—there is a very important aspect of this bill that could lead to very dangerous potential abuse.

Once again, American pressure appears to be dictating the government's choices, an indication of outside interference. These are not Canadian values. I would again point out that the fundamental freedoms protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms are the foundation of all the laws of this Parliament, which apply to all persons on Canadian territory.

If the government wants to expel certain individuals from its territory, so as not to have to honour its commitments, not only international commitments but moral ones as well, we condemn this. We would not want to attribute such an intention to the government. We therefore oppose all measures in Bill C-26 relating to the exchange of information.

Clause 119 permits the collection, retention, use, disclosure and disposal of information for the purposes of this act or for the purposes of application of the border legislation and the implementation of an agreement or arrangement entered into between the Border Service Agency and a foreign state, international organization or any other individual or organization. We do not wish to see that power extended any further.

Not only is there nothing to restrict the nature of these agreements, but there is also the possibility of information being exchanged between the Canadian Border Service Agency and any other individual or organization. This broad power to communicate information is a source of concern and of potential abuse. There is nothing stopping the minister from entering into a whole range of agreements with numerous entities. The problem lies in the fact that there is no definition of the purpose of the information sharing, nor any restriction on the type of agreements permitting such exchanges or with whom they may be signed.

It is dangerous to leave all this power in the hands of a single minister, a single individual. It seems risky for such a power not to

be counterbalanced by measures to protect refugees and immigrants on whom information might be disclosed.

When a refugee claimant seeks asylum because of persecution in his or her country of origin, if there is an agreement permitting notification of that country, it is not hard to imagine the danger this places the individual in. International agreements on refugees require us to welcome these individuals, give them a place to stay, and respect their rights, but they also require us to protect them.

Once again, fears about national security must not open the door to the abuse of individual liberties. If some members of the House plan to rise, as they have already done, and reassure us, I say that defining our course of action is not the task of any one member, but rather is dependent on the legislation and conventions by which we are bound.

There is a current trend toward even greater disclosure of personal information. We must draw the line somewhere. We are saying here that the line between privacy and the protection of national security has been crossed, especially since it in no way serves the interests of Canadians to release such information to a third party.

•(1645)

We will not make any suppositions about the reasons why this measure was included. We will only recommend that protection of privacy and individual liberties be reinforced.

Once again, the texts of international conventions are the definitive reference on what we can and cannot do. Paranoia has no place in the decision to release confidential information, and the Arar case is a perfect example of the type of society into which such measures can lead us. This case is currently before a parliamentary commission; an indication of how contentious it can be to formulate legislation governing such behaviour.

When individual rights are curtailed, when individuals feel less free, is a country more progressive? The Bloc Québécois strongly believes the opposite is true, and Canadians clearly agree. So, before we make decisions that could lead to major changes in how Canadians live, to a fundamental shift in the values held by Canadians and Quebecers, we must ask ourselves the following questions: are we prepared to sacrifice fundamental rights and at what price? In whose name? Are we safer or less free? Would our security be greater or our freedom more restricted? Have we truly reached the time when we must make such choices as if we were at war?

I would like to point out that we are discussing a bill. Before it ends up casting doubt on all the values underlying our shared history, before we decide whether we are creating a climate of war for ourselves, we must be prepared to accept the consequences, because they are momentous.

It is agreed that we have certain commitments to our American neighbours. But are we prepared to become unconditional allies, as their president put it during his most recent visit? Do we want to keep at least a bit of our sovereignty, or are we prepared to sacrifice everything for some vague reasons.

Government Orders

Bill C-26, in its current form, contains certain aberrations of a scope much broader than would appear. We must make just and enlightened decisions before there is no turning back.

For all these reasons—namely the abstract sharing of Citizenship and Immigration Canada's responsibilities with Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, which in the long run could endanger respect for and the safety of immigrants and refugees and everything related to rights and the collection and sharing of information about the people who cross our borders—the Bloc Québécois has reservations about the current application of Bill C-26.

We agree, nevertheless, with the principle of this bill and we recognize that the world is not the same in 2004 as it was in 1984. Still, we would hope that, even if the world is less safe, it is no less free. This is the unfortunate prospect that Bill C-26 opens.

Let us remain sovereign in the choices that we make in this House. Let us prepare bills consistent with our shared values and with the treaties and conventions that we have signed in the past. Most of all, let us not abandon one of our most important values: the presumption of innocence. Let us not put all our entrants in the same boat, and let us avoid any presumptions of guilt in their regard. That would be contrary to 400 years of free and democratic life.

• (1650)

Hon. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges for her comments.

In my speech, I described the Government of Canada's position on certain points. I would like to repeat them, because the hon. member has described something that does not exactly match the government's position.

The Canada Border Services Agency was created in order to provide integrated services at the border. The CBSA facilitates legitimate cross-border traffic of travellers and goods while stopping people and goods that pose a potential risk to Canada.

The Government of Canada is committed to protecting refugees and welcoming immigrants. This remains one of its highest priorities.

Moreover, transferring part of entry functions will not have any negative effect on the protection of immigrants and refugees. The duties of officers at ports of entry will remain the same.

• (1655)

[English]

I wanted to make that point and also underline the point I made in my remarks. We come from the premise that 90% or the vast majority of Canadians, whether they be individuals or businesses, want to comply with the law. However, we do have to deal with a small minority of those people who would like to take advantage of our generosity.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Speaker, I want to raise a critical point about what the hon. member opposite was saying.

Our position is quite simple. We are saying that we can and must remain critical in respect of the application of the measures that will

transform this entity. On October 12, 2004, the government announced it was reversing two decisions. Assessing risk before referral is now the responsibility of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. The signature of two ministers responsible is needed for issuing security certificates.

We are saying that currently, individual freedoms have to be respected. The rights of immigrants and refugees must also be respected. We must keep a critical eye on the procedures implemented. We must also recognize that the Border Services Agency has highly complex responsibilities.

To name a few: it must ensure that all people coming into Canada are admissible and comply with Canadian laws and regulations. This responsibility is quite broad. The agency must also interdict inadmissible people and detain and remove persons who have been determined to be inadmissible to Canada. This also requires a great deal of coordination. Furthermore, the agency must develop policies for implementing the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, for individuals who are inadmissible for reasons of security, violation of human rights or involvement in organized crime; decide whether an immigrant who meets the inadmissibility criteria can be exempt for lack of danger; ensure payment of duties and tax; and identify and intercept goods prescribed as high risk.

I have just listed seven responsibilities. They make for a highly complex agency. As I was saying earlier, with the coming into force of the Safe Third Country Agreement, because of the level of coordination and complexity, we must keep a critical eye on the way this agency establishes procedures.

I simply want to mention to the hon. member opposite that we are not necessarily against the principles of Bill C-26. The only thing we are saying is that we must remain on the lookout, because of the complexity of this agency.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Bloc Québécois' immigration critic for her vigilance and her concerns, which always focus on human rights with regard to immigration.

As we know, immigration is important to each of our ridings. In the past, it was more important for the big cities, but this is no longer solely their prerogative. The Bloc Québécois has always promoted a society accepting of new arrivals.

I want to ask my colleague two brief questions. First, can she remind us why it is so important to have a review and appeal mechanism? The Bloc Québécois has long fought for this. As she will explain, we were extremely disappointed, since the Bloc Québécois has been asking for several months now for the review mechanism to be re-established. Can she tell us why this is important?

Government Orders

Second, can she talk about the improvements that should be made to the IRB so that the tribunal can be much more vigilant, dynamic and efficient than it currently is and so that we can put an end to the Liberal tradition of political patronage?

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Speaker, I thank my dear colleague for his question. As I was explaining earlier, this is a department with complex responsibilities. In addition, there is the role played by Citizenship and Immigration and the coordination between these two departments.

With respect to the review and appeal mechanism, it is certain that at present, we have the same concerns about the agency's services. Decisions made by officers at the borders cannot be appealed. We have some concerns about that. People have no access to a safety net or recourse. Therefore, we must be certain that justice is done. If the system is to be based on values of justice and equity, the mechanisms to support those values must also be included.

That is one of the issues we have with immigration. When a refugee receives a negative decision, the decision is without appeal. We must explain to those listening that in the beginning, there were two commissioners on the IRB. With the changes in legislation in 2002, there is only one commissioner who makes the decision to keep or deport a refugee claimant.

The fact that there is no possibility of appeal takes away a certain safety net that used to exist. Previously, if one of the two commissioners decided in favour of the claimant, the individual could remain in Canada.

One of our demands is the implementation of the refugee appeal division. That is somewhat relevant to what I said earlier. If we want a fair and equitable mechanism, we must have a means of appeal and a way to review the file of any person who believes there has been a miscarriage of justice. That is currently lacking in immigration.

Transferring that idea to Bill C-26, it is rather similar. If we want there to be justice and equity within our borders, we must make sure that we have the mechanisms in place to give people who feel they have been treated unfairly by the system a chance to appeal the decision and receive fair treatment.

• (1700)

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate on Bill C-26.

The first thing I would like to do is acknowledge the hard work and tenacity around this issue that both our colleagues from Windsor—Tecumseh and Windsor West have focused on this. It is a huge issue for Windsor. It is not, like many in the House, a broader issue. This is Windsor's back yard.

I will mention the border delays. If members have had a chance to go to Windsor and be brought to the border by either of the two members I have just mentioned, they saw how backed up the trucks are from the bridges, many kilometres back from the actual border. This happens on a regular basis.

What is disappointing but interesting is that there are so many trucks it is affecting the small businesses that are on each side of

those main arterial roads in the city of Windsor for the simple reason that people cannot turn off the main arterial road into the parking lots of these small businesses. They are literally being strangled by virtue of the fact that their customers physically cannot get to them.

This whole issue of what is happening at our border crossings has all kinds of permutations. It is important to note that Bill C-26 is not a small bill. I point to the fact that it is close to 100 pages long and contains 147 clauses, which is a lot to consider.

I heard my colleague from the Conservative Party, the member for Central Nova, talk about the fact that he felt this should be a non-partisan debate. That is fair and I accept that. We will try to gear to that, but nonetheless there are some elements in here that have to be acknowledged, such as what the status was of border crossings under the government. We must remember that it has been the government for 10 years. What was the status we found when we actually looked at it? In other words, we are fixing something, but we need to remember who broke it or did not take the time to think ahead.

The is about the future and about moving forward. However I want to bring to the fore the fact that it was the Auditor General—and I do not know what we pay the Auditor General but it is not nearly enough—who did an audit and determined a number of things. First, she found that watch lists that are used to screen visa applicants, refugee claimants and travellers seeking entry to Canada were not consistently accurate and up to date.

My friend from the Bloc just finished commenting on the concerns that she and her caucus colleagues had around some of the immigration ministry authority and powers moving over to this new entity and what that might mean to new Canadians or refugees or those who are seeking to make Canada their new home. I point to what the Auditor General found out, which is that it can cut both ways. We can have someone, who ought not be coming in, getting in because the proper information is not going where it needs to go, or, if there is an error, not that computers ever make mistakes, but in that rare moment when there is a computer mistake, and I say that very tongue in cheek, the fact that this needs to be kept up to date was found to be inadequate by the Auditor General.

It sounds like a little thing but when it is someone's life, someone's family or someone's kids who are being denied entry simply because information is either not up to date or inaccurate, that is a big deal. The Auditor General found that problem going into this.

She also found that 25,000 Canadian passports were lost or stolen each year and the information about those passports was not being made available to the front line officers. She acknowledges that those passports could be used by people who have unlawful purposes in wanting to be in Canada. However, from a common sense point of view, one would think that there would already be a system in place to make sure that if a passport, one of the most important documents in the entire nation, is lost or stolen, the information about that passport would be forwarded to the front line people we look to as being our first line of defence in terms of making sure that only those who we want in this country are getting into the country.

Government Orders

The Auditor General found that and that is obviously something that Bill C-26 is attempting to correct. I do not in any way want to leave any impression that it is a bad bill, but I do want to point out how we got here and what some of the problems were that we are collectively trying to solve with Bill C-26.

● (1705)

The last thing the Auditor General mentioned, and these are just the big pieces, was that Transport Canada was not being given access to criminal intelligence that the RCMP had when doing the screening for employees who would be working in secure areas in an airport or indeed actually having access to aircraft themselves.

I hear my colleagues murmuring around me. It is surprising to hear that kind of information and obviously it has to be treated right. By no means are we suggesting that our privacy laws should not be upheld, but by the same token it just makes sense that if there is important intelligence that the RCMP has, that there be a means to make sure that the front line people who are hiring those who are going into secure areas and will have access are people who should be given those kinds of clearances and have that kind of a security level.

Those were areas that our Auditor General found problematic and wanting, particularly in the events following September 11, and that is how we got to this point today where all of this is here.

To take in the enormity of what we are trying to achieve takes a lot of work. There are all the issues that every one of us has raised so far. In its totality, we must understand that we are talking about goods valued at \$1.9 billion and 300,000 people crossing our borders every day. We could spend a lot of time, which we have and I hope members will at committee, talking about the security side of things, but I would hope that we recognize, and these are the issues that our colleagues from Windsor are bringing up all the time, that security and safety obviously are paramount but that we have to do this in a way that is intelligent and efficient so that we are not disrupting the critical flow of goods and people back and forth on our borders with the U.S.

Being from Hamilton and representing downtown Hamilton, certainly in terms of the steel industry, we talk a lot about just in time delivery. If we were to talk to anybody who lives near a border city, they would tell us the nightmares that a lot of manufacturers are going through because they have things timed in such a way. For instance, we did a tour recently of the transmission plant at General Motors in Windsor. I would urge any member who has an opportunity to take it because there is a lot there to be learned. One of the things they talked about was that transmissions built there in the morning could easily find themselves installed in a newly assembled vehicle in the United States by the end of the day. It is hard to make that system work if the equipment is sitting in a truck 20 kilometres from the border where it has been sitting for four hours, and the driver has no idea of when it will get to where it is going.

I cannot say this enough, because I would not want anyone to think that we are not taking security seriously, believe me we are, as every member of the House does. However there does have to be that balance where we have the ability to efficiently move goods and people across the border. That will take training, new technologies

and new systems of dealing with the processing of goods and people. It will take a lot of work and a lot of thought but we need to do it. It is imperative, both for our security and for our economy.

If the parliamentary secretary is planning to comment, which he may or may not, but if he does, I hope he acknowledges that the government is embracing the notion that they have to deal with both sides of this equally and that both are important, and that if either side fails then collectively we have let our country down. It is just that important.

● (1710)

The member from Newfoundland spoke about the staff, the front line people. I want to underscore, on behalf of our caucus, that message because it is critical. As we all know, we can have the greatest plans, policies, ideas, goals and lofty ideals in the world, but without the people on the front line who will make it happen, it is really just words and hot air. If we stand back and acknowledge how important it is and how difficult it will be, we had better appreciate the people on the front line. They need the numbers, the training and adequate equipment to do their jobs.

It is not the easiest job in the world. Although not exactly the same, to some degree I would liken it somewhat to officers pulling cars over on the highway. They are never a 100% sure what they will find when they walk up to that car. Border crossing staff, support staff and others, all who are employed, never know what they will face. Given some of the dynamics in our world at this time, we have to be cognizant of their needs as citizens, as employees of the government and as protectors of our border. They need to be treated with the respect and importance they deserve. If it takes funding to ensure that the training, numbers and equipment are there, then that money bloody well better be there. It is just that important.

Last, in acknowledging that we will support the bill going to committee, as we can see from the comments made by not only me on behalf of our NDP caucus, but also other colleagues, there is a lot of work to be done. The bill could be perfect, but I doubt it. I do not think I have ever seen a perfect bill. Therefore, there is always work to be done.

Given the importance in some of the areas, which will not be easy to work out, I hope the committee has the opportunity to dig into these things in a meaningful way, simply because of its overall importance.

I would like to caution the government a little. It is my understanding that the agency has been up and running for about a year and we are doing the paper work after the fact. I have spent 13 years in majority government situations at the provincial level, and have sat on both sides of the House. I know that when a bill is introduced in the first year of a four year majority government, there is a fairly high degree of certainty that it will become the law simply because with a good healthy majority government bills do not lose. Things can happen sometimes. This may indeed be one of those. I do not know. It obviously predates the last election.

Government Orders

However, the government that it needs to be careful. In a minority situation, it could easily find out, having gone stampeding out through the gate and setting something up, starting to pull pieces into place, spending money, hiring people, doing studies and all these things, at the end of the day the majority of the House might not agree with the government. Since the government does not control the majority, the only thing that is lawful is what Parliament says is lawful. Therefore, I would add that cautionary note for the government.

This predated the election, although I do not know if we want to make a big deal about that. However, it is worth at least pointing out that in a minority situation, as we are all going through these new untested, uncharted waters to some degree in the modern era, the government ought not get too far ahead of itself. It should remember that it is in a very different dynamic than it has been for the past decade.

Let us ensure we get the horse in front of the cart, pass the legislation and then take the action, not the other way around.

● (1715)

Hon. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on two particular points my colleague raised.

First, the department strives for perfection, but I do not think Bill C-26 is perfect. That is why bills come before Parliament. I am sure my colleague understands that the decisions of December last were made because the government could not wait around for the endorsement of the House when the security of Canadians was at stake. The government took action to bring these various agencies and groups together under one roof so it could have better coordination and ready access to information, as the member cited.

We are not creating any new powers or authorities under the new department or agency. Some efficiencies could be obtained. An immigration officer could call up information that otherwise might be awkward to pull up. There will be some efficiency, some synergy. The whole reason for this is so various groups can share information respecting fully, as the member cited, the need for privacy. The legislation would not change anything with respect to those authorities.

Having talked about the need for coordination, the member should be inclined to support the bill. I hope his colleagues will as well. Bringing these government functions under one roof is an important step for our government to take. It will result in a more coordinated and a more strategic focus on that.

If the member glanced through the 9/11 report that came out of the United States, he would find that this is a challenge governments face worldwide. We have to ensure that various agencies and departments talk to each other. The member cited inter-operability, as did other members. We are striving to ensure that radio systems can communicate with each other and that those protocols are standardized. We still have work to do, but much progress has already been made.

● (1720)

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I think all of us are like-minded in moving forward. This will be one of those times when we may have disagreements along the way about how we do something, but no doubt we are all resolute in the *raison d'être* of the bill and the absolute critical need to ensure that our borders are as safe as possible as well as being efficient as possible. I have no doubt we share that goal.

Again, I want to be perfectly clear that our caucus is certainly supportive, at the very least, to getting it to committee. I would not want to hazard beyond that. I am not criticizing it in any great detail at this point. It is up and running. Something needed to be done. We need to get it to committee. We will see where we are at in committee and if there are some changes that gets us close to perfection, I know we will want to roll our sleeves up and do that work.

Let me say two quick things to the hon. member. First, I appreciate the fact that after September 11 a lot of deficiencies were found in the American intelligence system. To the Americans credit, they have had a number of reviews of that and publicized their findings. People in very senior positions have had to take some hits and responsibility because of lack of planning ahead of time, which contributed to September 11. We did not have those kind of reviews, but I want to ensure that we put on the table the fact that we had similar serious problems here. We were not looking any further ahead than the Americans or anybody else. One could call that a partisan shot, but it is part of the history and needs to be provided to put things in context on how we got there.

Second, I accept the fact that the government had to move quickly. I accept the fact that a majority government would have no reason to think the bill would not pass. I have some trouble with the specific comment of the parliamentary secretary that it could not wait around. This is a minority situation. If it happened now, I do not imagine the government would dare run off, spend money, hire people and create an agency without first getting the approval of the House.

If timing was an issue in terms of responding quickly and having to beef up our security in a very quick rapid way, I believe the government would find it would get the support of the House. We are not here to hurt the country. We are here to do the right thing. If that means moving quickly, then by unanimous consent the House can do anything. I have a little problem with that being the reason. I think it is more the fact that the Liberals were in power with a majority for so long, it never really occurred to the government, in any serious way, that its bill would not pass.

I thank the parliamentary secretary for his attention and for taking the time to comment.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Kootenay—Columbia.

I am pleased to speak today on Bill C-26 to establish the Canada Border Services Agency, which will provide integrated border services and facilitate the flow of persons and goods across our border.

Government Orders

This bill is of particular interest to me given that my riding of Langley is on the international border with the United States and I have a border crossing in my community.

As members know, the policy of the Conservative Party is to develop a strategic partnership with the United States to ensure that both security and trade issues are resolved in Canada's best interests. We are hopeful that the creation of the CBSA will assist in achieving those goals.

The CBSA is responsible for the smart border program, including Nexus, which expedites pre-approved low risk travellers, and FAST, which expedites the movement of low risk goods.

For the transportation industry in my riding, border clearances are a giant headache. We have heard other members speak on that problem. According to the British Columbia Trucking Association, located in Langley, the typical trucker has to contend with the usual security check as well as completing the time consuming and complicated forms while waiting for the government agents to arrive so they can approve the truck's contents.

With increasingly frustrating waits at the border and a trucking industry that lacks enough personnel, the in-demand truckers now realize that they can afford to stop crossing the border and are considering just driving within Canada. If that were to happen, there would be a loss of international trade.

The Aldergrove border, which is in my riding, is currently closed from midnight to 8 a.m. The issue of opening Aldergrove to a 24/7 crossing needs to be considered. The Aldergrove crossing is at the south end of provincial Highway No. 13. At the north end of Highway No. 13, intersecting with Trans-Canada Highway No. 1, is a large Canadian industrial park known as Gloucester Industrial Estates. Along Highway 13 is Aldergrove's Department of National Defence military base. To add to that, we have the Abbotsford International Airport, which is only 10 kilometres to the east.

It is easy to see that if Canada-U.S. truck traffic were permitted to flow efficiently at this crossing, it would be of tremendous benefit to the economic future and life of Langley and the surrounding communities.

I would like to speak regarding illegal border drugs. Interstate 5 in Washington state, just to the south, is the west coast pipeline not only for trade but also for illegal drugs. The issue of illegal drugs crossing the border is a hot topic in Washington state.

Washington and B.C. share the third busiest border crossing in the country. Prosecutors and sheriffs in Whatcom County are currently seeking a \$1 million U.S. grant to help deal with crime spawned by their border crossing with British Columbia. This money is needed to deal with a large range of offences, including drug prosecutions, money laundering and auto theft.

According to Dave McEachran, the prosecuting attorney with Whatcom County:

—we have a huge flow of B.C. bud coming down and we've got cocaine going up to B.C., along with laundered money and guns.

While law enforcement is involved in intercepting criminals on both sides of the border, U.S. authorities are lamenting Ottawa's

approach toward decriminalizing marijuana and its link to organized crime in Canada.

It is unclear at this time how many immigration officers will be financed by the new Canada Border Services Agency to combat illegal immigration, people smuggling and trafficking. In fact, people smuggling is not just an overseas problem. In my riding, people smuggling is second only to drug smuggling. Immigrants from the Philippines, Mexico and Korea are paying smugglers to bring them across the border.

The bushes at the border are riddled with well-worn paths used by smugglers. Some of the trails are even named, including the most popular, the Ho Chi Minh trail, named by the local law enforcement. Security cameras in place on the border are not solving the problems, because there still is insufficient manpower in place to actually apprehend illegal immigrants.

Front line border guards must be resourced properly to do their jobs. We have heard that from other members. Canadian customs officers have asked for backup from armed police at some of the busiest airports and border crossings. Recent stories of border guards working alone have raised concern.

My hon. colleague from Kootenay—Columbia, who will be speaking next, has made it clear that two guards are needed at each crossing. This was tragically demonstrated after border crossing guard Adam Angel fell ill and then tragically died while working alone.

• (1725)

As well, a female border guard was forced to work alone with faulty communications equipment. None of her colleagues were able to notify her that a potentially dangerous felon could be on his way to her border crossing while she was working alone.

These types of stories should not happen in this day and age when we should put the safety of our staff as a high priority.

Appropriate staffing levels at Canadian border crossings should also be a priority for another reason: terrorism. The 9/11 attack was the impetus for the Anti-terrorism Act, the allocation of \$8 billion for national security, and the implementation of the airline security tax.

With the establishment of this new Canada Border Services Agency, we must be under no illusions about the severity of terrorist attacks on Canadian soil. Our top national security adviser, Robert Wright, has stated:

Osama bin Laden has publicly identified Canada as a country he believes his followers should attack. He ranked Canada as fifth out of seven countries, and every other country on that list has already been attacked...So this is not someone else's problem.

In fact, an Ottawa intelligence report states that al-Qaeda apparently considers Canada a legitimate target because of the presence of our troops in Afghanistan. The report surmises that terrorists might attack Canada in retaliation for the arrest of a few alleged al-Qaeda associates, including at least one from Vancouver whose deportation is currently being sought. That does not just hit close to home; it lands in our front yard.

Another recent national security warning comes from Colin Kenny, chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on National Security and Defence. Mr. Kenny criticized this Liberal government for ignoring a Senate report which concluded that most Canadian cities would not be able to cope with the devastating impact of a major terrorist strike.

Kenny said Ottawa has been lax in several security areas, including the protection of electrical transmission systems and oil pipelines. As well, we need better surveillance on our coastal waters, which stretch nearly a quarter of a million kilometres, making them the longest undefended borders in the world. Kenny says, "They are vast, they are vulnerable, and, unfortunately, they are largely unattended".

There is much more to be achieved before Ottawa can claim to be able to defend itself against terrorism. According to Martin Rudner of the Canadian Centre of Intelligence and Security Studies:

—the government has not done nearly enough to address terror threats to our infrastructure—especially when it comes to the energy sector. It has failed to actively crack down on fundraising for terrorist and terrorist-affiliated groups, despite legislation to enable such a crackdown, and the Tamil Tigers—responsible for more of the world's suicide bombers than any other group—have not yet been outlawed by Cabinet.

Why not?

While somewhat improved, our intelligence agency still falls short of the necessary level of sophistication, mostly due to the lack of sufficient funding that also plagues the RCMP. Our immigration system, which has roughly 36,000 failed refugee claimants lingering long past their deportation orders, is simply not tight enough for any country that takes security threats seriously.

• (1730)

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to again debate this particular topic. You may be aware that last week I had an opportunity as well to rise on this as a question. I see that the gentleman who had the opportunity to respond to my question is also in the House so perhaps we will be continuing our debate.

While we are in favour of going ahead with something that is already in place—it almost becomes redundant—I think it is important to take the opportunity to draw to the attention of the House this fact. Although we are going ahead with the necessary legislation to put this agency into effect, in fact and yet once again the government has brought us to a point where, although we have the necessity of a border guard, a border crossing control, for the sovereignty of our country and the security of the people of Canada, the government has turned around and completely under-resourced this absolutely vital entity.

Nothing makes this more profound than if I read to the House from the "CCRA Interim Policy on the Handling of Armed and Dangerous Lookouts":

This memorandum is intended to disseminate to the Customs inspectors, the interim CCRA policy on the handling of individuals who are the subject of armed and dangerous lookouts.

Should a Customs Officer encounter an individual who is identified as being the subject of an armed and dangerous lookout, the Customs Officer should allow the individual to proceed and immediately notify the police and provide as much detail as possible to enable apprehension.

Government Orders

This interim policy will remain in effect until a longer term strategy on armed and dangerous lookouts is developed in consultation with our partners.

This is really quite pitiful.

I can relay two stories to members. One of them is from my constituency, which was relayed directly to me, and is about one of the customs officers who was on shift by himself in the middle of the night. Members may recall that this was the topic of my last debate, the fact that he should not have been on shift by himself, but he was.

He was confronted by two individuals in a vehicle who were about to proceed across the border at the border crossing of Roosville. The border crossing is an hour and a quarter away from Fernie, which is the closest RCMP detachment. It was three o'clock in the morning. The officer took a look at the two individuals in the car and came to the conclusion that they were pretty dangerous people. As a consequence, he waved them on through. He then called the RCMP in Fernie, as I say, an hour and a quarter's drive away, and was told by the person there, "Well, I can't do anything about it, because I'm on shift all by myself".

There we had two people who the customs officer, and I have no reason to question his judgment, felt were very dangerous people. As a consequence of that, he called the RCMP, following this directive, only to be told there was nothing the RCMP could do about it either. That is the state that these Liberals have allowed us to get to here in Canada.

I have another story. Two customs officers noticed a car speeding through the Pacific crossing just south of Vancouver. It was in the middle of the day. As the car sped through, they recognized one of the people in the car as somebody who should have stopped; certainly they would have loved to interdict the person.

The two of them hopped into their vehicle and chased the car. They went down all the streets and through the freeways and, using their own personal cellphones, alerted the police to the fact that these two armed and dangerous people—they assumed they were armed and dangerous—were on the loose. Due to the customs officers shadowing the car, the police found these people, who indeed were armed, indeed were dangerous and indeed did have drugs in their car.

Everybody was really happy about this, because that meant these customs officers had done their job and the police had intercepted them so Canada was safe.

Do hon. members know what the reward was for the customs officers? It was a severe reprimand for leaving their border. Where is the common sense and logic to this?

At the Pacific crossing, contrary to Roosville and Rykerts and the other crossings in my constituency, which are undermanned, there is a certain complement of personnel at the border on the Canadian side at the Pacific crossing. What did the customs officers get for using their common sense, for using their courage and for having the conviction that they would pull these people over and indeed for getting the job done? They were seriously reprimanded and I believe even lost pay over the fact that they had left their posts.

Government Orders

• (1735)

What is wrong with this picture? Although the federal Liberals are constantly talking about the fact that they take our border security very seriously, they are not providing the resources. We are not only talking about money, but about the personnel that would flow from the money, and certainly not the equipment. On top of that, the border agents are in a position where they are not even integrating with sufficient backup and support from the RCMP and other police forces.

I do not understand a government that would be doing this to us at a time in our world's history when we are faced with some very malevolent forces in the world. Those forces could choose to come into our country at a time when we are trying to build a working relationship with our friends to the south, who are after all our biggest trading partner. Why is the government constantly under-funding and under-resourcing? The border agents are not only under-resourced in manpower and equipment, but, as I read in this interim policy, they are under-resourced in terms of this policy.

What drew this to my attention was the unfortunate passing of Adam Angel. Just to refresh everyone's memories, that occurred while he was working by himself. He should not have been working alone. He was ill the entire night long, to the point that by six o'clock in the morning he was literally on death's door. I do not know if he made it to the hospital. He was by himself. Why did he not contact anyone? I do not know the answer to the question about Adam Angel, but I know that 30% of the time the ability of these officers to contact anybody is either limited or non-existent.

Most of the time the information that is passed up the line from the U.S. side of the border is not even available to them. Other times, because of under-staffing, the backup and support they are supposed to be receiving from their supervisors, casting no aspersions on their supervisors, is not there because sometimes the telephones are not on. How seriously do the Liberals actually take Canada's border security? Not very seriously.

I also have in hand something called the "Canadian Customs Officers Critical Incident Summary Report". In this particular instance, there was a situation at Rykert's, just south of my riding, where the border guards were actually taken hostage by people. There are over 200 incidents in this critical incident summary report. It was shut down by management because it did not want a continuation of the compiling of these critical incidents.

This legislation should be going forward, but I seriously question the actual seriousness of the federal Liberals about the safety and security of Canadians.

• (1740)

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member who just spoke raised some very significant issues. I would like to ask him about the reference he made to the critical incidents that have been reported and that for some reason now they are not reported anymore.

I am wondering how the supervisor or the minister in charge would ever know exactly where the weakest spots were in the system if there was no way of finding out where the critical incidents happened, what the conditions were surrounding those critical

incidents, and how those critical incidents could be avoided in the future or at least be treated in such a way to reduce the number of critical incidents. How would they know if they were simply saying that they are not going to find out whether there are any incidents? Who knows if there are more of these and if more lives are in danger?

These people, who are at the border, are there all alone in some cases, as the hon. member just indicated. They have families and they have people who depend on them. Can we imagine the terror that the wife or the family of a border guard is experiencing, wondering if this is the night that a critical incident will happen at that border crossing? I wonder if the hon. member could speak to that just a little further.

• (1745)

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Speaker, indeed the whole issue of stopping the reporting of critical incidents is a very serious issue within itself. The Liberals are just trying to put their heads in the sand.

I could give an example from 1999 from the border at Rykert's. A subject appeared suspicious and the customs officer referred him to a secondary officer. The subject momentarily parked then fled. A 911 call was made to police who began the pursuit. The subject was stopped with a spike belt 150 kilometres away. When the subject exited his crashed vehicle, he began shooting at police officers. The subject was a U.S. felon who was fleeing apprehension in the U.S.

This is the level of the problem that we have. At the Ambassador Bridge, two fully automatic rifles, a .45 calibre handgun and a martial arts weapon were found undeclared on two men from Missouri. Both men were charged, convicted and given a 30 day sentence. In Patterson, two customs officers located a large weapons cache consisting of two rifles and four handguns.

These customs officers are doing a job for the security of our country and in return they basically get lip service from the federal Liberals. What the opposition is calling for, demanding, is that the federal Liberals step up to the plate with the proper resources, that we get to the end of this, and rather than, as my friend has said, shutting off the ability to come up with a critical incidents summary report, actually getting on with the job of giving the officers the ability to get the job done.

Hon. David Kilgour (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would my hon. friend give us more of his thoughts about what additional measures he would like to see in order to deal with this very serious problem that he has been discussing?

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Speaker, the answer to the hon. member's question is more personnel. There must be more personnel in order to do the job. The second part of the answer is to have the proper equipment available that personnel. The third part of the answer is that we must have negotiation and cooperation between ourselves and the U.S.

Government Orders

Right now the federal Liberals are telling us that if there is a problem for a border guard who is working by himself, he can go across the border. The fact of the matter is that he cannot. There is no protocol. There is no agreement with the United States in the majority of the situations. It is only under the most extreme situation that there can be any actual physical cooperation. It would only be in an overwhelming situation that the U.S. border guards would actually be able to go back and forth.

I have one last point. In the case of Roosevelt, there are 10 Canada Revenue Agency employees. Facing them immediately across the border, there are 29 on the American side. It just talks to the whole issue of resources.

• (1750)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

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PATENT ACT

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Industry, Lib.) moved that Bill C-29, an act to amend the Patent Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to begin the second reading of Bill C-29, a bill that makes technical amendments to the Patent Act. The changes provided in this bill are strictly technical and narrow in scope. I am hopeful that the House and the other place will have no problem passing this bill expeditiously.

It is very important that we move quickly on this bill for, although it deals with details that are of a technical nature, the jobs of many Canadians and the competitiveness of Canadian companies in a global marketplace could be stake if we delay.

Canada's reputation as a good place to invest and perform leading edge research and development may also be hurt if we do not move quickly to clear up the technical issues covered by the bill.

First, what the bill represents is a response to an unexpected court decision that has raised uncertainties about the status of some patents. It is designed to clear up the confusion about the patent fees and potentially the status of a significant number of patents. It is a measure to avoid clogging the courts with patent infringement lawsuits, and the sooner we pass the bill the sooner we can remove the element of uncertainty regarding Canada's patent regime.

I want to provide the House with some of the background that made these technical amendments necessary. The Patent Act is designed to protect the intellectual property of investors. The patent offer the investor a monopoly on the creation for a specific period. In this way we provide incentive for research and development so that people will invest the time and money it takes to devise and perfect a new product.

In order to apply and maintain a patent application or patent, a set of fees must be paid and these fees vary according to several factors. One of the variables today is the reason that we have a problem.

The fees paid for patent protection vary according to the size of an entity. If one is a small entity defined as an individual, a university or a business with 50 employees or less, the fees will generally be half of those of a large entity.

This distinction between small entities and large entities gave rise to the technical amendments that we seek to address. Those who filed patents and paid their fees always had to ask themselves whether they should be filing as a small entity or a large entity. On the surface, the definitions are straightforward, but over time the situation became much less clear.

What happens, for example, if a person starts off as a single individual inventor and his or her company grows quickly so that it becomes a large entity? What happens when, for instance, a person is a large entity with more than 50 employees but decide to break up into a company of smaller components, one of which maintains the patent? What happens when a person is a small entity but enters into an agreement with a large entity for exclusive use of one's invention?

Above all, with respect to the technical amendments before us, what happens if a person makes a mistake? What happens if a person files as a small entity and then realizes that he or she should have filed as a large entity instead?

Those are important questions for innovators, especially for individuals and small businesses who have the opportunity to use their ingenuity and innovation to grow a business.

The Commissioner of Patents is responsible for addressing the system and setting collective fees. In the past, in the case of small and large entities related fees, the commissioner acted on the principle that an entity that had made an honest mistake in determining the level of the fees should be given the benefit of the doubt. If the entity had submitted the incorrect amount in good faith and it was later determined that the amounts submitted was incorrect, the entity could top up the fees to maintain their rights in accordance with the act.

That was the practice and many individuals, small businesses and universities maintained their protection under the system that allowed for corrective measures, or so they believed.

However all this has changed as a result of a court case know as the Dutch case. In patent infringement suit brought against Dutch Industries by Barton No-Till Inc. and Flexi Coil Ltd., Dutch Industries successfully maintained that the patent had been abandoned because the proper fees were not paid. Moreover, the judge found that the Commissioner of Patents had no legal authority to accept top up payments.

Government Orders

The court decision means that the top up practice is no longer accepted. This opens a Pandora's box of potential legal trouble. It has created the possibility of a Dutch defence against patent legislation if a company is found to have used the top up policy in order to correct and oversight.

This case was appealed to the Federal Court of Appeal and on March 7, 2003 the court rendered its decision. The Federal Court of Appeal agreed with the lower court that late top up fees could not be corrected.

Furthermore, the Federal Court of Appeal ruled that the determination as to whether an applicant would be considered a small or a large entity is to be fixed at the time of entry into the patent regime. That interpretation by the court was inconsistent with the long-standing practice of fees varying over the life of a patent if the entity changed size.

● (1755)

This new interpretation meant that any applicant who had entered as a large entity and later became a small one, and paid commensurate fees, suddenly found themselves in the position of having underpaid the prescribed fees. These applicants and patent holders risk invalidation of their rights.

This creates a very difficult situation for holders of patents who may not have paid the right fee. We want to end this confusion. We want to remove the uncertainty as it relates to those who have used the flexibility as described. In fact, in August 2003 the government announced that it would amend the Patent Act to clarify the payment of certain patent fees.

The amendments contained in the bill provide a 12 month timeframe for patent holders and applicants who are negatively affected by the court decision to maintain their rights by making necessary top up payments. In effect, we are giving patent holders the right, for a 12 month period, to continue making the arrangements that the courts found they had no right to do under the current legislation.

The longer this legislation is delayed the more likely the number of patent infringement court cases would increase. This would have an adverse effect on Canada's reputation as a good place to do business. It would undermine our reputation as a country that protects intellectual property rights.

The intellectual property stakeholders have been consulted on these technical amendments and they support the patent provisions of the bill. I would urge hon. members to pass it as quickly as possible and remove the uncertainty.

The second issue dealt with in the bill involves the legislation that was passed in the last Parliament as Bill C-9, the Jean Chrétien Pledge to Africa Act. Hon. members who were present in the last Parliament will recall that this was an initiative to provide lower cost pharmaceutical products to least developed and developing countries. At its heart, the bill aimed at helping those countries fight HIV-AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other public health problems by giving them easier access to patented medicines.

Bill C-9 amended the Patent Act and the Food and Drugs Act. It provides the legislative framework that enables Canada to authorize

someone other than the patent holder to manufacture a lower cost version of a patented medicine for export to a developing country. Canada was very proud to be one of the first countries to take such action.

However there was a technical oversight in that legislation, one which we seek to correct now. An expert panel, to be appointed by the Minister of Industry and the Minister of Health, was to be named to advise the government on which pharmaceutical products should be eligible under the regime.

In response to recommendations from some hon. members from across the floor, the government agreed that the appointment of this panel would be reviewed by a committee of the House. Of course, the other place also has a rightful responsibility in matters that come before Parliament, and a committee of the other place should have the right and authority to review these appointments as well.

Hon. members who were present during the final weeks of the last Parliament will recall the urgency of getting this humanitarian and life-saving legislation through Parliament before the election writ was dropped. There was no time to make the necessary amendments to Bill C-9 that would ensure the other place was given the same rights of review as the House. However the then minister of industry gave the other place her commitment that at the next available opportunity the government would correct that oversight in the new Parliament.

The next available opportunity is now. We wish to take advantage of the need to pass technical amendments affecting payment of fees to make a further technical amendment that would provide the other place with its rightful responsibility to review the appointments to the expert panel.

This is not a controversial measure. It is a step to do the right thing and correct an oversight of the last Parliament, an oversight that, were it not for the generosity and spirit of the other place, might have killed the bill at that time.

Both of the measures in Bill C-29 are very technical in nature. Neither of them is controversial. Both of them deserve swift passage and that is why I urge the House to focus sharply on the technical content of the bill.

● (1800)

This is not an overhaul of the Patent Act. It does not break new ground in how we protect and encourage innovation in Canada. I urge hon. members from both sides of this House to join me in voting for the passage of this bill as soon as possible.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a few questions for my colleague.

The member talked about the Jean Chrétien Pledge to Africa Act in terms of a technical amendment, which we do support on the Conservative side. He also accurately mentioned in his speech that the purpose of this was to facilitate the delivery of cheaper medicines into Africa and other developing nations. As he mentioned, it was to deal with HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

Government Orders

I wonder if the member could provide the House with, if not today perhaps at a later date, if he does not have the numbers at his fingers, first, the number of medicines that have been transported as a result of the passage of the legislation; second, which countries have been assisted with the passage of the legislation; and third, the number of people who have actually received medicines at a lower cost.

Hon. Jerry Pickard: Madam Speaker, I have to say that at this point in time there was a real urgency at the last election to get this bill put in place. Obviously, the minister will appoint a committee of experts who will look at how we can deliver those services and deal with it.

At this point in time the obvious answer is that we have not implemented the actions of the bill. We have some technical issues, obviously, with the Senate not being involved in the bill as well.

This being the first sitting of the House after the election, we are attempting to get everything in place so that we can get that expert panel in place, and then we can make the decisions on how this should move forward and we can move it forward as expeditiously as possible.

However the obvious first step is to get the bill right, the legislation right and the technical amendments corrected.

• (1805)

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill C-29, an act to amend the Patent Act.

This is a housekeeping bill, in our view, which addresses two separate patent related issues. The first issue it addresses deals with the Jean Chrétien pledge to Africa act, which does help to facilitate the flow of drugs to deal with HIV-AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis to least developed nations.

The bill called for the creation of a committee of experts to advise the government on what pharmaceutical products should be eligible for export under the licensing regime set up by the act. The first part of Bill C-29 amends the act to allow the Senate, not just the House of Commons, to assess and recommend potential candidates for the committee of experts.

We support this specific aspect of the bill, although we would ask for guidance from the Senate as to which committee or committees should actually deal with this issue.

The second part of the bill deals with patent fees and entity size. Fees are required at all stages of a patent's life: application, review and maintenance. Canada and the United States have separate fee structures, depending on whether a business applying for a patent is a small entity or a large entity. The separation based on size is quite common.

Until recently, a company that filed for a patent under the small business fees structure and then became a large business, or vice versa, was granted flexibility in its patent fees. The company could pay a top-up or could reduce its fees due if the enterprise size changed. The top-up scheme has caused considerable administrative trouble for patent agents and it is my understanding that they would like this matter remedied as quickly as possible.

A court case has clarified that there should never have been such a top-up scheme. The courts ruled that the entity's status is determined when a patent regime is first engaged. Thus if the company files as a small business at day one, it is considered a small business for the life of the 20 year patent.

This set of amendments is required to prevent possible lawsuits for an estimated 7,000 patent holders and patent applicants on the grounds that their fees have not fully been paid and thus their patents could be declared invalid. This was the Dutch industry's case.

We support these amendments as well in a sense that they will certainly reduce a lot of the legislation or the litigiousness that could result from this. We think that the size of the company when it gets a patent should determine its size for the life of the patent.

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, we also support the amendments to the interpretation of schedules because we would like Canada to have a clear intellectual property framework.

[*English*]

We look forward to dealing with the bill at committee. We hope the legislation will pass as quickly as possible.

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I did not get a chance to speak to the bill, although I would have loved to have done so.

I want to thank every member and every party in the House for supporting the bill. The bill is critically important in dealing with a disease.

I have been to Africa 20 times. I have seen hundreds of people dying of this disease. I have seen an orphanage where there are 60 bassinets with two to three babies under the age of six months in each bassinet. One-third of those children are dying of AIDS. Those children will never know the touch of a human being and will never know their parents, because most of their parents are dead or have died of AIDS.

This disease is eviscerating entire countries, destroying the workforce of nations and leaving behind a sea of orphans, and not only in sub-Saharan Africa. What is highly unrecognized is that this disease is now on the geometric cusp in Russia, China, eastern Europe and India. Unfortunately, many of the political leaders in those countries have chosen not to be gripped by this problem and have buried their heads in the sand.

I want to thank members from all parties for supporting the bill. I also want to thank my colleagues and the former prime minister, who took such a leadership role. If all of us are seized with the issue, we will not underestimate the fact that this disease will kill 220 million or more human beings, a number far greater than is commonly recognized.

There are some exciting programs that we can adopt. Médecins Sans Frontières in the DRC, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has put together a very simple plan in villages which gets the anti-retrovirals to the people who need them in a way that is controlled and monitored.

Government Orders

I would only ask every member in the House to please work with all of us. Let us work with those in the field to make sure that the people get the ARVs. Let us make sure that the distribution and the monitoring mechanisms are there and that the ancillary functions required to address this horrible disease are there for people who are far less privileged than we are.

Again, I want to thank all members. I certainly hope the Senate will pass the bill quickly and that we move beyond the bill to deal with the very complex issues surrounding this very complex and horrible disease.

• (1810)

Mr. James Rajotte: Madam Speaker, there were a number of valid points raised by the member. He has personal experience. I have talked to the member about his personal experience in sub-Saharan Africa.

There is the issue of medical infrastructure. It is one thing to have cheaper medicines but the medical infrastructure needs to be in place to actually deliver medicines to the people who need them. People need to be informed, as we do in this country, as to how they should take the medicines. There needs to be proper nutrition, proper diet and a proper water source for people to ingest the medicines so that the medicines do the good that they should be doing. That is certainly a valid point in terms of this whole effort.

Also the member raised a valid point about nations. The bill specifically addresses the least developed nations. There is an appendix that identifies the specific nations, but obviously, nations that are developed or that are developing very quickly, such as China and Russia, need to address the HIV-AIDS epidemic as well.

The member has worked with many companies in this field on a personal basis. We should recognize that many companies have already made some real efforts. First and foremost, GlaxoSmithKline in Africa has done a lot of work. Its infectious diseases centre does a lot of work with all of these infectious diseases. As well there are companies like Merck Frosst in Botswana. Those companies try to do all of it, provide the cheap medicines, medical infrastructure, the advice. They work with groups like Médecins Sans Frontières, which should be commended as well.

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, I thank my friend on the other side for his comments. There are a couple of points I want to address. He made a very central point that is often forgotten.

The most important thing in dealing with people who have HIV-AIDS is food. The disease actually explodes in a person who does not have proper nutrition. The caloric requirements of an individual who has HIV-AIDS is much higher than for most of us. For most of us it is 1,500 calories but it is 2,200 calories for somebody who has HIV-AIDS. The problem is that in a number of countries political decisions are being made and food is being used as a weapon to wreak havoc, which greatly increases the number of people who move from being HIV positive to having AIDS.

I will cite the example of Zimbabwe where President Mugabe is using food as a weapon. Using food as a weapon in a country that has a 25% HIV rate means that the number of people who have AIDS explodes. Mortality figures go through the roof.

It is extremely important for us not to assume that the food problems, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, are due to acts of God. They are not. They are due to political decisions that are known in advance. Food is often used as a tool. This results in massive increases in mortality. We have to address that.

One other point of note, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has done very well, there is a Thai doctor who is working with a pharmaceutical company to produce ARVs at a very low rate within the DRC. The conflict in the DRC has resulted in two million people dead and four million people displaced. The glimmer of hope in the DRC is that one determined physician from Thailand, who is working with the people of the DRC in one area where they are able to make the ARVs and who has the distribution mechanism.

We should work with other countries where there are people who are willing to do this, where there is a stable element of governance, a lack of corruption and a leadership that is prepared to work with us. We could partner with other international groups, NGOs and countries, to focus on those countries, to develop islands of stability on a continent that desperately needs it. If we focused on that, we would do a great deal by providing islands of stability and saving a lot of lives. We must try to turn around this terrible beast that is destroying countries, that is causing amazing security problems and which is leaving a sea of orphans on a continent that can ill afford it.

• (1815)

Mr. James Rajotte: Madam Speaker, the member is quite correct in pointing out the need for food and proper nutrition. He identified the fact that it is often a problem of governance or of political leadership.

The member certainly characterized the situation in Zimbabwe very well. There are other situations, such as in Uganda. The political leadership there really took some courageous decisions and influenced the delivery of medicines and food in a much better way, so that a lot of the problems could be addressed. Certainly a key issue is getting the stable political leadership in place and then working with them.

The first question our party asked at committee on this whole issue was it was one thing to technically try to get cheaper medicines, but what is the Canadian government doing? What is CIDA doing? What is the Department of Health doing to ensure that we are partnering with nations and ensuring that medicines get to the people who need them?

At that time, I have to say, there was not a comprehensive plan in place. We hope that since then the government has put forward a plan and will come forward with a plan to ensure that the infrastructure is in place. Then the people who actually need these medicines will be able to get them and the medicines that they do take will end up actually helping them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Madam Speaker, out of respect for countries grappling with the AIDS crisis and to which Jean Chrétien had made a commitment to reduce the negative impact, particularly in Africa—in my view this is more like Canada's commitment to Africa—I will briefly come back to the bill.

Government Orders

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of this bill because we feel it is more a technical bill. Senators can sit at committee as planned to consider the issue.

An error had occurred resulting from the fact that all the parties in this House had wanted to pass this bill before the election campaign so that it could come into force as soon as possible. This is important and we feel it must be passed as soon as possible. This will allow Canada's commitment to Africa to be implemented as soon as possible and that is what we want.

The other change is a highly technical one, the outcome of a court ruling. In the past there was some flexibility, that is to say a small company paid taxes on patents, with adjustments as it grew in size. The court felt that a far more formal approach was required and the government decided to regularize the situation. This is, therefore, an appropriate change and one that must be put forward as soon as possible.

As the previous speakers have said, it is important that this bill, which is focussed particularly on accessibility of drugs to the least developed nations, be passed as promptly as possible.

As well, since we are fast approaching the end of a session, I would invite hon. members to pass this bill quickly on second reading, so that it will take effect and ensure that drugs will get to the populations concerned.

We are also calling upon the federal government to ensure the same promptness for enhanced measures to help implement this act. The act alone will not bring about sufficient results unless there is also allocation of the appropriate budgets, either through CIDA or some other means, to ensure the support that is indispensable for delivery, along with the appropriate medical care for patients. The colleague before me spoke along these same lines.

The Bloc Québécois will therefore be supporting this bill in order to see it passed as quickly as possible. We hope that, after a few witnesses in committee, it will come back to the House and be adopted promptly.

• (1820)

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise to support the bill in principle, and I agree with other members who have spoken about the need for urgency.

Others have talked about the part of allowing a one year period for patent holders to collect fee payments, and we absolutely support that. However, I want to take an opportunity to talk about the Jean Chrétien pledge to Africa, which called for the creation of an expert advisory committee to advise on which pharmaceutical products would be on the list of drugs eligible for export. It is this part of the amendment to which I wish to speak.

It is a bit disappointing and frustrating that we are here debating the makeup of an expert advisory committee when people are dying in Africa. It is incumbent upon the House to pass this bill expeditiously. I wonder about having a debate about including the unelected Senate as equal representatives.

In the throne speech, the Prime Minister talked about there being a moral imperative to do all that we could to make medical treatment accessible to untold millions suffering from deadly infectious diseases, notably HIV-AIDS, particularly in the poorest countries of Africa. Here we are several months later, as was noted earlier, and no drugs are going to those countries for people who are the most in need.

The CBC did a story and it talked about the fact that the savings would be enormous. Brand A drugs in North America cost anywhere between \$8,000 and \$15,000 a person, whereas generic drugs would cost approximately \$250. As we speak, these drugs are still not available to people in Africa.

According to the Médecins Sans Frontières, out of the 6 million people needing anti-retroviral treatment in developing countries, only 440,000 people currently have access to it. There is a sense of urgency that we need to get on with this. UNAIDS has released a report in which it states that about 34.3 million people, including 1.3 million children under the age of 15 years, have HIV-AIDS. In most sub-Saharan African countries, adults and children are acquiring HIV at a higher rate than ever before. The number of new infections in regions during 1999 was four million. Botswana has an infection rate of 35.8%, Zimbabwe 25.8%, and South Africa 19.9%. This is having such a wide ranging impact that in many of these countries the labour force is being decimated.

I urge the House to look at the bill quickly and to move on it so we can begin to supply drugs to these countries.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Industry, Natural Resources, Science and Technology

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

Hon. Raymond Simard: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order, I believe if you seek it, you would find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Is there consent to see the clock at 6:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Pursuant to order made Thursday, December 9, the House shall now resolve itself into committee of the whole to consider Government Business No. 7.

I do now leave the Chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

[For continuation of proceedings see Part B]

CONTENTS

Monday, December 13, 2004

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Immigration and Refugee Protection Act

Mr. Siksay	2635
Bill C-272. Second reading	2635
Mr. Lee	2637
Mr. Cullen (Etobicoke North)	2637
Mrs. Barnes	2638
Mrs. Ablonczy	2639
Ms. Faille	2640
Ms. Wasylcia-Leis	2641
Mr. Telegdi	2642

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994

Bill C-15. Report stage	2643
-------------------------------	------

Speaker's Ruling

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Proulx)	2643
---------------------------------------	------

Motion in amendment

Mr. Dryden (for the Minister of the Environment)	2643
Motion No. 1	2643
Mr. Wilfert	2643
Mr. Hearn	2644

Business of the House

Mrs. Redman	2645
Motion	2645
(Motion agreed to)	2646

Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994

Bill C-15. Report Stage	2646
Mr. Bigras	2646
Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	2647
(Motion No. 1 agreed to)	2648
Mr. Dion	2648
Motion for concurrence and second reading	2648
(Motion agreed to)	2649

Telefilm Canada Act

Mr. Lapierre (for the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Minister responsible for Status of Women)	2649
Bill C-18. Third reading	2649
Ms. Bulte	2649
Mr. Kotto	2650
Mr. Angus	2651
Ms. St-Hilaire	2651
Ms. Oda	2651
Mr. Kotto	2652
Mr. Angus	2654
Mr. Fitzpatrick	2656
(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed) ..	2657

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Marriage

Ms. Bulte	2657
-----------------	------

Cornwall Centennial Choir

Mr. Lauzon	2657
------------------	------

Rhodes Scholars

Mr. Simard (Saint Boniface)	2657
-----------------------------------	------

Sûreté du Québec

Ms. Brunelle	2658
--------------------	------

University of Prince Edward Island

Mr. Murphy	2658
------------------	------

Christmas List

Mr. Grewal (Newton—North Delta)	2658
---------------------------------------	------

Lacrosse

Mr. Adams	2658
-----------------	------

The Governor General

Ms. Deschamps	2658
---------------------	------

Club Richelieu in Dalhousie

Mr. D'Amours	2659
--------------------	------

Marriage

Mr. Warawa	2659
------------------	------

Rett Syndrome

Mr. St. Amand	2659
---------------------	------

Immigration

Mr. Siksay	2659
------------------	------

Veterans Affairs

Mr. Stinson	2659
-------------------	------

Immigration

Ms. Faille	2660
------------------	------

Miles Selby

Mr. Batters	2660
-------------------	------

International Development

Mr. Temelkovski	2660
-----------------------	------

Arts and Culture

Mr. Kotto	2660
-----------------	------

National Defence

Ms. McDonough	2660
---------------------	------

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Natural Resources

Mr. Harper	2661
Mr. Goodale	2661
Mr. Harper	2661
Mr. Goodale	2661
Mr. Harper	2661
Mr. Goodale	2661

Air Transportation Security

Mr. Casson	2661
Mr. Lapierre (Outremont)	2661

Mr. Casson	2661	Mr. Brison	2665
Mr. Lapierre (Outremont)	2661	Mr. Allison	2665
Housing		Mr. Brison	2666
Mr. Duceppe	2661	Justice	
Mr. Fontana	2662	Mr. Thompson (Wild Rose)	2666
Mr. Duceppe	2662	Ms. McLellan	2666
Mr. Fontana	2662	Governor General	
Ms. Gagnon (Québec)	2662	Mr. Schmidt	2666
Mr. Fontana	2662	Mr. Alcock	2666
Ms. Gagnon (Québec)	2662	International Cooperation	
Mr. Fontana	2662	Ms. Bourgeois	2666
Industry		Ms. Torsney	2666
Mr. Layton	2662	Ms. Bourgeois	2666
Mr. Emerson	2662	Ms. Torsney	2666
Citizenship and Immigration		Taxation	
Mr. Layton	2662	Mr. Carrie	2667
Ms. McLellan	2663	Mr. Goodale	2667
Mr. Benoit	2663	National Defence	
Ms. McLellan	2663	Mr. Batters	2667
Mr. Benoit	2663	Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	2667
Ms. McLellan	2663	Human Rights	
Mr. Chong	2663	Ms. Dhalla	2667
Ms. McLellan	2663	Mr. Cotler	2667
Mr. Chong	2663	Finance	
Ms. McLellan	2663	Mr. Stinson	2667
Parental Leave		Mr. Goodale	2667
Ms. Bonsant	2663	Sable Island	
Mr. Volpe	2663	Mr. Duncan	2667
Ms. Bonsant	2664	Mr. Murphy	2668
Mr. Volpe	2664	Border Crossings	
Employment Insurance		Mr. Bachand	2668
Mr. Lessard	2664	Ms. McLellan	2668
Mr. Volpe	2664	Ukraine	
Mr. Lessard	2664	Mr. Wrzesnewskij	2668
Mr. Volpe	2664	Mr. Pettigrew	2668
Citizenship and Immigrations		Economic Development	
Mr. Forseth	2664	Mr. Bouchard	2668
Ms. Fry	2664	Mr. Lapierre (Outremont)	2668
Mr. Grewal (Newton—North Delta)	2664	Securities Industry	
Ms. Fry	2664	Ms. Wasylcyia-Leis	2668
Marriage		Mr. Goodale	2668
Mr. Komarnicki	2664	Points of Order	
Mr. Cotler	2665	Oral Question Period	
Mr. Komarnicki	2665	Mr. Valeri	2668
Mr. Cotler	2665	Mr. Komarnicki	2669
Government Programs		Privilege	
Ms. Catterall	2665	Response to Question on the Order Paper	
Mr. Alcock	2665	Mr. Cummins	2669
Millennium Partnership Program		Mr. LeBlanc	2669
Mr. Christopherson	2665	Mrs. Ablonczy	2670
Mr. Brison	2665		
Mr. Christopherson	2665		
Mr. Brison	2665		
Mr. Epp	2665		

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Government Response to Petitions	
Mr. LeBlanc	2670
Telecommunications Act	
Mr. Emerson	2670
Bill C-37. Introduction and first reading	2670
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	2670
Committees of the House	
Health	
Mr. Ménard (Hochelaga)	2670
Bank Act	
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	2671
Bill C-316. Introduction and first reading	2671
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	2671
Food and Drugs Act	
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	2671
Bill C-317. Introduction and first reading	2671
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	2671
Canada Elections Act	
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	2671
Bill C-318. Introduction and first reading	2671
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	2671
Excise Tax Act	
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	2671
Bill C-319. Introduction and first reading	2671
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	2671
Pension Ombudsman Act	
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	2671
Bill C-320. Introduction and first reading	2671
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	2672
Do-Not-Call Registry Act	
Mr. Pacetti	2672
Bill C-321. Introduction and first reading	2672
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	2672
Broadcasting Act	
Mr. Pacetti	2672
Bill C-322. Introduction and first reading	2672
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	2672
Private Member's Motion No. 70	
Mr. Breitzkreuz	2672
Petitions	
Age of Consent	
Mr. Stinson	2672

National Defence	
Mr. Stinson	2672
Aboriginal Affairs	
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	2672
Autism	
Mr. Pacetti	2672
Canadian Forces	
Mr. Hill	2673
Aboriginal Affairs	
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	2673
Labelling of Alcoholic Beverages	
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	2673
Age of Consent	
Mr. Bevilacqua (Vaughan)	2673
Pornography	
Mr. Bevilacqua (Vaughan)	2673
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. LeBlanc	2673

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Canada Border Services Agency Act	
Mr. Graham (for the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness)	2673
Bill C-26. Second reading	2673
Mr. Cullen (Etobicoke North)	2673
Mr. MacKay	2676
Mr. Heam	2676
Mr. Adams	2677
Mr. MacKay	2677
Mr. Cullen (Etobicoke North)	2679
Mr. Heam	2679
Mr. Schmidt	2680
Ms. Faille	2681
Mr. Cullen (Etobicoke North)	2684
Mr. Ménard (Hochelaga)	2684
Mr. Christopherson	2685
Mr. Cullen (Etobicoke North)	2687
Mr. Warawa	2687
Mr. Abbott	2689
Mr. Schmidt	2690
Mr. Kilgour	2690
(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)	2691
Patent Act	
Mr. Emerson	2691
Bill C-29. Second reading	2691
Mr. Pickard	2691
Mr. Rajotte	2692
Mr. Rajotte	2693
Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	2693
Mr. Crête	2694
Ms. Crowder	2695
(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)	2695

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CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, December 13, 2004
(Part B)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, December 13, 2004

[Continuation of proceedings from Part A]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1825)

[English]

FORESTRY

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 7, Ms. Augustine in the chair)

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That this Committee take note of the pine beetle.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I would like to begin this evening's debate by making a short statement on how the proceedings will unfold.

Tonight's debate is being held under Standing Order 53.1. It provides for a take note debate to be held following a motion proposed by a minister following consultation with the House leaders of the other parties. The motion providing for tonight's debate was adopted by the House on Thursday, December 9.

Each member speaking will be allotted 10 minutes for debate, followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments. The debate will end after four hours or when no member rises to speak. Pursuant to the special order adopted earlier today, the Chair will receive no dilatory motions, no quorum calls, and no requests for unanimous consent.

Pursuant to the rules used in committee of the whole, members are permitted to speak more than once, provided that there is sufficient time. At the conclusion of tonight's debate, we will rise and the House will adjourn until tomorrow.

Mr. Richard Harris: Madam Chair, I rise on a point of order. You indicated that members were permitted to speak more than once, and I would just like clarification.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Provided there is sufficient time, members are allowed to speak more than once.

Hon. R. John Efford (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Chair, I welcome the opportunity to share with the House the Government of Canada's response to challenges faced by the citizens of British Columbia and indeed many western Canadians in dealing with the mountain pine beetle infestation. It is an infestation of the mature pine forests, that can only be described as massive,

approaching an estimated 10 million hectares, and expected to increase.

The effects are direct and expensive. Many British Columbians draw their income from the forest or from activities related to the forest. When I speak of these activities, I am speaking of private woodlots, commercial forestry firms, mills and other operations across the country that contribute some \$40 billion to Canada's export earnings.

I wish we could bring this infestation under complete control. Due to the scale of infestation and the abundance of the mature lodgepole pine, which is the insect's food source complete, control is not feasible. I wish we could change the weather because the only measure we know that would bring this blight under control would be prolonged winter cold with temperatures of minus 40° for a number of days, or a dramatic drop in temperature during a fall or spring cold snap.

The Canadian Forest Service of Natural Resources Canada, or as we call it the CFS, is responding to this epidemic in a way that is designed to complement provincial activities to combat the outbreak. For more than 100 years, the CFS has worked diligently to sustain Canada's forest resources for the benefit of all Canadians, from coast to coast to coast, today, tomorrow and long into the future. I want to add that much if not all of the province's strategy is based on CFS science data.

May I remind the House of our government's activities dealing with the mountain pine beetle. The Government of Canada has invested \$40 million in the mountain pine beetle initiative, or the MPBI announced in 2002. This is a six year program that is working in concert with the provinces MPB activities and is consistent with the federal mandate. It was developed as a response to provincial requests for federal programming.

The focus is not only on the issue of the day, dealing with the effects of this outbreak and reducing the current manifestation and its impacts on our environmental, economic and social well-being, but also, important, on reducing the risk of the future beetle epidemics, aiming to safeguard the problems for the economic benefit and enjoyment of our next generations.

Government Orders

All the initiative's programs are now fully operational and being delivered in close cooperation with many partners and stakeholders. I include in this list other federal and provincial agencies, national forest sector institutes, first nations, academic institutions, industry and private landowners and managers. The war we are waging on this infestation includes working to assist beetle control and forest rehabilitation on federal forest lands in B.C., the national parks in the Rocky Mountains, first nation reserve lands and non-corporate private lands.

Government of Canada researchers and program officers have been located in the beetle epidemic regions at Prince George and Kamloops to lead the research effort and to facilitate delivery of the MPBI's programs.

Dovetailing with the province's 10 year wood salvage plan, the Government of Canada's investment is funding research to: first, estimate the commercial life span of beetle-killed timber; second, determine how best to utilize the large volume of dead timber; third, understand the impacts of the timber flow changes on forest dependent communities; and fourth, understand and mitigate, if not eliminate the ecological impacts of managing the beetle killed timber stands.

The B.C. ministry of forests recognizes that this MPBI research will provide critical information to the province in support of its 10 year plan. This principle of cooperation and collaboration was established at the outset of discussions with B.C. officials.

The initiative's research agenda was developed after a series of regional consultations with companies, provincial officials and first nations. It is strategic scientifically sound and a practical complement to operational needs.

I would like to emphasize that in addition to providing the necessary information to allow the mills to use the timber killed by the beetle, the MPBI research will provide communities with valuable information on the economic impacts after the beetle epidemic. Researchers are working to assist the province in a case study on economic diversity options for the forest dependent communities.

I am proud of my officials at Natural Resources Canada who continue to work closely with their provincial colleagues in B.C. and in Alberta in the development of a decision support system to guide effective beetle management across western Canada and the rest of the country. Alberta is at risk because like B.C., the province boasts of an abundance of mature jack pine stands. We have to reduce the likelihood of the mountain pine beetle expanding into these other timber stands of the boreal forest and spreading across the country.

● (1830)

We wanted to respond to this crisis effectively and directly, and I believe we have. We will continue to do so within the roles of the two governments as clearly articulated in the Constitution and respecting the government's forestry mandate.

Members of the House are no doubt aware that provincial crown forests land management is a provincial mandate. I bring to members' attention that the Government of British Columbia's forest legislation requires major forest licence holders to carry out reforestation at their own expense. The reforestation component of

the mountain pine beetle initiative allows the Government of Canada to initiate efforts on lands that are outside the responsibility of the province.

There are no quick fixes to this problem and there never have been. The Government of Canada has records from the time of the first world war that note the existence of the mountain pine beetle in western forests. Indeed, over the years there have been numerous outbreaks of this beetle documented. This one, however, is the worst. Therefore we are all doing our best to reduce the environmental, economic and social impacts in a cooperative and collaborate way.

May I remind the House that officials from the provincial and federal governments work together and continue to work together long and hard to develop and implement the mountain pine beetle initiative that I have just described to the House. The Government of Canada's response has been significant and we will continue to support B.C. and Alberta working within the federal mandate.

The only thing that we could pray and wish for is that nature itself would bring in the temperatures efficient enough to take care of this massive, major infestation in our forests. Other than that, it will be a long, troublesome battle that the communities, the municipal, provincial and federal governments will have to do everything possible to lessen the impact on the people and the industry at large.

● (1835)

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Chair, I am very happy to hear that the minister's department, Natural Resources Canada, has brought this to his attention. It looks like they have done some good research. I am happy the minister now knows about the mountain pine beetle problem we have. By his own admission, he has declared it to be a massive and very serious problem.

The minister obviously has been briefed by people in his department, and I am happy about that. The members from B.C. and those who have a background in British Columbia know about this. However the message that we have been trying to get across to the government is that this beetle infestation in the forests of British Columbia is every bit a natural disaster as the floods in Manitoba and the Saguenay, and the ice storms in Ontario and Quebec, where the federal government came to the aid of those disasters with hundreds of millions of dollars to help restore and mitigate the damage caused by those happenings.

What we cannot understand is that the federal government, contrary to what the minister has said, has basically turned a blind eye to the beetle infestation, this natural disaster that is devastating our forests in British Columbia.

Unfortunately, the help, which the minister has said the federal government has given, simply does not measure up to its responsibility and obligation and the precedents that it has set over the years in coming to the aid of other areas of Canada that suffered natural disasters.

Government Orders

Why has the government not recognized this pine beetle infestation in the province of B.C., which is and has been going on for about 13 years since the newest outbreak, at the same level of concern that it has in the instances of the floods in Manitoba, the ice storms, et cetera, where it was quick to come to the aid in those situations?

Hon. R. John Efford: Madam Chair, yes, I was briefed by my department almost a year ago. It was a year ago yesterday that I was sworn in as Minister of Natural Resources. One of the first things my department made me aware of was the mountain pine beetle problem in British Columbia. I also have been to British Columbia on a number of occasions and have met with the forestry association and the minister responsible.

I am fully aware of the problem of the pine beetle in British Columbia, as I am of the spruce budworm problem in Newfoundland and Labrador. I also am fully aware of other infestations in British Columbia and in other parts of Canada.

This problem, as massive as it is, is not only impacting negatively on the province of British Columbia but there are other problems with similar infestations in other areas of Canada.

I would also like to note that not on one occasion since I became Minister of Natural Resources has one member opposite asked me for a meeting to sit down and discuss the pine beetle infestation in British Columbia and its impact on the people in their ridings, in the communities or the municipalities, with the exception of one individual who told me that we needed to discuss this further at some time.

It is a big problem and we are fully aware of it, but it is a problem that only nature can solve. It is an infestation by an insect that feeds off the pine and if a cold, frosty winter came in it would resolve the issue.

The federal government has already invested \$40 million into research and development and to work with the province of British Columbia to design a program that will minimize the problem as much as we possibly can. We are doing some things. Can we resolve this problem by throwing money at it? No, we cannot. Can we lessen the impact on people in communities by spending money? Yes, we can and we will continue to do that.

● (1840)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Chair, as the opposition member has said, I too am delighted that the minister has put the beginning of the facts on the table on what the government has done, but we have a lot more facts for later in the evening.

It is good we are having this debate so we can let the opposition know the details of what the government has done. The Canadian Forest Service has done some excellent work and we have explained a lot of that work. Members will now be aware of the research we have done and the programs that we have carried out in the local area. Although this is a nature problem, we have pointed out things that can be done to mitigate it.

The Canadian Forest Service quietly does excellent work which sometimes does not get out to the public. I wonder if the minister could outline some of the work that the Canadian Forest Service

does so that people will know that a lot of good work is going on relating to science and our forests and in the areas of federal jurisdiction relating to forestry.

Hon. R. John Efford: Madam Chair, my colleague is absolutely right about the amount of work that the Canadian Forest Service has been implementing along with the Government of British Columbia and the industry as a whole. This work is not just done in isolation of the industry, the communities or the Government of British Columbia. It is done in cooperation with everyone.

One of the major things being done by the Forest Service is research. A total of \$9.25 million has been committed to collaborative research projects within Canadian universities, the national forestry research institutes and other research agencies. That is quite a large amount of money. The idea is to find out if there is any type of control that can be used to stop the spread of the pine beetle. We also need to look at lessening the impact on communities and how the cut can be managed and controlled.

The Canadian Forest Service is working in many different areas and working in cooperation with communities, the industry and the Government of British Columbia. Cooperation is the key word.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Chair, I am a little concerned when hear talk around letting nature take its course. We have a problem that has been around for more than a decade. One of the things we know is that the longer term strategy will have a significant socio-economic impact on many of our communities.

I recognize that some money has come into communities but we are talking about something that needs a very long term plan, not a five year plan and not a ten year plan. The actual impact of this on many of these communities will not be felt for a couple of decades. By the time the massive cuts happen, it is the next kind of round where there is no timber available to support community mills and in turn community jobs.

We need a much broader and much more comprehensive industrial strategy as we have seen in other industrial areas, such as aerospace, to deal with the devastation in our forestry communities. I would ask the minister to respond to that?

Hon. R. John Efford: Madam Chair, I take exception to the hon. member's comment that we will let nature take its course. I did not say that. I said that the only permanent result was that if we could be so fortunate in answer to our prayers to have a cold snap that would eliminate that problem. However we have no control over nature.

Are we sitting back and letting nature take its course? Absolutely not. We are doing things within our control, which is why industry, municipal, provincial and federal agencies of government and the Canadian Forest Service are collectively putting in place whatever measures we can.

I agree with her comment about the future impact on these communities. because the hon. member is absolutely right. This will have a devastating impact, even more than it is having today. Today we are not feeling the major impact on the loss of incomes and the loss of jobs that this will bring in the future.

Government Orders

Planning is what is happening now. Collaborative discussions and planning to lessen the impact on people's lives in the future is what we are doing.

• (1845)

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Chair, I am really appreciative that this debate is taking place tonight. As you pointed out earlier, this debate was requested by the government House leader under the standing orders. I want to proudly point out that I requested this debate through our House leader, not the Liberal government. Had I not requested this debate tonight, I doubt whether this issue would be brought to the floor of the House of Commons.

This is a massive disaster in the province of British Columbia, and it is moving into Alberta because of the lack of processes and attacks that could have been done many years ago when this infestation was first discovered in the province. The Minister of Natural Resources spoke a few minutes ago about the work that the Canadian Forest Service has done, and indeed it has. The Canadian Forest Service, as far as I am concerned, wrote the book on the mountain pine beetle and the government has every right to be proud of the work that it has done. It identified the damage that was going to be caused when the pine beetle was discovered in Tweedsmuir Park way back in the early nineties.

The problem we have is that the provincial government of the day and the federal government under Mr. Chrétien did nothing to stop this small, in the beginning, spread and infestation of the mountain pine beetle back in the early nineties. For political reasons, the provincial NDP government was being told by its supporters and environmentalists that it could not go into the Tweedsmuir Park area and arrest this infestation. The provincial NDP government of the day listened to its political supporters and the environmental groups. That is one side of it. On the other side, the federal government perhaps could have been a lot more proactive in making people aware of the problem and in its offers to arrest the problem in the initial stages.

So here we have a massive infestation of the mountain pine beetle of 10 million hectares in British Columbia at the current stage. That is about 300 million cubic metres of dead mature pine. It is going to grow to about a billion cubic metres of dead mature pine by the year 2013 or 2014. It does not look like we are going to get a cold snap of -40°C or better long enough to arrest the flight of these bugs.

We, along with the province, must look at how to mitigate the damage that has been caused. There are a number of ways. We must get the value out of the wood that we can. We must get the wood out of the remote areas of the forest. We must look down the road because we must do some aggressive logging to get as much value out of the damaged wood as we can in a short period of time. There will be a shortage of softwood and pine down the road. We must make adaptations to mitigate that, and get communities and business involved in value added and creative marketing.

This all takes money. This is what is making me angry with the Liberal government. The minister stood and said the government has been doing all this work, that it has been studying it and having talks, and that it has given \$40 million. Out of billions of dollars in damage, the government has given \$40 million, out of an initial \$122

million asked for by the province. That is one-third of what was asked for, way back in the initial request. Some \$20 million went to research, which was a great thing. The Pacific Forestry Centre has done a pretty good job and has this little destructive critter figured out by now.

The other \$20 million went into some community projects which were run through the initial application through Community Futures, then it went through Western Diversification, then it went to the federal government's political office, and finally ended up in the minister's office. The people who got the contracts, if we look hard enough, or maybe not so hard, perhaps had ties to the federal Liberals.

A few years ago former minister Allan Rock was in central B.C. with the current Prime Minister. They talked about how disastrous and how serious this was, and how it was going to be a priority. They got on the Challenger and were flying back over the Rockies when altitude amnesia set in because we never heard anything about it. The minister talked about this being important. We have heard that story before.

• (1850)

Two years ago the minister of forestry from British Columbia came to Ottawa and asked the federal government to participate in a five year plan. Based on the assessments at that time, it looked like we could manage the mitigation with a five year plan. That request was for about \$600 million total over five years. That request was never responded to. The government did not participate and did not say that it was going to participate at some time.

Recently, the provincial minister of forestry was in Ottawa again, now with new estimates of potential guaranteed damage. The province of B.C. brought a 10 year plan because there is far more damage than what was initially thought. He brought it to the federal government and it talks about \$700 million over 10 years, as the federal government's share of the 10 year plan.

About a month and a half ago, there was very little in the news about this issue. The government did not mention that the minister of forestry from B.C. showed up. There has been no response. I have asked a couple of questions in the last two weeks and there has been no response. When is the federal government going to realize just how serious this is? Talking about it is one thing; actions speak louder than words.

I know the hon. transplanted member for Etobicoke North across the way knows the pine beetle issue. He must be disappointed with the lack of action by the federal government. The new Minister of Industry from B.C. undoubtedly knows this pine beetle issue better than anybody, save for maybe the scientists at the Pacific Forestry Centre. He certainly knows the economic impact on the communities. I am disappointed that he is not here tonight. He is probably busy, but I had hoped this would be a high priority on his mind, being the Minister of Industry, seeing as how this is affecting the forestry industry of B.C.

Government Orders

• (1855)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Madam Chair, I rise on a point of order. The member knows he is not allowed to mention the absence or presence of members in the House.

Mr. Richard Harris: Madam Chair, I apologize for saying that the Minister of Industry is not here tonight. I know I am not supposed to and I apologize for that.

We want the federal government to tell the province of B.C. that it recognizes how serious this is and that this is as bad or worse than the floods in Manitoba, the ice storm in Ontario and Quebec, and the floods in the Saguenay area. Those disasters cost hundreds of millions of dollars. The federal government was there in an instant.

We do not need any more selective disaster participation. If it is a disaster in Ontario, Quebec or Manitoba, and we have a situation that is of equal seriousness in British Columbia, let us start treating all the areas of this country fairly. That is all we ask from the government. We have seen precious little of that.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Chair, I really do not disagree with most of what was said by the hon. member. I appreciate him raising this issue because we all think it is important.

I want to talk about the biology and when this problem began because the other two parties, the NDP and the Conservatives, have mentioned that it was discovered in the nineties. The mountain pine beetle has been around probably before any of us came—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. The hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George.

Mr. Richard Harris: Madam Chair, I said that the current outbreak of mountain pine beetles was discovered in the early nineties in Tweedsmuir Park.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Madam Chair, I accept that correction. However, the mountain pine beetle has been around since time immemorial. It is part of forest ecology. It has always coexisted with the trees in certain numbers.

As the minister mentioned, the research began at the time of the first world war. I will not go through the governments that have been around since then, but the best scientific experts in all governments have looked at ways of dealing with this on a natural basis.

There were some comments earlier that seemed to suggest that we cannot just leave it to nature. The mountain pine beetle, which is about the size of a grain of rice for those people who are watching, is very difficult to manage. I want to ask the member a question. Are there other ways that we could be dealing with the pine beetle at this time that are related to the biological aspect of the creature itself?

Mr. Richard Harris: Madam Chair, currently, there are only two ways to kill this little bug. One is with a prolonged cold snap like the member said and that is what we have been able to rely on in the past. However, with the changing climates, I have not seen a minus 40° spell in the 45 years that I have been in Prince George. I believe the last one was 15 years ago, so that is not perhaps going to happen. We always hope it will.

The other natural way is a massive forest fire. That is my point. Sooner or later one of those will happen. If it is the latter, a forest

fire, it means that all the affected pine that we were not able to get at will burn and it will be a complete waste. Sure we are going to have reforestation because the fire explodes the pine cones and we have nature's way of reforesting the woods and the bugs get burnt. That is the costly way of doing it.

We could take some mitigating steps to try and salvage what we can, and have a short, medium and long term approach to it, but it takes money. That is what I have been trying to get the Liberal government to recognize. Right now the only way to kill the bugs is with a cold snap or a fire. Maybe science will come up with some sort of chemical process some day that will stop them from multiplying. However, we must address the damage that is there now. That is what the federal government must recognize. The province cannot do it on its own.

The federal government, as a partner in this country, must recognize the importance of the forest industry in British Columbia, recognize the massive problem that we have there, and recognize that this is indeed a natural disaster, not just something that has just happened. This is a big thing and we need the federal government to remember the billions of dollars that we have sent in tax revenues into the federal coffers. We never asked for a bunch of it back, but once in a while we would like to be recognized when we have a problem.

• (1900)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Chair, it is a pleasure for me to participate in the debate tonight.

I would like to pose a question for my hon. colleague from Cariboo—Prince George. My colleague and I are the two MPs representing the city of Prince George. For those people who do not even seem to know where Prince George is, it is a city that we like to believe is the central-northern capital of British Columbia. It is geographically almost dead centre in the province of British Columbia. People who are down on the lower mainland of British Columbia tend to think that Prince George is in the far north, but that is not really the case.

My colleague and I have raised this issue repeatedly over the last number of years, asking the government to respond. During the opening round of debate tonight I was listening to the Minister of Natural Resources. On a number of occasions during his remarks and in the question and answer period following his speech, he referred to the need for proper planning. That was the way he termed it. He talked about the need for planning.

I can say that my colleague from Cariboo—Prince George and I have repeatedly raised this issue and tried to impress upon the government the need to devote adequate resources to this crisis, only to have it ignored over the last number of years. When we finally do get a take note debate on this epidemic, to have the Minister of Natural Resources stand in his place and suggest we need to talk some more about planning, it is so discouraging.

I want to give my colleague from Cariboo—Prince George a further opportunity to expand upon his remarks tonight and to share some of the hurt and anguish that we see on a daily basis in our ridings in central-northern British Columbia.

Government Orders

Mr. Richard Harris: Madam Chair, I appreciate the question from my colleague from Prince George—Peace River. In response, let me say that the planning is done. The planning has been done for a number of years. The federal government has known that. All we have asked the government is that it come and join in the plan with some federal money. It has not done that. It has not even acknowledged it.

It is nice to see the Minister of Natural Resources here tonight because I want that minister to hear first-hand from the members of Parliament who are from the infested area so that the minister can share it with the Minister of Industry, who is from B.C., a senior federal minister from British Columbia. He has a vast background in the forest industry in B.C., a vast and successful background in the forest bureaucracy in the province of B.C. Of all the people in the Liberal government, once he got here should have been talking to the Minister of Natural Resources about how bad this is and he should have been saying that we have to do something.

He should have been talking to the Prime Minister, who has at least a couple of times in British Columbia said how serious it was and how it was going to be a priority. When Allan Rock, the former minister of industry, was out there, he said it was serious.

The day the Minister of Industry arrived here, we should have started seeing some action. The planning is all done. Let us put it bluntly and cut to the chase: what the province needs is money. We need \$800 million from the federal government over the next 10 years to carry out this plan.

The planning is done. We have ongoing science and that is good to maybe figure out a way other than nature's way of controlling the little critter, but we need money. That is what it is about. That is what this debate is about. We have not had any.

The government has not recognized the problem in a responsible manner. It is all about money. We need it. The planning is done. The game plan is there. We need the government's help.

• (1905)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Chair, I am pleased to rise tonight and participate in this discussion about the mountain pine beetle. As previous members have commented, this is an issue that certainly falls within provincial jurisdiction, but I would argue that there is a very strong role for the federal government here.

We need an industrial strategy that not only looks at the science of it, because certainly we have alluded to the fact that the pine beetle is a natural occurrence, but it also needs to deal with the socio-economics of it.

There is no doubt that we are in the middle of an epidemic of these tiny beetles. There is also no doubt, as I have talked about, that it is part of the natural ecosystem of British Columbia and Alberta and that the beetle and the lodgepole pine survived together for many thousands of years before harvesting of timber began.

I want to emphasize that it is partly because of the commercial value of this standing forest that this epidemic of mountain pine beetles is much more of a problem. If we were not talking about

people's livelihoods, we probably would not be having this kind of debate.

The beetle is part of our boreal forest. It goes through a part of a cycle and in fact contributes to the overall health of a forest in an ecosystem that we look at in a holistic way. But these trees in British Columbia are commercial trees and, according to some areas, 25% of the timber harvested is actually the lodgepole pine. Estimates vary, but at the high end, over \$6 billion of lumber could be lost.

Our concern in the NDP is with the communities and workers affected by this epidemic. Like trees, communities cannot just up and move. When an epidemic like this hits a community, it needs a lot of help to weather the epidemic. This is why we are calling for an industrial strategy.

Many agree that there are two factors affecting this epidemic. The lack of cold snaps early in the winter means more beetles survive to the next summer, and of course, as has been alluded to, the forest fire control measures help to create the ideal ecosystem for the beetles to thrive. Since we have had fire suppression, it has created a different kind of ecosystem.

It is truly unfortunate that the main mitigation measure has been sanitation. What this translates to is clear-cutting of huge swaths of land. It is unfortunate that we are using this as the main mitigation measure because it is a short term solution with long term consequences.

In some areas of British Columbia, these sanitation measures mean timber companies are harvesting well above sustainable levels. This puts the nearby communities in a terrible situation. All the potential work of harvesting is happening in a very short period of time, which means that there will be no jobs for workers and communities once this harvesting is finished.

To harvest these affected areas, some of which are in remote areas, timber companies have to build logging roads. These roads are some of the worst consequences of logging. They create a break in the habitat, allowing predator species to travel while disrupting migration flows of other species.

We cannot log in isolation. These roads allow invasive species to travel into the heart of a wilderness and increase soil erosion and runoff into water courses. The timber companies know this and have taken steps to reduce the impact of logging roads on areas, but they cannot eliminate the damage. We are building these roads and ecosystems with trees that are already stressed by the pine beetle and further stress the system by clear-cutting all of the trees whether they are infected or not.

Another problem with this approach is that it does not respect other policies that have been put in place to protect certain areas. For instance, wilderness areas that have been protected from any exploitation are now threatened under this clear-cutting sanitation approach to the beetles.

The B.C. Parks website states:

Forestry experts and entomologists agree that you can't "stop" a beetle expansion such as we now see across British Columbia. Only nature can do this through two consecutive very cold winters. However, management activities are planned and implemented to try to slow the rate of expansion until cold winters can stem the rapid expansion of beetle populations.

Government Orders

This speaks to the need for that comprehensive strategy that I alluded to earlier. The David Suzuki Foundation has published a scientific paper looking at alternatives to sanitation measures to deal with the mountain pine beetle. Its paper, "Salvaging Solutions", looks at the options that are available to mitigate this epidemic without destroying local economies through over-harvesting or creating the conditions for an epidemic in the future. Again, we have seen so many times that what we do is a quick-fix simple solution. We do not think about the long term consequences.

I would like to quote from this report because there are alternatives out there. I need to emphasize that some of these measures are already being used by B.C. parks to mitigate the beetle within their borders and these measures are working. The measures are as follows:

Establish a comprehensive management strategy for the mountain pine beetle to adequately conserve and manage the ecosystem. This strategy should focus on proactively managing the host lodgepole pine trees rather than the beetles. The strategy should entail policies and practices for:

- i. prevention of an outbreak and reduction of long-term lodgepole pine susceptibility and risk;

This is the science that we have been talking about. It continues:

- ii. suppression during population buildup of mountain pine beetles to strive to contain and suppress initial outbreaks, especially when small;

This is saying to get it early. It continues:

- iii. salvage activities for ecosystem recovery after the outbreak to resensitize the ecosystem at all spatial and temporal scales.

We need to "distinguish clearly between sanitation and salvage harvesting in forest policy", says the Suzuki report.

● (1910)

Again, this is from the Suzuki report:

Subject salvage operations to full planning requirements and environmental regulations.

This is really critical. They need to be done in a well planned way.

It continues:

Design a planning process to ensure that environmental values are protected during sanitation harvests....

Use existing harvest capacity first for insect suppression....

Mimic natural disturbance processes when harvesting by retaining remnant patches of forest and coarse woody debris and employing a diversity of silvicultural systems....

Vary amount and pattern of retention with forest type and natural disturbance pattern....

Ensure that reduced stumpage rates do not subsidize salvage in stands that would be more valuable if retained for environmental values or for future harvest....

Allocate harvest according to local variation in disturbance regime....

Keep harvest rates low to maintain future options until long-term consequences of harvest rates are better understood.

Commit to long-term planning, research, and proactive mountain pine beetle management.

This problem keeps coming up. The current outbreak is 13 years, but it has happened through cycles. The mountain pine beetle outbreaks will happen again in the future once we get this one under control. Therefore, we need the research and planning during periods of low abundance to help avoid this kind of panic approach that has such devastating impacts on our community.

B.C. Parks' current policy provides for a few different methods of beetle control. We talk about how what we need to do is go in and clear-cut, but there are other methods. Part of it is allowing the natural process to prevail, the "do nothing" approach, which I do not think anybody would support. There is a method of pheromone baits and traps. The beetles are attracted to other trees where beetles have successfully burrowed. There is individual tree fall and burn on site, which requires that comprehensive management plan that I was talking about, and then there is the prescribed burn.

Finally, we need to talk about the precautionary principle. Even after decades of large scale clear-cutting, we do not know all the effects on the forest ecosystems. We have seen many forestry companies go to much smaller scale clear-cuts. We have no idea what effect this kind of large scale massive clear-cutting will have on the environment.

Forests have a lifespan and life cycle much longer than the life of Parliament, of a government or even of a forestry company. We do not have adequate research to understand how clear-cutting affects our systems, but we know a few things. Forestry companies usually replant a clear-cut with a single variety of tree. That leads to an even-aged stand of trees, which makes them even more susceptible to pest infestations or diseases.

We know that a clear-cut destroys habitation for all other species that call a forest home. It removes the biomass that is an integral part of an ecosystem. Clear-cuts increase erosion, silting watercourses and destroying salmon habitat.

We cannot use only one mitigation measure to deal with infestation, especially when that measure creates other environmental problems.

In conclusion, what we have here is a complex problem and what we do not need is simplistic thinking. We need a commitment at the federal government level to demonstrate leadership which will come up with a comprehensive plan that looks not only at the environmental impacts but at the impacts on our societies and communities. I would urge all members to take that into consideration during this debate this evening.

● (1915)

Hon. R. John Efford (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Chair, it is interesting to sit in this hon. House and listen to the comments from speakers on both sides today, December 13, 2004. On December 12, 2003, I was sworn in as Minister of Natural Resources. It is difficult to understand why hon. members would stand in the House now, 12 months later, and make all these comments about a comprehensive plan that needs to be put together.

One would have thought that after all of these months that have gone by we would have been able to sit down at the table or that I would have at least received a phone call.

Government Orders

Let me ask the hon. member this question, with a premise to the question. First, we are putting together a comprehensive plan; second, we are concerned about communities; third, we are concerned about the environment; and fourth, we are concerned about a complete clear-cut and what all the impacts are. At what time during this year did the hon. member call my office and request a meeting to sit down and discuss this issue?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Madam Chair, I am a brand new member, so I would have welcomed a conversation with the minister a year ago. It would have been wonderful to have seen him in my community of Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Hon. R. John Efford: The election was in June.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Absolutely. I am glad the minister can count. I would like him to count the number of jobs that are being impacted by this epidemic. Yes, I welcome the minister's invitation to visit him. I will be doing that early in the new year.

This is a critical issue. It is fine to point fingers, but we want some solutions. We want to see something that talks about how we are going to protect jobs in communities in British Columbia and Alberta. As has been pointed out, it seems that once a person crosses the Rockies we are off the radar.

I would welcome a more community oriented approach. We need to talk to our mayors and our municipalities that are directly impacted by this problem. We should involve them, unlike the softwood lumber solutions where in my community they have had to actually let the money go because of ridiculous regulations that do not allow them to meet the deadline.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Chair, I did not really have a question when I was sitting here following the intervention by the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, until I heard the minister attack her for not phoning him of all things.

It shows everyone how ridiculous the government's approach to this crisis is, that he would suggest that regardless of what party the opposition members are from, somehow the onus is on them to pick up the phone, as he just said, and enlighten him about the seriousness of the problem.

The Liberal cabinet was just out in British Columbia for a cabinet meeting. Surely to God the Minister of Natural Resources would have some clue about what is going on in British Columbia. He was just there. If he wanted to meet with people right there on the ground whose livelihoods are affected, people who are going broke, their businesses are going broke, surely to goodness he could meet with them without someone having to pick up the phone and phoning him.

• (1920)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Madam Chair, I welcome the member's comments.

It is really unfortunate that is what happens when we have the kind of situation that we currently have in B.C. Anyone who has flown over parts of B.C. will see the swaths of brown trees as our forests die off.

It is unfortunate that instead of talking about the cold, hard facts about what is happening in communities and to people's lives, we end up pointing fingers about who picked up the phone first.

As other members have pointed out, this is a natural disaster in our provinces. We need something more than another report. We need some action that talks about how we deal with this so people are not on the streets.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am glad the member is here and, as I said earlier, to learn of the many things that have been done for a number of years by the Canadian Forest Service. The minister outlined these. I think that is the point the minister was also making in defining the many action plans.

Since the member talked about communities, I am sure she is delighted that one of the action plans is the research that is being done on the effects to communities and what we can do for them.

I would like to ask the member what some of the components of the industrial strategy she was suggesting related to forestry might be. All the mills in the area are working cutting the timber infected with the mountain pine beetle. The mills are filled to capacity doing this work. What types of elements or other things in this industrial strategy would she suggest?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Madam Chair, we understand that if we go ahead with these clear cuts, we will very quickly deforest large tracts of land. This will have a longer term impact on the communities.

We need to engage local communities in the discussion. It is absolutely critical that the people who will bear the longer term brunt are at the discussion table, along with their provincial comrades. It is critical because they are the people who will have to talk about whether they retool their mills, whether they need a retraining strategy because people will not be able to work in the forestry sector, and whether or not we have to look at a different kind of value added component.

In the short term, we will have lots of jobs. It is the longer term that I am really concerned about. Many rural communities in Alberta and British Columbia are already impacted by other strategies that are harming them. Softwood lumber is a good example, and of course fishing, which we do not want to talk about tonight. We need that longer term rural strategy that involves people from the community in the discussions.

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Chair, the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan talked about deforesting. Believe me, deforesting will happen in one of two ways: either we will be the ones in control of it, or a forest fire will be in control of it. That is why we have been after the federal government to buy into the B.C. plan.

Government Orders

I do not know if the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan was around B.C. in the early 1990s. Tonight she is talking about being selective in the forest. That was the same type of attack that we wanted back in the early 1990s when the infestation had just started in Tweedsmuir Provincial Park. The municipalities and the regional districts were saying to the provincial NDP government, “For God's sake, get into Tweedsmuir Park with some selective logging, horse logging, whatever, but get the mature pine out of the path of this little group of pine beetles”. However, the Suzuki people and the environmentalists who were supporting and giving advice to the provincial NDP government at the time were telling the government not to go in there because it is a park. We have got that now.

On the other hand, we cannot keep our heads in the sand like the federal government has. The infestation has gotten bigger and bigger. The federal government put its head in the sand, hoping that the problem would go away and that it would not have to become responsible for helping out the province of B.C. The plans are already there.

Why have we not phoned? Good government is about leadership. The provincial government has shown leadership in what it wants to do. It has written the plan. It wants some leadership from the federal government to come to the aid of the province. The province has the plan. We have leadership in the province. We want some leadership by the federal government. We want it to recognize its responsibility as a partner in this country when provinces need its help. That is what the government has not done and we need it.

I suggest to the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan that she continue to urge the federal Liberal government to help out in the plan that the province of British Columbia has. I know the province will take into consideration all the environmental questions that need to be recognized, but we need the federal government to come to the province's aid.

• (1925)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Madam Chair, I want to point out that I am suggesting that there needs to be a multiple level approach to this particularly complicated problem. That is why I am encouraging us to look beyond just purely clear cuts.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Chair, I have been listening to this debate with much interest. I think we should put this in some context.

The northern interior of British Columbia is approximately 50% of the land mass of the province. The softwood lumber that comes from this area represents about 21% of Canada's softwood lumber production. I have seen estimates that the infestation has affected \$6 billion worth of timber. This is a huge problem.

Some might ask what my interest would be, as I am the member for Etobicoke North. There are a couple of reasons. I lived in British Columbia for 12 years and got quite involved in forestry, and ironically this past year my own riding of Etobicoke North was threatened by the Asian longhorned beetle. Fortunately it did not turn out to be as bad as we thought but it can be devastating for communities. The Asian longhorned beetle problem in my riding does not come close to the devastation that the pine beetle is

wreaking on the residents of northern British Columbia and on the total economy of British Columbia.

The reasoning of the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan is the same kind of reasoning that kept the British Columbia provincial government from going ahead and declaring an emergency, which would have called for clear-cut logging. Let us cut to the chase. Doing these interventions at this point in time, going after the host trees or the blue trees, the felling and the burning in a selective way, the only way to deal with a huge infestation like this one is with salvage logging, with clear-cut logging.

That brings me to the point about which I am a little confused, because I am not quite sure what role the federal government can play in a salvage logging operation. The delineation of responsibilities, federal and provincial, is quite clear. Surely they are not asking the Canadian Forest Service to go in there and do some clear-cut logging. There might be a plan. I would like to see the plan. I was just chatting with the Minister of Natural Resources. He has not seen the plan. The parliamentary secretary has not seen the plan. If there is no plan and if we have not seen the plan, how can we react to a plan?

I certainly have not seen the plan but I would like to know what role the plan envisages for the federal government. Clearly the Canadian Forest Service has a role to play when it comes to research. It has a role to play in terms of the export policies as they relate to international trade, as it deals with the softwood lumber dispute with the United States. Its jurisdiction is quite clear.

In fact it was only a few years ago that the federal government partnered with a number of the provinces with the forest resource development agreements, the old FRDAs. Those were cost shared agreements to replant forests. They were all eliminated, actually at the urging of many of the provinces. They said they did not want the federal government planting trees, that this was a provincial jurisdiction.

I empathize with the members for Cariboo—Prince George and Prince George—Peace River. They live and breathe this every day of their lives.

I had the good pleasure many times to visit Prince George, to visit forestry operations. In fact the company I was involved with in Toronto owned 50% of a big operation out there, Northwood Pulp and Timber. I think it has since been sold.

There are so many different forestry operations in that region, areas like Burns Lake, Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Fort Nelson, Fort St. James, Fort St. John, Houston, Mackenzie, McBride, Smithers, Valemount, and Vanderhoof. When I see those names I am reminded of my many trips probably to every one of them. They are forestry communities and there are many other forestry communities as well.

Government Orders

This is a huge problem. When we look at the interventions, how we can deal with this, the best way would be to have a cold snap of -40°C right at the beginning of the winter. That would pretty much deal with the mountain pine beetle. We all know that B.C. has not had that kind of climate. In fact I would hope that it causes the members opposite to look at the effect of climate change and global warming. Surely that is one of the impacts it is having in northern B.C. We are not getting those cold winters that kill the beetles immediately. We do not have the cold and there is no real prospect that B.C. is going to get that kind of cold weather. Therefore what do we do when the beetle starts expanding its sphere of influence every day and takes over huge swaths of forests?

● (1930)

What happens to this timber? I have had the disturbing experience of flying over many of these areas. What we see are the red tops of trees. We know those trees are infested with beetles. In terms of their ultimate value, there is a way to log these trees at a certain point in time and still get good value from them. However, even with the passage of time, their commercial value becomes very limited because they rot and discolour. That is a huge problem.

Therefore, what can we do? If we go in with massive logging operations, we end up with a huge supply of timber on the market. What do we do with that? Timber that is salvageable is put through the sawmills, then more lumber is shipped into the U.S. market and prices are affected negatively. I am not talking about a small area. A huge amount of lumber would be created from this type of devastated forest.

I am not sure what the answer is. I wish I could stand here and say that there would be a huge federal role. Maybe there is one, and I would like to see what it is. However, it is not up to the federal government to go in and do clear cut logging, that is for sure.

The minister and colleagues have talked about the \$41 million initiative, the mountain pine beetle initiative. I suppose that is to help with doing some research and trying to envisage the world post the beetle. The real answer is to stop the growth and spread of the beetle. The only way to do that is to log it.

There are some people in British Columbia and across Canada who would say that it would be terrible to clear cut those forests. As the member for Cariboo—Prince George noted, they will be gone anyway. We might as well deal with the spread of this beetle because one way or the other that timber will be ruined.

I did some work in the private sector. We looked at the Canadian Forestry Service and at different models for the delivery of its programs and considered whether they should be decentralized or centralized. There is the Pacific Forestry Centre in Victoria. We actually recommended that it decentralize some of the research to Prince George. I think the government did that for a while. I do not know if the Canadian Forestry Service still has a research capability in Prince George. The argument we put forward at the time was that we could not deal with the forest industry in British Columbia without focusing on Prince George and the Prince George region. Too much is going on there and it is too important for the livelihood of many people.

I will throw out some statistics. Located in the northern interior of British Columbia are 141 production facilities. They provide about 25,000 direct jobs and 55,000 to 75,000 indirect jobs. I have already commented on the percentage of the softwood lumber exports that come from the northern part of British Columbia, and it is enormous. The region produces more than five billion board feet of lumber annually. That is enough for 640,000 new single family homes. When the mountain pine beetle comes in and creates this kind of devastation, that has a huge impact for the local economy and the economy of British as a whole.

We can talk about all the other types of interventions in an academic sense, but they will not work. We have to get rid of the trees that are infested and we have to stop the growth of the infestation. The only way to do that it to do some control or prescribed burns into these areas or we salvage it, log it and clear cut it. Anything else I think is just missing the point.

● (1935)

The citizenry in British Columbia has to accept the fact that they need to get in there and clear cut these areas. No one likes the idea of clear cutting forest, but when the alternatives are much worse, then that is something to which we have to face.

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Chair, it was almost amusing watching the Minister of State for Multiculturalism, the Minister of Natural Resources and everyone crowding around asking about the plan?

The same thing happened about a year and a half ago, or two years ago, when I talked to the current Minister of Western Economic Diversification. I brought the subject up in the House in the form of a question and the response came back that they had not seen an official plan yet. The minister of forestry and the provincial people from British Columbia were here on a number of occasions. They briefed all the necessary people in the federal government about the crisis.

Shortly after those comments, the official plan, gilded in gold, was presented to the federal government after it knew about the problem. The same thing exists. The federal government knows about the problem in B.C. It knows how much money British Columbia needs. It knows about the plan. I am kind of certain that the plan is here. I am not certain I am completely comfortable with what I am hearing from the minister and the Liberal members. Maybe they are not ready to deal with it.

The member for Etobicoke North said that we do not need to get too academic about it. I agree with the member 100%. Let us get down to basic facts of what this is all about. We know what the problem is. We know how to solve it and the province knows how to solve it. The member for Etobicoke North knows how to solve it. He talked about the federal government not getting in and clear cutting timber. Of course not. However, when it gave \$400 million to the auto industry during the last election, the members were not down there assembling automobiles either.

Government Orders

The Minister of Industry has talked about another billion for industry in Canada. We will not see federal people out in the plants. We are talking about cutting a cheque to become a partner in fighting the beetle infestations crisis. How much more basic can we get than that? It is simplistic and the member for Etobicoke North knows exactly what the federal government needs to do. Unfortunately, the double and triple talk we are getting from the ministers responsible to avoid it and not show some leadership is a distance from the common sense approach to it, and we all know what that is.

We need a cheque out in B.C. to try to salvage what we can.

• (1940)

Hon. Roy Cullen: Madam Chair, I do not know where the plan is, but if the member could get a copy of it delivered to the minister, I would like to see it.

There is a difference. Defining a problem and the scope of a problem is not a plan. There has to be a plan to deal with a problem. I do not know what the plan is. In my daily responsibilities here, I do not imagine I would be expected to know what the plan is for the Prince George region. There are others here who would be very interested.

The member said that I should know what has to be done. I know what has to be done. We have to clear cut the trees. I do not know where the federal government fits in there in terms of why B.C. needs a cheque? If it clear cuts, takes the logs to the mills, saws them up and then ships them, unless people will be faced with losses.

Ages ago the province could have declared this a disaster or an emergency, but it did not. It was worried that it would face some opposition from people who did not like clear cut logging. It is a shame, but that is the reality. Everyone wants the federal government to cut a cheque. What would it use that money for if it is going to cut down a bunch of trees?

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Chair, I do not think anybody is suggesting that the federal government go in, clear cut and plant trees. We are asking the federal government for some leadership.

A short term strategy that talks about clear cutting enormous amounts of timber to prevent wasting timber fails to recognize things like a disruption in forest plans, straining harvest and milling capacity, over supplying the market, decreasing lumber prices and reducing long term timber supply. It is that long term timber supply that is really critical for many of these communities.

I keep talking about the socio-economic impact on communities. That is why a plan needs to be comprehensive and detailed in its scope. The plan should not just look at the issues around the pine beetle and the immediate impact it is having. That is where the federal government has a role to play in providing leadership and a long term strategy. The plan also should include working closely with the provinces.

Could the member comment on that issue?

• (1945)

Hon. Roy Cullen: Madam Chair, I would contend that our government has shown leadership on this issue. When we talk about leadership, we need to be very specific. This is a salvage logging

operation. What is the role for the federal government? I still do not understand what it would be.

If we clear cut certain areas, there must be a plan to replant or to reforest. There has to be a civil-cultural solution. There has to be a whole range of planning in terms of the long term sustainable supply and yield in the forest. That is a long term horizon at which it has to be looked.

We are dealing with a very specific thing where little critters are chewing away at the trees every day because it is not cold enough. When it is not cold enough, they start infecting other trees.

We can talk about all these long term plans, and we need them, but we need to define what role the federal government will play in terms of clear cutting these areas to deal with the mountain pine beetle. For the life of me, I am not sure what the federal role is. I will wait eagerly, as I am sure the minister and the parliamentary secretary will, to see this plan and to see what the federal role should be, according to the province of British Columbia. I am baffled by it.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Chair, if this debate tonight were not so unbelievable for my constituency of Prince George—Peace River, it would be truly sad. It is unbelievable that we have a minister of the Crown, the Minister of Natural Resources, admitting that he has been in that position for year and asking us to show him the plan. That is the type of leadership that unfortunately we have come to see all too often from the Liberal government.

When this minister cannot solve a problem with his own premier in Newfoundland and live up to the commitment the Prime Minister made over the last year to Newfoundland for resource sharing revenues, is it any wonder that he does not have a clue about the scope and nature of the problem in British Columbia? After all, for this government, what happens on the other side of the Rocky Mountains might as well be in China for all it cares.

After all this time, there is no plan. The member who just spoke talked about the role of the federal government. There was a federal government role during the ice storm and it addressed that disaster. There was a federal government role for the floods in the Red River. There was a federal government role when the SARS epidemic hit Toronto. There is a federal government role in addressing this disaster.

In my speech that I will give in a few minutes I will outline a few of the things that government members could consider doing if they cared a whit about British Columbia. If I can think of these things, surely to goodness so can the Liberal government.

Government Orders

Hon. Roy Cullen: Madam Chair, we are again getting confused between defining a problem, and the extent and scope of a problem, and having a plan. I am looking forward to seeing his plan tomorrow morning. If there is a plan and the two members opposite have seen it, tell us, what is in the plan? What is the role for the federal government? I will be sitting with bated breath waiting to hear about that.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Chair, is it indeed a great pleasure that I rise this evening to participate in this take note debate on the mountain pine beetle crisis. This is a debate that is long overdue.

Since 1993 the province of British Columbia has been waging its latest battle against this destructive pest. I have had a very up close and personal look at the devastating path this outbreak has taken. In my constituency of Prince George—Peace River, I did not have to go very far to see the telltale red of the pine stands hit by the mountain pine beetle.

Hon. R. John Efford: The member has not read the plan.

Mr. Jay Hill: If the hon. Minister of Natural Resources would just hang tough for a little while maybe he will get a little bit of an education before the night is out.

This particular epidemic is one that has gone largely unnoticed by many Canadians. I accept that this is understandable in some areas of the country, especially in Liberal country.

If a person lives a great distance from B.C. and the areas infested with these beetles, or if a person lives in a region not directly affected by events in the logging industry, it is an outbreak that could be overlooked, at least for now. In a very short time, however, no one in this country will escape the economic impact of the mountain pine beetle infestation.

It is the responsibility of the federal government to know about the impending consequences and, more importantly, to take action to mitigate the fallout. The federal Liberal government has neglected or, more accurately, abandoned the softwood industry and the province of British Columbia, and now Alberta, in the midst of this severe crisis.

It is not through a lack of scientific understanding. It is not through a lack of expert advice. The government has been forewarned again and again. In fact, I must comment the scientists at the Canadian Forest Service for the dedication and effort they have directed to this epidemic, despite a severe lack of resources and support from their political masters.

Let us put aside the hollow sympathy and promises that will be heard from the government on this issue as the debate unfolds tonight and just stick to the facts. So far the government has only made a five year commitment of roughly \$8 million per year to fight this epidemic. Three years ago, in consultation with the industry, I wrote a letter to the former finance minister, who is now our nation's Prime Minister, telling him that \$50 million was needed each and every year over a 10 year period to combat the mountain pine beetle.

What was the response? A grand total of just \$40 million over five years, most of it to be spent on research and administration. I can almost hear the automatic response from government members.

They will cry poor. They will say the coffers are empty. They will say they just do not have that kind of money. That is simply not the truth and we know it.

Let us look at the numbers. The government has underestimated the federal surplus for each of the past seven years, meaning that Canadians have already been overtaxed by some \$61 billion. So not only was the money there, but there was money to spare. It did not go back into taxpayers' wallets, nor did it go toward fighting a devastating epidemic ripping through B.C.'s forests.

It all comes down to a matter of priorities. Roughly around the time that the Prime Minister, in his former role as finance minister, was denying a reasonable level of funding to fight the mountain pine beetle epidemic, his government was diverting \$100 million to Liberal friendly ad firms through the sponsorship program.

This brings me to a rather interesting aside about the mountain pine beetle crisis. The former minister of public works, Alfonso Gagliano, was rewarded, for his stewardship of the adscam billions, by being appointed ambassador to Denmark. It struck me as somewhat ironic when I read that the pine beetle infestation has already attacked more than 4.2 million hectares of land, an area roughly the size of Denmark.

When it comes to priorities, the province of British Columbia and the mountain pine beetle epidemic register very low with the government. Following the SARS outbreak, the city of Toronto received \$10 million from Ottawa to run tourism ads. Compare that to the \$8 million allocated to fight the pine beetle, and an industry that drives 25% of B.C.'s economy, creating 40,000 direct jobs and 120,000 indirect jobs. There are more than 80 communities in B.C.'s interior where forestry is the mainstay of the local economy.

The latest scenarios now predict an 80% pine kill in British Columbia, with the infestation peaking in 2008. The rapid spread of the infestation has taken even pessimists by surprise. This fall it was confirmed that the infestation had spread to three locations near the B.C.-Alberta border. In fact, some people say it has already transcended the border and is in Alberta. That puts another 54,000 direct and indirect jobs in Alberta at risk.

While most Canadians look forward to mild winters, free from the bitter cold, the residents in my riding of Prince George—Peace River are hoping desperately for at least a week of continuous minus 40°C weather. As we have heard tonight, that is what it takes to begin killing these pests. Yet, we have experienced unusually warm winters in northern B.C. and the climatologists advise that we can expect warmer temperatures to come.

Government Orders

• (1950)

The government must become an active leader and participant in a strategy that focuses on three elements. First, the federal government must begin now to provide programs and assistance to woodlot owners, producers and forestry companies. One of the reasons that many Canadians do not immediately recognize the severity of this epidemic is that the economic impact is not yet apparent, but very shortly there will be a sharp decline in the supply of pine with nothing left to replace it.

Right now the annual allowable cuts throughout B.C. have been expanded to get the beetle infested timber out of the forests, a necessary measure in controlling the infestation. In the short term, that means forestry companies and woodlot owners are experiencing a sharp spike in revenues as their harvests rise accordingly.

Let us look ahead a few years. In less than a decade there will be a severe shortage of pine to harvest. It is expected that some communities face a 40% decline in logging. That is when the income will dry up and more forestry jobs will disappear.

All the federal government seems to see at the moment is a healthy boost in its tax revenues. Dr. Laurie Cook, a woodlot owner in my constituency, has informed me that, like many of his colleagues, he is currently experiencing unusually high harvests and higher than usual income. However, all of his harvest areas must be replanted at considerable risk and expense. He wrote:

Future income, when the mountain pine beetle is finished with me, will be minimal to zero for several years, which will be the very time that I will have the [replanting] expenses and will have nothing to write them off against.

Dr. Cook suggests that the federal government initiate an income tax deferral program for those affected by the mountain pine beetle infestation. This is a concept that I support as part of an effort to assist affected producers.

Second, scientific research must continue, without the lion's share being eaten up in administration and bureaucracy. We need to find ways to thwart the spread of the mountain pine beetle. Admittedly, it is not an easy job. Female beetles produce about 75 eggs and enough beetles can emerge from one tree to attack 15 healthy trees. Aggressive measures must continue to harvest the infected trees and other trees weakened by fire and drought, prime breeding grounds for the beetles.

Third, reforestation is a must and the industry cannot bear this cost alone. The Liberal government likes to talk a great deal about its environmental policies, yet where is the money for reforestation as millions of hectares are being harvested to combat the mountain pine beetle? It is called planning and foresight, and once again the government cannot see any further than here and now, and how much tax revenue it can collect.

If it were truly serious about addressing this crisis, the finance minister would have responded to a request made two months ago by the B.C. ministry of forests. He asked for federal help in a 10 year \$850 million plan, the plan that we are talking about tonight, to address the mountain pine beetle epidemic. The appeal has been met with silence from Ottawa.

This past August I wrote the industry minister shortly after he was appointed to his job asking him to carry on the fight for B.C.'s lumber industry as he had in his previous job as the CEO of Canfor. I was disappointed not to receive any response, but I am more disappointed for him because it is obvious that he was not able to make his case to his cabinet colleagues. I am disappointed for the thousands of Canadians employed in the softwood lumber industry who had high hopes that he would be able to prompt action from his chosen political party on both the softwood lumber dispute with the United States and the mountain pine beetle crisis.

• (1955)

I am encouraged by the opportunity this evening to bring this crisis to light on the floor of the House of Commons and to air possible solutions. However I seriously question the sincerity of the government's concern for the future of western Canada's forest industry. When the industry minister was the CEO of Canfor at the time the federal government announced its paltry softwood aid package two years ago, he said, "It's not enough and it's coming a little late in the game".

• (2000)

Hon. R. John Efford (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Chair, this is a very serious issue but I have seen serious problems before that were addressed with money and no real plan put in place. That was done to Newfoundland and Labrador by the former Conservative government of 1992 during the closure of the fishery, where \$2 billion were spent but no actual rebuilding plan was put in place. Today we are in a similar situation to what we were in 1992.

I do understand the seriousness of the situation. We have been working very diligently with the B.C. government and with industry toward a long term plan to solve this problem but it is not an easy one.

I want to ask the hon. member a direct question, because it is a massive, serious issue that will impact negatively on British Columbia for a long time and therefore we need to get our ideas together. At what time in 2004, when the hon. member represented his constituency and his major concern was with the people of British Columbia, did he request all members from British Columbia, myself and all interested parties to sit down and have a discussion?

Mr. Jay Hill: Madam Chair, that type of attitude by the minister is why we have western alienation and why we have the feeling in British Columbia. What time? How dare the minister ask me what time I phoned him to try to organize meetings with him?

Hon. R. John Efford: We had meetings. We had lots of good discussions.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please.

Mr. Jay Hill: Thank you, Madam Chair, for trying to quell the minister. I sat here and listened to his intervention, such as it was, but now a minister of the crown is not satisfied to sit there and listen to the response. He has to holler and heckle.

Government Orders

I referred in my speech to letters and interventions that I have made where I did not even get a response from the Minister of Industry for months.

Hon. R. John Efford: Not on one occasion did you call me.

Mr. Jay Hill: Madam Chair, he says that I did not phone him, as if he is the only minister over there. Does he not know that his colleague, the Minister of Industry, was appointed by the Prime Minister as the senior Liberal minister for British Columbia to take care of our problems, especially forestry problems?

My hon. colleague from Cariboo—Prince George pointed out that we have the highest regard and respect for the Minister of Industry. He comes from the forest industry. He used to be the CEO of Canfor, one of the largest forest companies in Canada. He was also a very highly successful government servant in the provincial government of British Columbia before that. He knows these issues inside out, but the Minister of Natural Resources stands up tonight and says, “Well, they didn’t call me”.

Hon. R. John Efford: That is not what I said.

Mr. Jay Hill: He was just heckling that and now he is saying that is not what he said. Of course that is what he said. He asked me when in 2004 did I call him.

Hon. R. John Efford: When did you?

Mr. Jay Hill: I did not.

Hon. R. John Efford: That is right, you did not. You admit it.

Mr. Jay Hill: I just did admit that I did not.

The reality is that the Prime Minister said that if British Columbians had a problem there was a minister. He was just elected in June and he told British Columbians not to worry because western alienation was a thing of the past. He said that the government has high profile ministers, like the Minister for Western Economic Diversification and the Minister of Industry, and ministers galore from British Columbia. However the Minister of Natural Resources sits here tonight and says that nobody called him.

Hon. R. John Efford: I did not say nobody. I said you did not.

Mr. Jay Hill: I would suggest that rather than trying to point fingers at me and my colleagues from Cariboo—Prince George and Prince George—Peace River, he should be asking his colleague, the Minister of Industry, why he has not come up with a plan to address this.

• (2005)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Chair, I was delighted to hear both members from the opposition say that a dramatic temperature fall is the only way of actually eliminating this. They also both acknowledged that there has not been one for a number of years and not likely to be one. The same is true in my riding. We have not had 40° below for an extensive period in White Horse for some time. That is not the only area it is affecting.

In Yukon we have the spruce bark beetle, *Dendroctonus rufipennis*, if anyone wants to know the name. As the House

knows, the Canadian Forest Service, just like this one, has been working on many of these forest pests for years.

The scientists have almost unanimously come out and said that we need to take steps toward climate change, which is causing these problems with the various species. For the member's constituency, which is very close to my area in the north where climate change is having more of an effect, will he help encourage his party to come on side on a number of the initiatives that we are taking, the \$3 billion worth of initiatives, including signing Kyoto, to reduce the impacts of climate change?

Mr. Jay Hill: Madam Chair, with all due respect, my colleague from Yukon might just lean a little bit ahead and enlighten the Minister of Natural Resources about this problem. I have a lot of respect for my colleague from Yukon. Despite our partisan political differences, we work cooperatively on a number of issues for our constituents and I look forward to continuing to work cooperatively with him in trying to educate his government about the need for assistance in addressing some of these key northern issues that we do face and, he is quite right, that we face in both our ridings.

As to his question about climate change, if he is waiting for me to convince my colleagues to come on board with Kyoto, he will have to wait a long time because we do not support Kyoto. However we have said that we can do much better than Kyoto and that we can address the very real problems with greenhouse gas emissions, with those gases that contribute to smog in our cities and a lot of the problems that we see with the environmental change that we are experiencing without buying into the Kyoto plan.

The Liberals have been attacking us tonight saying that we have no plan or, more important, typical of the federal government, directing its attack at a provincial government. It is not enough that the Liberals want to wage war against Newfoundland. Now they want to wage war against the B.C. provincial government too. I guess they never learned the lesson that history has taught us, which is that we do not win wars when warring on two fronts. They are going to fight with both coasts.

The reality is that there is a plan to address this. The provincial government, unlike what the Minister of Natural Resources has been saying, which is that he has been working diligently with the provincial government, and yet the reality is that nothing could be further from the truth.

Hon. R. John Efford: Have you seen it?

Mr. Jay Hill: Madam Chair, could you just get control of the Minister of Natural Resources because I am concerned that maybe he does not have as strong a heart as he thinks he does. I do not want to see him keel over here tonight because he is so worked up about this.

Government Orders

My colleague from Cariboo—Prince George, my colleague from Kamloops, and myself, who represent most of the northern half of British Columbia, have written letters to the ministers and indeed to that minister himself. We have risen on statements in the House and we have asked questions in question period. For the minister to suggest in one breath that somehow he is unaware of the problem and then in another breath say that he has been working diligently and has been beavering away with the provincial government trying to work out a solution, and yet turn around in the next breath and suggest there is no plan, it is very discouraging for British Columbia but it is also typical of the Liberal government.

● (2010)

Hon. Raymond Chan (Minister of State (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Madam Chair, I am pleased to speak to the issue of the federal government's action plan with regard to the mountain pine beetle epidemic in western Canada. I believe this currently is one of the biggest challenges to the strength of the B.C. economy. It is for that reason that I was pleased to meet the Premier of British Columbia last week and to meet with the B.C. ministry of forests a few weeks before that.

It is sad for me to hear in the debate tonight that all the opposition is doing is trying to play politics on a very important issue that affects our province of British Columbia.

It is amazing. This issue has been dear to my heart, even before I was re-elected to the House of Commons. As a private citizen I was so concerned about this issue that I took the initiative to contact our colleagues in the government in B.C. and to call the minister himself and meet with him. Before I became a member of Parliament I met many times with the minister to talk about this issue.

It is amazing that the opposition members, even though they know it is such an important issue and have been long time members of the House, have not initiated a call to the minister to deal with it. What is wrong with members of Parliament representing those ridings raising the issue with the minister in charge?

Instead they play politics. They just call the political minister in B. C. and say that they have done their job and that they have asked questions in the House. Instead of seriously asking for a meeting to debate the issue and perhaps come up with some proposals to the minister, they did not. They try to confuse the issue about this plan.

The government under the leadership of the Liberal Party has been on top of this issue since 2002. It has been in consultations with the provincial government and they have come up with a plan. We are working on it with a \$40 million project to help alleviate the problem. They want to mix that up. If they are talking about this plan that we initiated back in 2002 or in the 1999 period, of course there is a plan.

However when we talk about a new plan, I met the premier last week. He has a plan for mitigation. He asked that we all work together to support the provincial government in finding new solutions. Maybe forest fires can come back again. There is a plan for that but there is not a plan to fight the pine beetle. Everybody knows that the way to fight the pine beetle is either to deforest them or we wait for the cold weather.

If the opposition member has a plan we would like to see it. He claims that the provincial government has come up with a plan and that we have ignored it. The allegation all night long has been that the provincial government has a plan that asks for our support and yet we have denied it the opportunity. That is not true.

They are playing politics. Ever since 2002 we have had a \$40 million initiative to try to help with this issue. It was announced in October 2002 and a major program was designed to directly assist the efforts of private woodlot operators to work on beetle control and on post-beetle rehabilitation of their forest lands.

As I indicated, I am interested in drawing the attention of the House to the support of British Columbia's private land owners in this very important area.

In addition, the mountain pine beetle initiative provides assistance for beetle control and forest rehabilitation on first nations reserve forest lands, and in the federal parks along the western side of the Rocky Mountains and for major federal forest land holdings in central and southeastern British Columbia.

A second major focus of the initiative is to deliver the research required to ensure an effective response to this beetle epidemic. These research needs were identified through a series of regional forums with hundreds of B.C. land managers.

All the mountain pine beetle initiative programs are fully operational and a wide range of B.C. landowners and researchers have become involved and many of them in the ridings represented by the hon. member and his colleagues in and around the city of Prince George in B.C.'s central interior.

● (2015)

The Canadian Forest Service has located staff in Prince George and Kamloops to assist private forest landowners to develop proposals to identify forest beetle infestations, to take management steps to control the beetle and to subsequently reforest these lands.

The Canadian Forest Service has also stationed a research group with three scientists and technical support at the University of Northern British Columbia to work with university and provincial government researchers in providing a cohesive and targeted flow of information in meeting the challenges of this beetle epidemic.

In addition, UNBC and provincial government researchers in Prince George have been awarded almost \$1 million in mountain pine beetle initiative funds.

These are responsible and laudable actions on behalf of the landowners.

This issue is of utmost importance to us in British Columbia. We will continue to work with the provincial government, the affected landowners and our minister to find long term solutions to this very unfortunate situation. But I think that just playing politics is not going to do the job.

Government Orders

Mr. Richard Harris: Madam Chair, if this were not such a serious matter I would be rolling on the floor laughing after listening to the member from Richmond, who I believe is a secretary of state. He said we have been talking about fighting the beetle, about having a war against the pine beetle to kill it. We have already admitted that there are only two ways to kill it. We either freeze it to death or burn it. That is the end of the story. There is research going on now to try to find other ways.

We have not even been talking about that tonight. We have been talking about mitigating the damage that the beetle has caused. In my question a couple of weeks ago, I said that the federal Liberals have been asked by the province to join the province in a 10 year major plan to mitigate the damage caused by the pine beetles.

Another question we talked about was mitigating the damage caused by the pine beetles. My colleague from Prince George—Peace River talked about it and I talked about it: mitigating the damage caused by the pine beetle.

The Liberals say there is not a plan. Now the members say they know about a major plan to mitigate the damage from the pine beetle. A major plan: that is what we have been talking about.

It is called a timber supply mitigation plan. The plan is a 10 year plan. They have asked this government. Members know it. The Minister of Natural Resources knows it. The Minister of Industry knows about this, the very plan the member just talked about, a 10 year plan: harvesting, economic activity and looking at new ways to expand the emerging forest industry into different areas. It is a 10 year plan.

This government is going to be awfully embarrassed because everything we say tonight is in *Hansard*. We have talked about the 10 year plan. My colleague from Prince George—Peace River talked about it. I have talked about it. The Liberals, up to this stage, have denied it. The date is going to be a matter of record. I would ask them to be very careful of what they say about not knowing about the plan of the Province of B.C. that has been presented to the federal government, because it does have it.

The hon. member just talked about knowing about a plan to mitigate the damage. That is the plan. It is a 10 year plan. It is some \$800 million that the provincial government has asked the federal government to join in on. That is the plan.

They know they have it. That is what we are talking about tonight but the Liberals have not responded, the same way as they did not respond two years ago when the Minister of Forests from B.C. came to Ottawa with a five year plan, which was based on the assessments at that time, to help us out. I think it was \$600 million over five years. That was the plan.

The federal government since then and to date has not responded to the province on the previous one. Now the estimates are far greater about the damage; the province has a 10 year plan. The Minister of Forests from B.C. was here two months ago. This minister knows it and perhaps the secretary of state knows it. The Minister of Industry certainly knows it and the Minister of Natural Resources certainly knows it and the Prime Minister of the country certainly knows that the plan was presented to the government two months ago.

They know it. It is not public, but they have it.

● (2020)

Hon. Raymond Chan: Madam Chair, here we are again playing politics. If they are talking about the forest fire mitigation plan, yes, the premier was here last week and we met. There was a presentation to us to support the prevention of forest fires, to mitigate against the chance of having another big forest fire in B.C. The government is considering it, but this is a plan that the premier just brought to our attention last week or two weeks ago. It is not something that they are talking about.

When they talk about a plan for the pine beetle, we have been working very closely with the provincial government and the government is very happy with the efforts that we have come in with. The government is very happy with the \$40 million that we put into the industry.

When those members talk about us making an enemy of the provincial government again, that is the wrong thing to be saying, I would say, at the very least, because we have never had such a good relationship with the provincial government before. We constantly meet with the premier. The Minister of Industry has a very close relationship with the premier. They met often to deal with a lot of the issues. Also, the federal government has never paid so much attention to B.C. issues, ever.

Let us talk about my riding. We were just provided with another \$450 million for the RAV line. That is getting us ready for the winter Olympics in 2010, providing transportation from my beautiful riding of Richmond to downtown Vancouver and also providing a rapid transit system for the airport, which is so important for the economic development of B.C. Do members know why? Because we are the gateway to Asia-Pacific.

I hope the opposition will spend more time giving us more constructive proposals instead of just playing politics.

● (2025)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Chair, we have comments from the hon. member talking about people playing politics with this issue. It is not playing politics to show that very clearly funding is insufficient. It is not playing politics when we show that the devastation is increasing, not decreasing. The federal government has put very little into an industry that is worth \$16 billion every year. We got \$40 million, which is a pittance compared to the size of the crisis.

The federal government has put in very little. The provincial government, as the hon. member may know, has actually cut its reforestation budget from \$82 million a year down to \$3 million for this year. We are talking about actually having fewer resources for forestry as the crisis continues to grow, fewer resources than we had two or three years ago.

I would like to ask the hon. member how he can possibly reconcile cutbacks in funding through the provincial government for reforestation and the federal government putting in a pittance of \$40 million for an industry that is worth \$16 billion a year. How can he possibly reconcile that small amount of support given the size and the scope of this crisis?

Government Orders

Hon. Raymond Chan: Madam Chair, I appreciate the hon. member from the NDP having raised this issue. I am not talking about them playing politics. The hon. member shows genuine concern as we do, but we have to recognize that if we are talking about provincial cutbacks, it is a provincial matter. It is not an issue to be raised in this House.

At the same time, we have been consulting. When we provided that \$40 million to the provincial government to deal with the pine beetle issue, we had good consultations not only with the provincial government but with the stakeholders of the land. They are very happy that the provincial government has come across.

The reason I am accusing the opposition members of playing politics is that they keep talking about a plan to stop the pine beetle issue, that the provincial government has come up with a plan for us but that we have refused to fund the plan. I would ask the hon. member that if he agrees there is a plan and if they are not playing politics, I would like him to enlighten me as to which plan they are talking about. We would be very glad to work constructively, if there was a plan drafted by the provincial government a year ago or two years ago. I would be very glad to help the provincial government, to advocate the government on behalf of the B.C. people.

Members keep on talking about a plan. The only plan I have seen so far is the forest fire mitigation proposal by the provincial government that was given to us a couple of weeks ago, but that was not to deal with the pine beetle. It is a reforestation effort to make sure that we have a carbon sink in B.C., in Canada, which is so important to the climate change issue.

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Chair, there is great pessimism in British Columbia, a province that has always been optimistic and forward looking in Confederation.

In the last few years British Columbians have braved the softwood lumber debacle, devastating forest fires, the mad cow crisis, drought, depletion of the salmon stocks, and hits to the tourism industry because of the SARS crisis. Yet there is another crisis, one that has received little public attention outside of British Columbia and that threatens greater economic devastation than all those I just mentioned. It is the mountain pine beetle infestation crisis.

These tiny insects, no bigger than a grain of rice, are a weapon of mass destruction with 500 to 1,000 invading a single tree. Within a year the needles of the tree turn an orangey red and the tree dies, but not before playing host to the eggs left behind by these plundering insects.

This epidemic, and there is no other word to describe it, is the single greatest insect infestation in Canada's history. Let me give the House some idea of the magnitude of this crisis and the impact it is having and will have far into the future.

At this moment the mountain pine beetle invasion has destroyed, or is affecting and threatens to destroy, a total of 173.5 million cubic feet of timber over an area of nine million hectares. That is a land mass area equal to about three-quarters of the total land mass of Sweden. The timber infested or already destroyed has a market value of \$18 billion.

It is not just the great stands of timber that have been devastated or that are threatened. We have to remember that in north central British Columbia more than 90,000 people are employed as a result of the forest industry; 90,000 individuals and the families that go with them.

Consider that and we begin to understand why there is such pessimism in British Columbia. In a province that has always prided itself on looking forward, there are thousands of people looking forward and despairing at what they see.

Some people might ask, what is the problem with a few worm holes in a few trees? The answer is a lot of our traditional export markets will not buy wood that has been infested by the mountain pine beetle. That is because the beetles carry a fungus from tree to tree. That fungus leaves a blue stain throughout the tree because it is carried by water moving through the sapwood. The beetle might die, but the fungus survives and migrates through the tree.

The Japanese refuse to buy this stained wood and the Japanese account for 10% of our total shipments. That would be \$1.8 billion in lost sales right there, and that is the highest grade and the highest value of our total export shipments.

The other danger is the increased chance of forest fires. The lodgepole pine, which is B.C.'s single most predominant species, is being killed off by the pine beetle. Those dead trees become kindling in the forests for future devastating fires such as we saw in British Columbia and in my riding only two years ago. We have already seen first hand what scorched earth looks like and we do not want to see any more of that in B.C. and we pray it will not be seen anywhere else in Canada.

What is at risk should be noted as well. There is the disruption of a stable supply of adequate and affordable timber. That disruption will lead to higher prices for finished wood and that means higher prices for new homes and home renovations.

The viability of the forest industry is threatened as well because without stable supply, maintaining market share is compromised.

That takes us back to individuals and their families. Jobs are threatened and revenue in our communities and the provincial government will be substantially reduced. If 90,000 jobs are at risk, consider the enormous impact that will have in terms of income tax revenues federally and provincially.

If whole tracts of pine disappear, the environmental impact will be equally enormous. There is, of course, the increased threat of forest fires, but we have to consider the impact of terrain stability or increased chance of flooding and landslides.

Wildlife habitat will be threatened. Scientists say that water temperatures in our lakes, streams and rivers could change.

Other commercial resources under threat are wilderness tourism, hunting, fishing, commercial fishing and outdoor recreation, all of which bring revenue to British Columbia and create employment.

Government Orders

Our province has embraced the concept of a sustainable resource but that concept is under threat because of the mountain pine beetle. If there is no resource to harvest, there is no money to invest in sustaining the resource for the future. If we cannot earn a profit from a tree, where do we get the incentive or the money to replace that tree for future harvesters?

What is frustrating and angering British Columbians is the indifference of the Liberal government to this crisis, a crisis most believe was caused in the first place by the federal government.

Years ago the fir bark beetle began its invasion that started out from the Chilcotin military reserve at Riske Creek. Pine beetles are now spilling out of that same reserve into surrounding forests. The cause was the stressing of the trees by previous military activity on those reserve lands. The federal government refused to consider the removal of infected trees which might have slowed down or even halted the spread.

• (2030)

Parks Canada is to blame as well. It is known that the mountain pine beetle can be found in the national parks, but Parks Canada sees this as a natural species creating a natural disturbance. That is what Parks Canada spokesperson Pamela Wright told the Senate Standing Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources. She said:

Where a natural species is part of the natural disturbance regime occurring in a park, controlling that species would not necessarily be desirable. The natural disturbance regime is part of the process that drives the evolution and functioning of the park.

In other words, Parks Canada and the Liberal government will not clean up its own yard even if the mess creates a disaster for everyone in the neighbourhood.

For years now, my colleagues from all over British Columbia have been trying to convince the government that a natural disaster is occurring in British Columbia and the consequences will be enormously negative. All we have heard is platitudes such as pray for a cold snap, and we have yet to witness any action.

Ministers have gone so far as to say no requests have been made by the Government of British Columbia, and it was repeated again this evening. Would the Liberals have done anything if British Columbia had asked that the mountain pine beetles in the national parks be contained within park boundaries? No, because the Liberal government believes the pine beetle is a natural species doing what comes naturally, threatening to destroy a billion dollar industry.

Is it natural that 90,000 jobs are threatened? Is it natural that the families of 90,000 workers face a bleak and uncertain future? Is it the natural policy of the minority Liberals to let British Columbia slide into economic oblivion?

The time for platitudes and Liberal indifference is past. We are in the middle of a natural disaster in British Columbia that is greater than any ice storm, as disastrous as that was for Ontario. This is as great a natural disaster as the flooding in Quebec. This is as great a natural disaster as the flooding in Manitoba.

Why is it when British Columbia faces a disaster of unimaginable proportions the Liberals shake their heads, wring their hands, and

offer platitudes and words of concern, but absolutely no action? Why can Liberals not acknowledge the contributions of British Columbians ever since Confederation in economic terms and respond to this crisis with cash and action?

The mountain pine beetle story is a story of federal incompetence and indifference. The Liberal government did not deal with the beetle infestation on federal park lands and as a result, billions of dollars of forest land outside those parks is under threat.

The time for Liberal hand wringing is past. The time for Liberal indifference to the crisis and excuses for inactivity is past. The time for Liberals ignoring a natural disaster of catastrophic proportions is past.

If the forestry industry in British Columbia is to be saved, it is time for the Liberal government to begin governing for all of Canada and to throw itself at this crisis with as much vigour as it throws at problems where it can harvest votes.

It is time the Liberal government demonstrated to British Columbians that it has the interest of all Canadians at heart and not just those who reward its arrogance and incompetence with votes at election time.

• (2035)

Hon. R. John Efford (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on the first part of her speech. It was a good speech and her comments expressed the seriousness of the situation in British Columbia.

I have met with the minister on many occasions on this issue as well as with other officials in British Columbia. I have also met with the forestry association. I am very concerned. We want to work together. It is wrong for the member to say that I have not met with the minister.

I asked her colleagues if they had read the report and I will ask the hon. member the same question. I have met with the minister. I understand the seriousness of the situation. We are looking at a long term plan. The federal government has invested \$40 million. Has the hon. member read the report? If so, can she tell me what is in it?

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Mr. Speaker, I am very sorry that my colleague only liked the first half. The first half was very factual. The second half was factual as well, but it was also emotional. The reason that it was emotional is that perhaps this particular member across the way has not had to deal with families who are so negatively affected by the forestry industry.

This has been an unmitigated disaster. These pine beetles are killable. There has to be a way in science to get rid of them. And please, never ever say to me again: pray for cold weather. I am so sick of hearing that. If that is the solution to this, then find a scientific way to make those trees think that it is below 40° Celsius. It has to happen. This has to stop immediately.

Government Orders

In terms of what reports I have and have not seen, I have probably read everything there is out there regarding this. When I do not read about it, unlike some people I actually form committees that run throughout my riding, committees of people who are actually directly affected by what is going on in the forest industry, and I take my advice from those people.

As to this report, it has been said I do not know how many times tonight, so there is no sense in my repeating the same old thing: it was presented to the government two months ago—

Hon. R. John Efford: Have you read it?

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Your hon. colleague over here just admitted that it was there. Your job is to read it, Mr. Minister. You are the member who is looking after natural resources. If you would like me to do your job, change seats.

The Speaker: The hon. member will have to address her remarks to the Chair. As a former chair occupant, she knows that.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I beg your pardon, Mr. Speaker. Let me say with all due respect that you taught me better than that. Occasionally emotion runs rampant and I forget and get involved with the member who is shouting back and forth at me.

Those are the best answers I can give on the question.

• (2040)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated much of the presentation by the hon. member from Kamloops. She mentioned, and I agree with her wholeheartedly, that she is sick and tired of people talking about praying for cold weather as if there is nothing we can do about this crisis that is devastating communities throughout British Columbia.

As the hon. member knows, our party is a very strong supporter of Kyoto. Climate change has an impact on what we have seen with the pine beetle infestation. My question to the hon. member is, why does her party not wholeheartedly support Kyoto and dealing with climate change so that issues like the pine beetle infestation can be dealt with effectively over time?

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the question from my new colleague. As for Kyoto, if the member has had the opportunity to read the information that has been put forward, I believe he would find that Kyoto does not answer the questions he is asking. It does not address the issues that need to be addressed in the country. My party and I believe that we can do a better job than Kyoto.

We have a system under Kyoto where what will be done is what I call a shell game. Carbon credits will be traded, which will allow one country to continue to pollute the water or do whatever it wishes as long as it buys a carbon credit from another country.

I am sure if the member took a look at this whole situation and read everything there is to read, or if he were here for part of the discussions, he would also agree with me that we as a country can do better than that. We are very intelligent. We have all kinds of resources at our fingertips. We have people with experience. We have people who work in different industries who understand. We have unions that can give us better answers than Kyoto gives us.

Once you have had an opportunity to have a look at it, I would love to sit down with you. Mr. Speaker, I would love to sit down with you and the member can join us and we would have a really serious discussion about what Kyoto does and does not do.

When the member understands the parts about the carbon credits, I am pretty sure that he and I will be on the same page on this.

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Kamloops whose riding I know is dramatically affected by the mountain pine beetle. It is spreading. That is the direction of it. It is heading down through the Kamloops area into the Kootenay area. It is just going to continue to worsen.

I am sure my colleague from Kamloops knows, as I do, that the 10 year pine beetle mitigation plan that was conceived and created by the provincial government has been presented to the federal government. I am sure she knows and I know she knows that it has been presented to the federal government. Those members are denying it tonight. There was a little slip-up earlier with the member for Richmond; it slipped out that the government knew about the plan, but quickly, realizing what he had said, he started talking about the forest fire mitigation plan.

Of course he knows that is not what we are talking about. We are not talking about forest fire mitigation. We are talking about the pine beetle. There was a little slip-up there. I am sure my colleague from Kamloops knows that the hon. Minister of Natural Resources knows about this 10 year plan too.

Does my colleague think that the reason why the government members are not admitting they have the plan is that they do not have their communications done yet? It is typical of this government that when they do announce they are going to participate they want to make sure that they are going to get their communications ducks all in a row before they make the announcement. Does she think that could be the reason? The Liberals never like to do anything unless there is a political plum in it for them. Would my colleague agree with that assessment?

• (2045)

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Mr. Speaker, one of the nice parts about being one of the female members of this caucus is that I can allow the male members to be nastier than I am. I get to stay on the nice side of things. In answer to that question, I think it has some merit, but let me just say about the minister and the parliamentary secretary, who this evening have been saying that they do not understand it, and then the parliamentary secretary more or less admitted that he knows about it, if they do not know about it, they should know about it.

I would be terribly disappointed to learn that a minister would be that far behind in his portfolio. I would think that would be a condemnation of himself. I would not admit it, quite frankly.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate this evening. I want to share my time with my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster.

Government Orders

As a British Columbian, let me say that this is an important issue for our province. There is no doubt about the importance of the forest industry to our province. No one has any questions about that. There is no doubt about the importance of tourism to our province. There is no doubt about the spiritual importance of the forest to everyone in British Columbia.

I personally have seen the devastation caused by the infestation of the pine beetle even though it has not spread to my part of British Columbia on the lower mainland. I understand the fear and frustration that this causes for the communities that have been directly affected. I have talked to people about their dread as the infestation spreads across the province.

To see one's livelihood turning brown before one's eyes as the lodgepole pine trees in the area die, to see the timber that is harvested stained blue from the fungus carried by the pine beetle and made less desirable and less saleable, to see logging increase to make use of the dead trees immediately rather than seeing the long term viability of the industry in one's area, bringing into question the future jobs and future survival of one's community: I understand the dread that this causes for people in other parts of British Columbia.

The B.C. government has taken some initiatives on this, that is clear. I am hoping that the federal government will get behind those initiatives and expand them. It needs to get on board.

Tonight I want to talk about the suggestions made by Carole James, the leader of the New Democratic Party in British Columbia. On November 25, Ms. James made an important suggestion about a pine beetle community investment fund for communities in northern British Columbia. This fund would be modelled on the Columbia Basin Trust and the Nechako-Kitimat Development Fund.

Not so long ago, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster and I and our colleagues from the NDP caucus in British Columbia visited the West Kootenays. While we were there, there were important meetings happening around the Columbia Basin Trust. We saw first-hand the importance of that arrangement for those communities and the passion that people felt about the Columbia Basin Trust and how important it was to the future viability of those communities. It is a great model in terms of the ongoing importance of those areas.

The suggestion was that a fund would be established with revenue generated from harvesting operations to control the spread of the pine beetle infestation. The need was to keep the revenue being generated from that harvesting near the affected communities rather than see it end up in the coffers of the provincial and federal governments.

This comes from the increases in the annual allowable cut in the areas around Quesnel, Prince George and the Lakes districts, where the government will collect revenue on an additional 5 million cubic metres this year alone. That is a huge windfall for the government. We and Ms. James want to make sure that the revenue is spent in the those local communities and does not disappear to Victoria.

She proposed that there needed to be community representatives making decisions and setting priorities on how to invest the revenues in their communities. Local people need to be involved directly in setting those priorities so that it is not just people in Victoria or

people in Ottawa who do that work. Business, labour, first nations and municipal and regional governments all need to be directly involved—and directly involved locally—in establishing the criteria for their community investment fund on the pine beetle.

The amount of timber harvested in these areas will decline by between 20% and 40% over the next 10 to 15 years because of the extra harvesting that is happening now. As I mentioned earlier, that means the long term viability of communities is put into question. That means the ability for people who live in those areas to count on a future in that same region is being put in jeopardy because the work is being done now and not spread out over a longer period as was expected before this infestation happened.

Prince George city councillor Murray Krause believes that northern communities need to have control of their destiny by stopping the outflow of the wealth from the north. That is a key part of any long term plan for the region.

Councillor Krause strongly believes that local people in his area, in Prince George, need to have a key role in making the decisions about how this crisis is managed and how the future of those communities is developed in light of the infestation.

Nate Bello, the mayor of Quesnel, said:

This initiative recognizes the need to invest in the economic future of those communities directly impacted by the pine beetle infestation, including forestry and pine beetle recovery, transportation, tourism, energy, small business and sustainable economic development.

That is quite the list of important areas that the mayor of Quesnel has identified, but the basic fact is that he, like others, wants to be directly involved in how this crisis is managed and what the future planning and future economic development of his region is going to be. I think he recognizes that what Ms. James has suggested in her initiative around a pine beetle recovery fund goes some way to addressing that hope.

• (2050)

In passing, I remember not so long ago seeing a display of value added wood products made from timber that had been stained by the fungus that is left by the pine beetle. This gives the wood a streak resembling a blue grey kind of stain. It was very interesting to see that an enterprising entrepreneur in the area had actually taken this and tried to turn it to advantage, and use the special qualities of that wood in products that he was hoping to market.

That is the kind of local initiative that we need to support as well. We know and we have heard from other members this evening how the staining of this wood has decreased the value and desirability of the wood. We heard how Japan was no longer interested in the stained wood even though its strength and other qualities were not affected. It is just the cosmetic value of the wood that is affected. Here is an entrepreneur that has taken that head on and made products. He has attempted secondary manufacturing that takes advantage of the staining that has happened to the wood in order to turn the disadvantage into an advantage for British Columbia.

Government Orders

There are significant questions raised by the infestation. The role of fire suppression and how our fire management process has sometimes set us up to undo the natural changes in the forest. Sometimes this has made it even more likely that the pine beetle is going to take hold in an area. Regarding forest management and clear-cutting practices, when we clear-cut a forest and then reforest it, we often plant a single species which ultimately will make the forest more vulnerable to an attack by a pest such as the pine beetle.

Instead of matching the great diversity of the original forest we see the ghetto forest developed by this process. We also need to look at the whole question of climate change and how it affects this whole crisis.

• (2055)

The Speaker: I am sorry to cut the hon. member short, but he was splitting his time. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Yukon.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to compliment the member for Burnaby—Douglas and I mean that sincerely. It was one of the best speeches in a take note debate that I have heard because he offered some positive and constructive solutions that just have not been here tonight as my colleague mentioned earlier. There were no ideas coming forward over and above the number of programs that we already have in place. I highly compliment the member for that. It was certainly something to think about and I hope the Canadian Forest Service people and the minister's staff are listening to those ideas.

I would like to ask the member two questions. First, I believe his colleague sort of chastized the British Columbia government for something related to budgets and reforestation whereas, from the other side of the House, we have been hearing all night about the masterful work of the B.C. government. We are working with the B. C. government. We think it has a good plan and we are working closely with it with our plan in order to do our part of the job. Could he expand a bit more about the role of the B.C. government in relation to the lodgepole pine?

Second, by B.C. law, large forest companies have the responsibility for reforestation. When he was talking about the tax revenues of the provincial government, I want to ensure he was not suggesting that the provincial government use those tax revenues to do the reforestation that the large B.C. forest companies should be doing.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Yukon for his compliments about my speech. It is very important that we ensure that our governments take this crisis as seriously as possible. Certainly, the people in the areas affected feel this crisis very directly and very personally.

I do not think any amount of money will address all the needs and the important concerns that are in the area. We need to be working actively to see that this crisis is addressed. The B.C. NDP leader suggested to put local people in direct control of some of the windfalls that come out of this. It is strange how often, when there is a disaster in the works, there is some benefit to the overall economy.

I always think it is strange that sometimes a great disaster, such as a hurricane or earthquake, can often increase the GDP of a country because of all the effort that has to go into restoration work and

rebuilding. Even though there has been a huge disaster, often lives are lost, and a huge disruption to society, it somehow ends up being a bonus when we look at the overall impact in the way we manage and the way we account for our economies.

We need to be careful in this instance. We need to ensure that we take innovative steps in order for local people to benefit from the outcome of this and that the benefits that accrue from this disaster, and unfortunately there will be some, do not all dwindle away to other parts of the province, other parts of the country or leave the country, or all go into the profits that the corporations will reap in this area. I think the B.C. NDP has come up with a really important suggestion.

• (2100)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to compliment the member for Burnaby—Douglas. He brought forward very concrete suggestions and was very well prepared for the debate this evening. It is an extremely important debate for British Columbia.

The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas has certainly seen the cutbacks in the reforestation budget that has come from the Liberal government in British Columbia. He also mentioned Carole James and the work that she would do as premier and what she has put forward to address this critical issue in B.C. We know that Carole James has a great deal of experience, having lived in the interior in Prince George, as well as having lived and worked on Vancouver Island.

What is the difference between the reforestation policy of the current B.C. Liberal government and that of Carole James, leader of the B.C. NDP?

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, the whole question of reforestation is a crucial one. It is particularly crucial around this whole matter of the pine beetle. In the past, in clear-cutting practices, we tended to take out the whole forest. We take out the whole forest and change the huge diversity that exists in the forest.

Someone who has visited an old growth forest will see the incredible range of plant life that is there, the incredible range of trees. It is not generally just one species of tree that is found in that area. However, after it has been logged and reforested, often it is replaced by a single species. I once heard an expert on forests call them ghetto forests because they were replaced—

The Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this important issue this evening. I would like to thank the member for Burnaby—Douglas, both for the skill with which he spoke to the issue a few moments ago and for his generosity in sharing his time with me this evening.

Government Orders

We know that the pine beetle infestation is devastating British Columbia. The latest figures for 2003 indicate that over 100,000 square kilometres of British Columbia are now infested. That means roughly 173 million cubic metres of wood has been affected and has been killed as a result of this infestation. That is the equivalent of 5.2 million homes that could be constructed with the wood.

We are talking about an area equivalent to three-quarters of Sweden. If the pine beetle infestation continues, we are talking about an area the size of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island together that would be devastated.

We are talking about something, the magnitude of which has never been seen in Canadian history. This is the greatest infestation that we have ever had in Canada. It is a matter of tremendous importance for communities in the interior of British Columbia that have seen their lodgepole pine forests and other forests devastated. In fact, the latest figures indicate that we could be talking about 85% of the lodgepole pine forests that will be affected. Obviously, the magnitude of this crisis is significant and the magnitude of the response needs to be significant as well.

As I indicated earlier, the \$40 million that the federal government is putting in is not sufficient to handle the magnitude of this crisis, not nearly sufficient to handle the magnitude of the crisis. When we couple it with the cutbacks that have happened at the provincial level, we are talking about a situation where the lack of political action at both the provincial and federal levels is compounding this important crisis and making it much worse.

I would like to mention a report that will be released in a few days by the Sierra Club. It indicates the degree to which cutbacks by the provincial government have had an impact on the pine beetle infestation. The study is done by a former *Vancouver Sun* forestry reporter, Ben Parfitt. He was assisted by Kerri Garner, a student of environmental studies and geography at the University of Victoria. Certain excerpts were published by Stephen Hume in the *Vancouver Sun* last week.

First, they did a study of the cutbacks to the ministry of forestry. The cutbacks indicated that 800 jobs in the ministry of forestry have disappeared over the last three years since Gordon Campbell was elected. Most of those 800 positions which were axed include science, technical research and enforcement staff. We have been talking this evening about the importance that research plays in developing a response to the pine beetle infestation. The B.C. Liberals under Gordon Campbell gutted 800 positions. The newspaper report stated:

—the authors found “a gutted and demoralized department that is largely incapable of addressing the many challenges before it”.

The writers indicated that:

In short, the government wound up decimating the ministry just as it confronted the most sinister challenge it has faced—the nightmarish pine beetle infestation that is sweeping through B.C.'s boreal forests like a botanical version of the Black Death.

That is the result of the cutbacks of the B.C. Liberals in dealing with this important pine beetle infestation. It is having a huge impact on the interior of British Columbia.

As I mentioned earlier, we are talking about an industry that has \$16 billion in export revenues annually, but there have been

cutbacks, both in terms of the number of positions that have been eliminated and the cutbacks for reforestation. We have seen reforestation budgets cut from \$82 million to \$3 million in this most recent year and we know reforestation is one important way of trying to address this infestation.

We have seen cutbacks at both those levels and the result compares unfavourably to the U.S. forest service. For example, each U.S. forest service employee is responsible for managing a forest area equivalent to five—

● (2105)

The Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kootenay—Columbia.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting that there is apparently an election coming up in British Columbia on May 17. Anybody who did not know would actually think we were in Victoria right now, with the NDP members going on about the B.C. Liberals cutting back their forest amounts and so on. This is the federal Parliament, I just thought I would let the member know, and we are talking about the responsibility of the federal government in this issue in British Columbia.

If he wants to get into provincial politics, perhaps we could remind him, as my colleague from Cariboo—Prince George did earlier in the debate, it was the B.C. NDP government that was at the crux, at the core, at the beginning, at the genesis of this disaster. Perhaps the member might think a little about his comments. If we are trying to hold the federal Liberals accountable, because truly they have an accountability in the aftermath of the start of the disaster by the B.C. NDP, we should be doing that in this chamber.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the hon. member opposite who first said that we should not be talking about provincial politics and then proceeded of course to support the position of the B.C. Liberals.

It is very clear in the House that we have a responsibility to question the inadequate response from the federal Liberals. There is no doubt their response has been entirely inadequate. In previous interventions in the House, I have mentioned that very fact. Forty million dollars is a drop in the bucket compared to the sixteen billion dollars that the export industry is worth. There is no doubt the federal Liberals are responsible in large part, but we will not let the provincial Liberals off the hook either. What they do is pass the ball back and forth. The federal Liberals say that the provincial Liberals should be doing more. The provincial Liberals say that the federal Liberals should be doing more.

The reality is the inadequate federal response, coupled with the cutbacks, which we have seen devastating the ministry of forests, has led to the crisis we now see. Under the B.C. Liberal watch, most of the territory that is now infested was infested. Most of that has happened over the past three or three and a half years, since the B.C. Liberals were elected. That is unfortunate and it shows that the B.C. Liberal cutbacks have had an impact as well.

Government Orders

In the spirit of non-partisanship, members in all four corners of the House should recognize that when a provincial government enacts policies that have an extremely negative impact on our forest land, we have the responsibility to speak up. In this case, both the federal Liberals and the B.C. Liberals are responsible.

• (2110)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no one from this side of the House has ever suggested the B.C. Liberals should do anything different.

All night long I have been trying to get some members from Her Majesty's loyal opposition to buy into Kyoto or the mechanisms under Kyoto to reduce greenhouse gases. As everyone has admitted, a cold spell is the only way of biologically defeating this bug, which has been determined by scientists. However, they disagree. They say that they have something better. I would be delighted to hear in their coming speeches this evening what better ways they have of reducing greenhouse gases, other than the ones proposed.

They were complaining about carbon credits. The best way to reduce greenhouse gases quickly is in one industry to get more bang for the buck rather than put in another industry that does not have much room to move.

I know they are very supportive of Kyoto and greenhouse gas reductions. In some areas we have put a lot of effort into solar and renewable energies, like ethanol and wind, but they are not available all the time. They are intermittent. In some areas of the world and in some parts of Canada nuclear energy is very low in greenhouse gases. Would the member comment on nuclear energy as one of the methods in a combined comprehensive strategy to reduce greenhouse gases in some parts of the world?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has made a very important point about Kyoto, the importance of adhering to it and moving forward with it. I do not buy the proposition that somehow there is something better, something hidden away that we will hear about some time from the members in one corner of the House. The reality is we must work through Kyoto. Only through Kyoto can we really start addressing the issues of climatic change, which have worsened the pine beetle infestation.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, I am delighted that we are having this debate tonight so we can outline the comprehensive program we have put in place in conjunction with and working with the B.C. government over the last few years: the pine beetle initiative and various programs under that.

It should be noted that Canada's Constitution clearly indicates that the forest land management and indeed the management of all natural resources fall within the provincial mandate. Additionally, under British Columbia's forest legislation, as I said earlier, major forest licence holders are required to carry out reforestation at their own expense.

The role of the federal government in forest matters is confined to the areas of science and technology, aboriginal affairs, national reporting, consensus building, international trade and relations and the management of federal lands. However, it should also be noted that the federal government is putting a large effort toward assisting

the province of British Columbia, while staying within the federal mandate, in the mountain pine beetle battle.

In 2002 a \$40 million six year program, the mountain pine beetle initiative, was introduced. This initiative complements the province's mountain pine beetle activities and is consistent with the federal mandate, a principle that was established at the outset of discussions with B.C. officials. One would think from listening to the debate tonight that those discussions had never occurred, but they did.

The mountain pine beetle initiative includes a suite of programs assisting beetle control and forest rehabilitation of federal lands: first nations reserve lands, federal parks and three large blocks of federal forest lands, as well as private non-industrial forest lands.

The member for Cariboo—Prince George has been quoted in the media as saying that the mountain pine beetle outbreak is as much a natural disaster as the Quebec ice storms and he feels the federal government should be providing funding to rehabilitate Crown forests that are being attacked by the beetle. That has been said this evening as well.

The beetle infestation is huge and the situation is serious, but whatever the government does must be consistent with its mandate. It should be remembered that in the ice storm situation, to which the hon. member has referred, federal funding did not go to rehabilitate provincial crown lands, but to assist private landowners, as is being done in the current situation in B.C.

The mountain pine beetle initiative was developed as a response to a provincial request for federal programming in this area. It also includes a research program focused on reducing current infestation impacts and the risk of future beetle epidemics. This meshes nicely with the province's 10 year wood salvage plan.

I want to mention that under the \$40 million initiative, there are a number of programs. Some are research and some are reforestation, as I have just mentioned. All those programs are working and in place.

In that plan, the research initiative has four sections to it. The first is to estimate the commercial lifespan of beetle killed timber. The second is to how best utilize the large volume of dead timber, and that falls in line with the industrial strategy ideas that were raised earlier this evening. The third is the research we are doing on the impacts of the timber flow changes on forest dependent communities, of which there are a number in B.C. and other parts of Canada. The NDP raised tonight the need for us to address those communities, and we are doing that. The fourth idea, in which I know the NDP would be interested in, is our research on the ecological impacts of managing the beetle killed stands. The NDP raised that issue tonight.

Government Orders

The B.C. ministry of forests recognizes that mountain pine beetle initiative research is addressing the high priority information requirements and that this effort is supplying critical information to the province in support of its 10 year plan. Additionally, federal officers have been located in the beetle epidemic region of Prince George and Kamloops to facilitate the delivery of the mountain pine beetle forest programs. I mentioned that earlier this year.

Perhaps the member for Cariboo—Prince George is unaware that in his own riding of Prince George the mountain pine beetle initiative has awarded nearly \$1 million in funding to research scientists at the University of Northern British Columbia and the B. C. ministry of forests.

This funding is to produce answers to research priorities identified by hundreds of forest land managers during a series of regional forums, including three sessions in Prince George. These forums were undertaken by the Canadian Forest Service to ensure the mountain pine beetle initiative's research agenda would not only be scientifically sound, but also focused on the information needs of those directly battling the beetle. That falls in line with what a number of people raised tonight about local consultations.

Scientists from the University of Northern British Columbia and the Canadian Forest Service are working together to discover, among other things, the dispersal patterns of beetle populations, the factors contributing to the rate of decay in beetle killed timber, the hydrological changes in forest stands killed by the beetle, and at what point a beetle-attacked stand no longer contributes to the outbreak expansion. This research will help forest managers decide when and where to harvest during outbreak conditions.

● (2115)

These projects illustrate how federal government researchers and university researchers can partner together to deal with the impacts of the current outbreak and to use that knowledge to reduce the risk from future forest pest epidemics.

I say future epidemics because we are quite certain they will occur. The mountain pine beetle is a natural part of the pine forests of western North America. As a natural part of these ecosystems, it is well adapted to these forests and from time to time its population explodes.

The federal government's experience with the insects goes back to 1914. Over the decades, through federal-provincial cooperation, many outbreaks of this pest have been tracked. However, the current outbreak has spread across an area approaching 10 million hectares, an area larger than New Brunswick. It is by far the largest mountain pine beetle outbreak on record.

Complete control of the mountain pine beetle is not possible given the scale of the infestation and the abundance of mature lodgepole pine, the insect's food source. The only thing that will bring it under control is a period of winter cold, minus 40 for a number of days, or an unseasonable fall or spring cold snap.

Other troubling aspects of the current outbreak are the early scientific results that indicate mountain pine beetle now inhabits areas where it was not previously found. It is thought this beetle migration is some of the first evidence on climate change actually occurring in Canada. The outlook is for increased beetle spread as

climate change models indicate a reduced likelihood of prolonged winter cold necessary to terminate the infestations.

There is no quick or easy fix for this situation. The hon. member is greatly mistaken when he alleges that the federal government is not engaged in the issue. The Canadian Forest Service of Natural Resources Canada is deeply involved in this situation and is working in close cooperation with the province, having put financial resources and some of the best forest researchers in the country and perhaps in the world to work on this issue. The results of their research provide a sound base to the mitigation policies and programs implemented by forest managers and planners.

The B.C. ministry of forests is well aware of the contributions made by the Canadian Forest Service and the Government of Canada in this situation. Those valuable contributions should not be dismissed.

I want to talk for a few minutes now on the effects on the little guy who has been caught in this issue, particularly in British Columbia, although the pine beetle has spread to Alberta as well.

Many Canadians, specifically those in British Columbia, draw their income directly from the forest or in activities related to the forest. Commercial forestry firms, many with high technology mills across the country, produce products for domestic and export markets, contributing some \$40 billion to Canada's export earnings.

There are many others, individuals or small groups, who operate on private woodlots often not as visible, but who are playing a strong role in dealing with the mountain pine beetle epidemic in B.C. They are neighbours to the crown lands managed and protected by the Government of B.C. and the forest licensees. They are interested in being good neighbours in joining the effort to respond to the natural occurrence of the beetle. I want them to know that the government has not forgotten them.

A six year, \$40 million initiative was announced in October 2002. Within that initiative is a major program designed to directly assist the efforts of private woodlot operators to work on beetle control and on post-beetle rehabilitation of their forest lands.

● (2120)

As I said, I am interested in drawing the attention of the House to the support for British Columbia's private land owners in this important area. In addition, there is the mountain pine beetle initiative and forest rehabilitation on first nation reserves.

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is time that we got the federal Liberals on record. I am going to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources to speak for himself as well as his minister.

Government Orders

Very recently provincial government representatives were in Ottawa. They brought with them a major 10 year plan to mitigate the damage caused by the mountain pine beetle infestation, as well as to mitigate the economic impact of that throughout the province in communities that depend on our forest industry.

Will the parliamentary secretary stand in his place now and speak for himself and his minister and tell us, on the record, that he and his minister know absolutely nothing about this 10 year major plan that was just presented within the last couple of months by the provincial government representatives here in Ottawa? Will he stand up and say that he and his minister know absolutely nothing about this mitigation plan?

• (2125)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, climate change is affecting my riding as well, which is why we keep encouraging the members opposite to help us with the climate change problem affecting species like this.

I cannot comment on a meeting I was not at or a trip I was not involved in. I am glad we are having this debate so that members can actually see the various initiatives the federal government is taking, the various plans we have made with the B.C. government in reaction to its approaches.

There are various areas of jurisdiction. There is work on a number of programs that the federal government has undertaken. We have not got to all the federal land yet. I will have to speak to that later. There are federal lands in national parks, on first nations reserves and on big federal forest tracts in B.C.

I outlined the four elements of the research agenda. We have a major plan, initiatives and programs in cooperation with B.C. If the members opposite are not willing to admit that all these things are underway, or they do not understand it, then we cannot go on from there with further suggestions. It would be interesting, as I have heard from this corner of the House, to hear some suggestions from the other corner of the House. Over and above that, once they admit all these things that we are doing, I would like to hear suggestions as to how we could move forward. I would certainly be the first one to pass those on to the department.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his intervention in the House. I know that the hon. member is fully aware of the value of the forest industry, the \$16 billion in exports annually. I also know that the hon. member understands the size and scope of the incredible crisis that we are facing in British Columbia. It is over 100,000 square kilometres of devastated forest land.

The hon. member understands the size and scope of the issue. He certainly understands the value of the industry and the importance of forest lands in British Columbia. Would he not agree with me that \$40 million over six years is very much a pittance, much less than what is needed from the federal government to address the crisis?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the member has asked an excellent question. He referred to that concept earlier.

I would like to point out two items that he did not mention in relation to this question. First of all, it was the part of the speech I

have not had an opportunity to give yet, which talked about how we were dealing with the rest of the federal mandate.

I am interested in suggestions. We have talked about the federal lands, the federal science, the federal research, bringing people together in cooperation and working with the B.C. government. If there are other areas in the federal mandate that were not covered in our programs and which we are not doing, I would certainly be willing to hear them.

The other item is in relation to funds. The member is quite right about the magnitude of the problem and the magnitude of the effect on the B.C. economy. We have to look at the cost of the individual solutions. If \$2 million is enough and it solves the problem, then all that is spent is \$2 million.

I think the solution is the funds related to the things that are left undone. Hopefully tonight we will hear, as we have already heard from this corner of the House, some suggestions of where we need to invest more over and above the comprehensive programs that we put forward relating to the items that the federal government is allowed to deal with.

• (2130)

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thought that rather than getting into a debate only with our words, I would put some words from registered professional foresters on the record with respect to the federal government. I have some comments from Peter Gribbon of Downie Street Sawmills and from Troy Hromadnik, the chief forester at Tembec. Both are very responsible forestry companies, as are all of the forestry companies in my constituency of Kootenay—Columbia, that I am proud to represent.

Mr. Gribbon in part says:

The cause of landscape level outbreaks is tree and stand susceptibility. The best long-term strategy is to focus on managing pine instead of the beetle. That could be extended to say: the best strategy is to focus on managing lodgepole pine ecosystems and the processes that regulate them. Conversion of the landscape to one less prone to epidemic outbreaks provides the only real solution to the type of Mountain Pine Beetle problems currently seen in B.C.

Existing forest management knowledge needs to be translated into "beetle proofing" future stands through practices like:

- management of tree densities which should be reduced;
- a mix of tree species and ages in a forest helps to prevent populations from building up;
- shortening rotations time also helps keep the forest younger, healthier and more resistant to attack;
- permanent road systems throughout the working forest reduces the response time and can help keep outbreaks small;
- maintain vigour in pine stands.

He goes on to say:

The Federal Forest Rehabilitation program, led by Natural Resources Canada will deliver a beetle control response on federal forest lands that have the greatest concentration of beetle-infested forest.

The federal government could also make additional significant contributions in the following areas:

- economic and strategic analysis;
- economic diversification support;
- environmental impact mitigation work;
- fisheries and water protection work;
- rehabilitation of non-economic sites;

Government Orders

support for University and College research chairs;
 undertake research into effective forest and ecosystem management;
 investigate influence of climate change;
 help support rural
 community economies and assist in developing other economic engines.

Mr. Hromadnik of Tembec had a slightly different perspective in his presentation to me. He said:

At this point, management efforts at the provincial level are almost exclusively focused on controlling the spread of this pest. While this is and clearly should be the priority of land managers in the province of BC, only recently has there been a recognition that the federal government must begin to play a more active role.

As it relates to forest health, the role of the federal government continues to be elevated as the mountain pine beetle epidemic persists in the province of BC. In a recent forest manager 'think tank' session, the question was asked of senior industry members, "What is the role of and/or what are the expectations of the federal government in the matter of controlling the spread of mountain pine beetle in B.C.?" Several consistent themes evolved including...

reforestation/rehabilitation funding;
 marketing;
 education and awareness;
 research and development;
 community stability; and,
 overall political support for the various initiatives.

In 2001, a BC industry task force called for \$600 million in federal assistance over 10 years and in 2002 joined with the province to request an additional \$125 million over five years. While the province did receive \$40 million in federal funding, the amount is far short of that required to address the 'fall-out' from this disaster. Although industry maintains the legal requirement to reforest land where salvage harvesting has occurred, there are literally thousands of hectares where stands that are killed will not be salvaged. To ensure that these stands continue to contribute to the 'productive forest landbase' of the province, rehabilitation activities will be required. As one assesses the problem it becomes clear that substantial federal funding will be required to assist the province of BC in completing this task.

He goes on to say:

Although the beetle epidemic in BC is rightly seen as a disaster by most, it is not necessarily viewed this way by all. The federal government, to the benefit of the province and the BC industry, may choose to implement a mountain pine beetle education and awareness program. Through such efforts, the federal government will educate foreign markets, communities, NGO groups and students on the implications of this event.

He then goes on to talk about research and development as a key area of the federal government. He also points out:

Many communities in the province of BC will undoubtedly face significant, long-term impacts as a result of the beetle epidemic. The federal government, in cooperation with BC agencies, will be able to identify such communities and will be able to develop economic transition strategies where they are suited. The federal government can aid and encourage economic diversification of communities and/or individual businesses and can attract other economic ventures compatible with future re-establishment of the forest industry. With federal funding and efforts tied to the maintenance of community stability in affected regions of the province, the long-term economic impacts of this pest will be reduced and, in some areas, perhaps mitigated.

● (2135)

Federal support has been sought by the province in the past. In light of the disaster created by the mountain pine beetle, B.C. is again looking for the involvement of the federal government. The federal government has a key role to play in the control of this pest and/or in the mitigation of its impacts. The federal government, in collaboration with provincial partners, is capable of identifying and addressing those challenges that have arisen as a result of the beetle epidemic. The federal government maintains the knowledge, resources and infrastructure to follow through on the action plan it develops. It is for these reasons that the federal government must join its provincial partners and engage the mountain pine beetle issue head-on.

Those were two sets of comments by people in the province who are directly engaged with the potential of this problem.

In my constituency of Kootenay—Columbia we are just at the starting edge of this problem. I regret to see the devastation in the constituencies of my colleagues from Prince George and in other areas of the province. We are just starting into it. It is primarily on the west side of Kootenay Lake and it can clearly be seen. There are other patches throughout the east Kootenays. It will fully engage the pine in Kootenay National Park and Yoho National Park. It will then carry on through Banff and Jasper National Parks and end up in my colleague's constituency in Yellowhead and in the constituency of my other colleague from Wild Rose.

At that point, we will have engaged so much wood it will be hard to even comprehend. With all due respect to my friends from the NDP and all the people who are involved on the farther edge of the environmentalist action groups, I say that they should give their heads a shake. Two years ago in the summer, we had forest fires in Kelowna that were directly related to this infestation. In fact, what we have in many parts of the interior of British Columbia at this point is not forests. We have matchsticks complete with phosphorous on the top, figuratively speaking. Our whole province is about to burn up as a result of this infestation and the standing dead wood.

Some environmental groups have become very exercised about the fact that even with a low level satellite in terms of being able to take a look down on the province of British Columbia, that one can see the area of clear cut. Of course we can but that beats the heck out of having all of that fuel sitting there just waiting to turn into an absolute inferno.

Why am I describing it this way? I see my friend from Yukon. He has much of the same kind of topography. Although his trees grow at a much slower rate, he region has many of the same species and, to a lesser extent, the same kind of industry that I have in my constituency and in the province of British Columbia. He would know that when this happens we will see, over the next 5, 10, 15 years, changes in our province that even at this point are unimaginable to us. We have only seen a taste of it as a result of the fire at Kelowna. In fact, the forest fire in my constituency came within only 10 kilometres of the southern boundary of the city of Cranbrook.

If this disaster, and I say again, disaster, was in Ontario, if this disaster was where Liberals get elected, they would have been falling all over themselves to get the situation corrected or at least to come up with some form of mitigation. It is to that extent that this is a political debate. It is to that extent that when they see problems with the auto pact and the auto industry that they turn up with many tens and hundreds of millions of dollars. When they see the problem in the Canadian aerospace industry they turn up with loan guarantees and export plans. They turn up with all sorts of resources but somehow in the province of British Columbia, where this happens to be on the other side of the Canadian Rockies, they cannot see it. They do not understand it.

Government Orders

• (2140)

I really value the input that we have had from my colleague from Kamloops. It is true that in her presentation she was somewhat emotional but maybe we do have to get a little emotional in this chamber. She was a little emotional on behalf of her constituents. She said that the people in her constituency, the people in my colleague's constituency and the people in the Prince George—Peace River constituency are living with this at this point. They are seeing the starting edge of this disaster happening.

It is with that frustration that I, having the privilege of being B.C. caucus chair, am fully aware and engaged with this on behalf of the B.C. caucus because our B.C. caucus speaking for the people of B.C. are the only ones who are trying to put any kind of pressure on the federal Liberals.

We heard the chirping of the natural resources minister earlier tonight when we was saying, "You didn't give me a phone call". I do not know what all was going on. Mr. Chair, obviously you were not there but I am sure with your expertise that all of that chirping would not have happened. However, the point was that it became a back and forth debate. The reality is that we are dealing with a disaster at this particular point.

I say to the federal Liberals that they should wake up and smell the forest fire because that is exactly what we are into at this particular point. We need action, not more words from the federal Liberals.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to compliment the member for the first 75% of his speech. I thought it was very innovative and it was great to have some quotes, on which I was going to start my question but now have to start off with the last unfortunate part .

He mentioned that his party may be the first opposition party engaged but the reason we wanted this debate tonight is, as we have shown, that our party has a comprehensive set of programs that we have put in place. They are all in place. We are working on them and we will continue to do that. I am glad that his party is coming on side, pushing the problem that has to be worked on.

Unfortunately the opposition members have tried to put forward a myth by asking why we are not reacting like we did during the ice storm, SARS and these other major crises in Quebec and Ontario. As I have already said in my speech, I explained how we are dealing in the same way as we did in the ice storm, by reforesting woodlot owners.

A member from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition asked tonight "Why do you not do the same as with SARS and put in \$10 million for such a major crisis?" Well, we have put in \$40 million, which is more than he mentioned in relation to SARS.

I will go back to my question on the thoughtful part of his presentation. It was great that he had these experts in the province directly engaged in the problem. They mentioned a number of items that he read out, such as community stability, research, rehabilitation and R and D. That is great because those are the things that we have outlined in our speeches tonight on exactly what we are doing.

I have outlined the four prong research program. I have talked about the rehabilitation that was done on the lands that we were allowed to, on all the various types of federal lands. I have talked about community stability as the third pillar in our research program.

My question is related to two other items that those experts mentioned, one being diversification and the other climate change. As the House knows, we have a Department of Western Diversification, but the party of the member opposite is always criticizing that department saying that we should not have that department giving out money to promote diversification, although that is what those experts he quoted asked that we should do.

My question will give the member a good opportunity to outline, as other members of his caucus have mentioned tonight, better ways for reducing greenhouse gases than the ones that we are proposing. What are those other ways of reducing greenhouse gases?

• (2145)

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I will try to deal with all those questions.

First, I would point out that in the comments by one of my experts he said, "In 2001 a B.C. industry task force called for \$600 million"—which seems to me to be a tad more than \$40 million but I am not sure—"in federal assistance over 10 years and in 2002 joined with the province to request an additional \$125 million over five years".

My math is not all that great, but I come up with a total of \$725 million that was recommended by experts and requested by the province. The response by the federal government was \$40 million. It seems to me that there is something of a shortfall.

My friend keeps on going back to the question and we have answered the question with respect to Kyoto and the whole issue of climate change.

While I recognize it is his turn to ask me question, I would ask him, if all that is happening under Kyoto, in addition to some of the glossy advertising that the federal government is attempting to put together and trying to influence people in that particular way and having very little effect, what is gained by taking carbon credits from Russia on old information, on information that existed when it was the U.S.S.R. instead of Russia? Their economy fundamentally collapsed. As a consequence, they have so-called carbon credits left over to sell.

What are we going to do? I guess Canada will transfer hundreds of millions of dollars, nay billions of dollars, to Russia in order to get away with continuing to put out carbon. carbon, I should mention in the case of Russia, that will now increase as a result of the turn back in the economy. The economy in Russia is now starting to come back up again and this is all stale dated.

All that is basically going on is buying and selling of carbon credits and a little bit of advertising. If that is going to solve the pine beetle problem in the mind of the member for Yukon, then I think he has been looking at too many northern lights.

Government Orders

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the member might be right, because I was definitely looking at some gorgeous northern lights on Saturday night in my riding. They are spectacular.

However, I would suggest that he did not answer my two questions. The first question had to do with the experts that he quoted who suggested diversification. We have a Department of Western Diversification that was created for that. Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition constantly suggests that we should close that. He quotes an expert who says that we should do something and then the member lobbies against it.

My second question has to do with climate change. I asked the member a question on climate change because at least three of the members of his caucus tonight have suggested they have a better way. What better ways for reducing greenhouse gases does the member's party have? I would be happy to look at other ways to reduce them.

In relation to carbon credits and trading emission credits, one of the best ways to reduce greenhouse gases available is by collecting methane from landfills in developing countries. If a country is serious about reducing greenhouse gases that way and trade it off to a Canadian company that might otherwise go broke, if through their processes it has already done everything it can, as opposed to forcing them to do something that would make them totally uneconomic, they might as well reduce those greenhouse gases in another area where they can be reduced and trade those credits. However if the member has a better way I would like to know about it.

Finally, he suggested the increased figures of what we are doing. I have explained a comprehensive program where we are dealing with the items under the federal mandate. If he wants more funds I would like him to suggest some concrete proposals, something like the NDP did earlier this evening, as to what exactly we would use that extra money for over and above a comprehensive slate of programs that we have running right now under the mountain pine beetle initiative.

• (2150)

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Speaker, this is good debate because in fact western economic diversification is exactly that: economic diversification. I am afraid that my friend did not understand what one of my experts was saying. I will quote him:

Conversion of the landscape to one less prone to epidemic outbreaks provides the only real solution to the type of Mountain Pine Beetle problems currently seen in B. C.

He is talking about the responsibility that governments have, including the federal government, to pony up some dollars to help in the process of reforestation, and rather than just going with pine and pine and pine in the forest to come up with a diversity of pine, a diversity of stand, and to manage the forest in a way such that the forest would not be susceptible, as it has been, to this epidemic with one particular species.

With respect to the question of climate change, I can understand that he is trying to make a point about Kyoto. I think we could have a debate about energy and energy alternatives that might be well taken in the House, but let us talk about that for half a second.

Instead of shipping a couple of hundred million dollars over to Russia in this false attempt with carbon credits, why not take that money and put it into wind research? Why not take that money and put it into solar research? Why not take that money and put it into tax credits and programs which would actually develop alternatives that can make a difference in terms of carbon generation?

We are going to be requiring more and more energy. I take a look, for example, at the great nation of China, with 1.3 billion people and the rapacious appetite they have for energy. The amount of energy that it will require for its developing economy is absolutely gigantic. We cannot even imagine the amount of energy that it is going to require.

With the kind of technology we have in Canada, through either a tax credit program or some kind of encouragement, instead of shipping the money for these crazy carbon tax credits, why do we not use that money to help Canadian industry develop an alternative for countries like China or India so that they will no longer be dependent on burning fossil fuels and creating the CO₂? That is the innovative way that the Conservative Party is looking at it, not the old, tired out policies of shipping billions of dollars for paper tax credits.

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to stand and be heard in this take note debate tonight, which hopefully is going to draw attention to the problem of the pine beetle in British Columbia. However, we need to take a look at this issue not only from British Columbia's perspective but from my riding's perspective as well, because the pine beetle impacts it also in a very significant way.

The forest industry is a large economic driver in my riding. It is an important part of the livelihood of many individuals who live in my riding. Let me put it this way. I have a geographically large riding made up of a significant number of communities and there is not one community I can think of in my riding that has not been impacted in a significant way by the softwood lumber industry or the forest industry in one way or another. Because of that, we are looking across the mountains. My riding is in Alberta and reaches from Edmonton to the B.C. border, and through Jasper National Park, by the way.

I will talk a bit about the parks, the impact or lack of impact of this crisis and what is happening on the other side of the mountains. Looking across the mountains into British Columbia we can see the devastation that is being caused by the pine beetle. Speaker after speaker this evening talked about that devastation and how it has impacted their communities. It really is something that we should consider.

My colleagues have talked about the lack of resources being applied to the problem in British Columbia and how that is so different from the ice storm or perhaps the SARS crisis, which also impacted other areas of this country in a significant way. By the way, SARS did impact our area of the country in tourism.

Government Orders

There is a difference with regard to the impact and the amount of dollars applied from the federal side of things with regard to the ice storm or SARS; that is, it did not take years and years for the government to get to the table to address the problem. When the ice storm hit, emergency relief was available. When SARS hit, emergency relief was available to deal with it as soon as possible.

Let me say, though, that the pine beetle infestation hit many years ago and this thing just started to grow. It is a lot like a fire. If the problem is not addressed at its infancy, it will grow and become an animal that is uncontrollable in a very short time. That is what we see with a forest fire and that is what we are seeing with the pine beetle.

This issue was left. It was neglected. Because of that, it has grown into a crisis beyond belief. It is now a challenging problem. Timber worth up to \$9 billion has been destroyed already and it is possible that will be up to \$16 billion. Also, that does not count the amount of timber that is in jeopardy in my province.

We are becoming very alarmed at what we are seeing with regard to the pine beetle, because it is starting to get through the parks. We have seen over the last year signs of the pine beetle getting into Willmore Wilderness Park, a provincial park in the Grande Cache area.

That is very significant because it means that the pine beetle leaped the Rocky Mountains. It is not the first time this has happened. It happened in the 1940s and between 1977 and 1986, a few decades ago. It was neglected back then, just like a fire that is neglected. It turned into an absolutely massive problem that created thousands of dollars' worth of losses in timber.

This can be dealt with in two different ways, or in three or four different ways, I suppose. One of the ways is to just leave it alone, cross our fingers and hope that we get minus 40° for a couple or three weeks. That should arrest the problem. That is one approach. That has been the approach of this government for the last number of years. We are not convinced that it is an appropriate approach.

We do not do that to a forest fire. Our timber is too valuable to just leave it. When a fire starts, it has to be aggressively attacked. We attack the fire so that we can protect the forest for future generations. When a forest is gone we lose the watershed, we lose the potential for good soil, we lose water quality, and we lose the natural ecosystem of the entire forest and the land around it. This has massive repercussions on the natural environment of both Alberta and British Columbia.

To just neglect it and not deal with it is not an option. That is a plan that just does not work and has not been working in the past. We have to do something similar to what we would do with a forest fire. We have to aggressively attack it. This forest fire, this pine beetle infestation, is out of hand. It is not a forest fire, it is a pine beetle infestation, but it has caused a massive disruption of a massive area of land and we have to attack it with a significant amount of resources.

Therein lies the problem. The B.C. government has come forward with a plan, but we see little support from this federal government. We are wondering why the government is not there. Why is the federal government not trying to work hand in glove with the provincial government? It could be said that it is provincial

jurisdiction and started as provincial jurisdiction and the federal jurisdiction should not butt in.

• (2155)

Perhaps the government can claim that in British Columbia, but it cannot claim that in the national parks. Jasper and Banff National Parks are 100% federally supported and are within federal jurisdiction. It is a natural buffer between the forests in Alberta which are outside of the park and the beetle problem in British Columbia. It is a natural place for us to arrest it, at least at that border, so it does not jeopardize more forests heading west, which is the direction these beetles are moving.

I put this on the table and challenge the Liberal government to wake up and realize the potential of the hazard. It cannot turn around and blame a provincial government for it. It can only look at itself in the mirror. It is on record that we have a problem now in the national parks, which are 100% within the jurisdiction of the Liberal government, and it needs to deal with it.

Right now the national parks have said that it is a natural disaster, that they will leave it alone and let it run its course. We have seen the devastation that has occurred in British Columbia by letting it run its course. We do not say that if a fire breaks out, whether it is in the park or out of the park. There is only one time we would do that in a park, and that is if we want to control some of the old forests. We do not do that by allowing a beetle to get completely out of control as we have seen in British Columbia.

With regard to solving the problem, we need to aggressively attack it. We need to have a government that realizes exactly the problem. We have seen tonight in this debate, as others have spoken from different constituencies, how devastating this is to their ridings and to British Columbia. They have put that on the table. Hopefully, this evening we can raise some awareness of it and bring to the attention of the government in power that it has to get serious about the problem.

I understand a 10 year provincial plan has been brought forward. We have seen no commitment by the government to support that plan. We challenge it to do that. That is the least it can do, even if it is long after it should have been addressed. It is similar to SARS, or an ice storm, or other natural disasters that we have seen across the country. We do that as Canadians. When a natural disaster devastates an industry, we try to do what we can. Yet for some reason British Columbia has been left out. It is almost as if Ottawa looks at the forests in British Columbia as hinterland and does not worry about them. That is exactly what they are, hinterland, and they are being destroyed before our eyes. We have a government that talks about Kyoto, that talks about carbon credits, that talks about how it is an environmentalist, but it is turning a blind eye to protecting an environment that is being devastated by this beetle. This is not only about the environment. It is about the hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of timber and the jobs that go with it, including the livelihoods of families, communities, et cetera.

Government Orders

We have to get serious. We cannot allow the neglect that happened before. In the forties this beetle caused problems in Alberta. The governments turned a blind eye to it and let it run its course. It caused massive amounts of damage. We saw it again from 1977 to 1986. We cannot allow it to happen again. We have to deal with this at its infancy. While it is not in its infancy in B.C., it is in the parks and in Alberta. Now is the time to act.

I encourage the government to get off its backside and do something creative and constructive for the benefit of Canadians in this part of Canada.

• (2200)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to quickly comment on a previous speaker's suggestions regarding Kyoto. It was a great compliment to our government. He talked about wind and solar energy in China. As everyone knows, in the throne speech we increased our wind incentive four times, from 1,000 to 4,000 megawatts. We are pioneering in that area.

I spoke at the national Canadian Solar Industries Association this year as a guest speaker. It is very happy that we are providing it support. We actually announced at those meetings that we would make the rules even easier. We are also working with China. We are selling it clean coal technology and helping out in that area. I appreciate the member's support for the initiatives we are taking.

The member for Yellowhead spoke about neglect. I am not going to go over all the times that I mentioned the comprehensive government program, the mountain pine beetle initiative, and all the programs under it that we are dealing with. His party is coming onside this evening recognizing the problem and asking for action. That is good. We have been working with the B.C. government on this major program since 2002.

The member commented that we did not start working on it as early as we did on SARS. The federal government has been working on this since 1914. I think that is early enough.

He suggested that we were not treating it like a forest fire and that we should treat the mountain pine beetle like a forest fire. I do not think that is a very good idea. We are not going to treat the mountain pine beetle like a forest fire because we are not going to let them run all over the place.

In forest fire management, as everyone knows, there are some great benefits. Major parts of a province and territory are set aside to allow the natural process of forest fires to carry on so that there is regeneration and fertilization. When they are close to cities or people, that is the time to control it. There are huge tracts of land where we let them go. If he wants us to do that with the mountain pine beetle, we are not going to. We are going to continue our comprehensive set of programs with research work on federal land to deal with the mountain pine beetle, wherever it is.

Over and above the comprehensive slate of programs, in which specific activities, not just a generalization, would he like us to invest further funds?

• (2205)

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, those were interesting comments. With regard to the fires, we do not let a fire go until it

gets so large that we cannot deal with it. That is the way the government has dealt with the pine beetle problem in British Columbia. We should deal with it in its infancy stage.

When it comes to what part of the plan the government is not dealing with, there is no plan for Parks Canada. There is no plan for the pine beetle getting into Banff and Jasper National Park which is right in my riding. If the member wants to know how the government plan is not working, it is not dealing with it in its infancy stage in the national parks.

The government cannot point to the British Columbia or Alberta governments. It can only point to itself in a mirror because it is the federal government's jurisdiction. The federal government must deal with the problem with regard to the parks. There is a natural buffer between the forest that is being challenged by the beetle and the national parks. It can be dealt with very simply in that stage.

If the government is really serious about finally stepping up to the plate and finally doing something about it, then that is what the government has to do. It has to get serious about dealing with it, not only in British Columbia where the problem has devastated so much of the forest already. It must try to contain it as we would a forest fire. Then we must stop it from going into the national parks. To date, the government has no plan for the national parks.

I would encourage the government to not only deal with the 10 year plan that is before it, step up to the plate, and fund it appropriately, but also deal with its own jurisdiction which is within the national parks. This infestation must not devastate another province like it has the one that the government has just neglected.

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tonight has been a very good exercise. The mountain pine beetle infestations began in my riding of Cariboo—Prince George and that is where the major concentration is found. I was pleased when I learned that my request for a take note debate on the mountain pine beetle issue, and the devastation that has resulted, was going to be held in the Parliament of Canada on Monday, December 13.

My colleagues from Prince George—Peace River, Yellowhead, Kootenay—Columbia and Kamloops, like myself, have a problem with the mountain pine beetle infestation. They represent the people who live in our ridings and indeed the people of both provinces, Alberta and B.C., where the problem exists. Together, we have been able to raise the issue to a level that I do not think it has been since the beetle infestation began. We hope that the Liberals will no longer say that they do not know about it and will act on it, and come to the aid of the province of B.C. in its request for help.

Government Orders

I want to thank my colleague from Yellowhead who just spoke and pointed out the danger that exists on the western side of both Jasper and Banff National Park. He mentioned the inactivity of the federal government in addressing national park land. If something is not done, the beetles will simply eat and infest every single pine tree in both parks, and there will be no stopping them.

I also want to thank all my colleagues for their contribution and the member for Yukon. Although we do not agree on whether his government thinks there is a plan or not, we know there is a plan and his government knows about it. The area of the country that he is from is similar to ours and I know that he sympathizes with the problem although he is maybe not allowed to say anything except current Liberal policy. Fortunately, we were able to speak about what the real issue is all about.

● (2210)

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my hon. colleague for bringing this take note debate to the House. He has represented his constituents in a very important way. If it were not for his concern on this important issue, we would not have brought the attention that we have this evening to this important issue.

I hope that not only were Canadians watching the debate, but that our Liberal colleagues were watching or listening. It is important to realize that this is devastating many constituencies and constituents in the British Columbia area, but that it also brings fear to ridings like my own in Alberta.

I applaud my colleague for bringing this debate to the House. It is a very important issue that we should take very seriously because it has far reaching repercussions.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this has been a good debate. It has been great that we have been able to get this forward for the reason that we have been able to outline a comprehensive set of programs since 2002 in working with the British Columbia government to deal with the mountain pine beetle.

This take note debate is a good mechanism for Parliament. It allows us to bring forward some initiatives, some esoteric areas that we do not have time during the day to get into all the details. It was quite clear from the debate tonight that most members, if not all who were in the House, were not aware of the various programs that the federal government has undertaken. They were not aware of the research that we are doing that will give good background for the British Columbia government, the four pillars of that research program, dealing with the communities, dealing with the industrial strategy of the lumber and how long it will last and what to do with it, and the programs on federal land.

I would like to reassure the member from Her Majesty's loyal opposition who spoke last about parks. I agree with the point he was making and I want him to know that we are taking action in the parks. We are doing the operational actions in the parks now. We are cutting the trees on federal land, as we are doing in all the federal properties, the relatively large forest tracts we have in B.C., on the national defence lands and on first nation reserves.

Earlier tonight I talked about what we are doing for the small private land owners. I want to carry on and talk about how it

provides assistance for beetle control and rehabilitation on first nations reserve forest lands in the federal parks along the western side of the Rocky Mountains and for major federal forest holdings in central and southeastern British Columbia.

A second major focus of the initiative is to deliver the research required to ensure an effective response to this beetle epidemic. These research needs were identified through a series of regional forums with hundreds of B.C. land owners and managers. That will help many of the people. Members spoke tonight about wanting this consultation and I am indicating that we have done that with the people in B.C.

All the mountain pine beetle initiative programs are fully operational. A wide range of B.C. land owners and researchers have become involved, many of them in the riding represented by the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George as well as those of his colleagues in and around the city of Prince George in B.C.'s interior.

The Canadian Forest Service has located staff in Prince George and Kamloops to assist private land owners to develop proposals to identify forest beetle infestations, to take management steps to control the beetle and to subsequently reforest these lands. The Canadian Forest Service has also stationed a research group with three scientists and technical support at the University of Northern B. C. in Prince George to work with the university and provincial government researchers.

Together they will work to provide a cohesive and targeted flow of information in meeting the challenges of this beetle epidemic. In addition, the UNBC and provincial government researchers in Prince George have been awarded almost \$1 million in mountain pine beetle initiative funds. These are responsible and laudable actions on behalf of the land owner.

The Government of Canada's six year \$40 million mountain pine beetle initiative is assisting land owners located in communities within over nine million hectares of British Columbia. Communities such as Vanderhoof, McBride, Quesnel, 100 Mile House, Cranbrook and Armstrong are home to private land projects under this federal initiative. As well, there are new projects and agreements being reviewed by officials in the Canadian Forest Service.

This is also not a new focus for the Government of Canada, Natural Resources Canada, or the Canadian Forest Service. For over 100 years the Canadian Forest Service has proudly represented the people of Canada in researching the needs of Canada's forests, working with our provincial and territorial colleagues to ensure that all Canadians have a healthy and sustainable forest resource for today, tomorrow and long into the future.

Government Orders

Natural Resources Canada and the Canadian Forest Service have a long tradition of working with individual Canadians to ensure that they have knowledge, tools, and where necessary, the additional assistance to meet the challenges they face in managing this valuable resource for environmental, economic and social needs of their families and communities. The mountain pine beetle initiative is simply the current example of this government's response to this need.

I commend the member opposite for bringing up this topic tonight so we could debate it in the House, and as he has said, bring people's attention to it so we can get these points out.

There is no doubt that the mountain pine beetle is the most serious pest of mature pine forests in western Canada. The current infestation in British Columbia is by far the largest of this type on record. This massive infestation is approaching 10 million hectares of mature lodgepole pine, the insects' food source. Complete control of the mountain pine beetle is not feasible but that is not to say the Government of Canada has been sitting idly by, leaving the province of British Columbia to fend for itself.

● (2215)

The government's mountain pine beetle initiative is an example of strong federal-provincial cooperation. Forest land management is a provincial mandate. British Columbia forest legislation requires that major forest licence holders be required to carry out reforestation at their own expense. However, the federal government stepped up to the plate and is working with the province in areas of this massive infestation that fit within the federal role and responsibility.

The Government of Canada's mountain pine beetle initiative is focused on federal lands, first nation reserve lands, federal parks and on private forest lands owned by the little guy.

The mountain pine beetle initiative allows the federal government to do what it can to help British Columbians on lands that are outside the responsibility of the province.

Officials at Natural Resources Canada continue to work in close collaboration with their provincial colleagues in B.C. and Alberta to ensure that every effort is made to respond in the best way possible to this massive natural epidemic. Officials must continue to do so in a manner consistent with the federal mandate.

The Government of Canada's mountain pine beetle initiative plays an important role in supporting the provincial forest management efforts by the province of British Columbia. It adds to the scarce resources to face this epidemic that is so devastating to local communities and local businesses, for instance the people in the riding of the member opposite, who is doing such a good job in bringing forward an initiative.

I want to make sure that people realize that we have taken initiatives in a number of areas that are under federal jurisdiction. We have a large block of forest in B.C. which, unlike in most provinces, is still under federal control. We are taking our initiatives there, on reserve lands, on national park lands and in working in cooperation to come up with a continued coordination plan with the B.C. government. We joined them in 2002 on this most recent outbreak. Of course the pine beetle has been there for thousands of years living in the forest.

We are doing research on the effect on the communities and how we can best harvest the dead wood, how long it will last and what it can be used for. There is also the ecological impact. This pest has co-existed for thousands of years with the forest. If we deal with this pest in an unnatural way, or if we do something dramatic, we have to make sure we are not setting off a chain of ecological reactions that will harm us more in the long run than the problem itself.

I thank the member opposite and all the members who have spoken to this issue tonight. The government will assure the people of Canada that, as with all our programs on this pest, this is a major concern to Parliament. The government will continue to analyze the results that have come from this debate and see if there is more that we could do to mitigate the effects of this devastating outbreak in British Columbia and Alberta.

● (2220)

The Speaker: There being no further members rising, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, the committee will rise and I will leave the Chair.

It being 10:23 p.m., this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 10:23 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Monday, December 13, 2004

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Forestry

(House in committee of the whole on Government

Business No. 7, Ms. Augustine in the chair)..... 2697

Mr. Valeri..... 2697

Motion..... 2697

Ms. Augustine (Etobicoke—Lakeshore)..... 2697

Mr. Efford (Avalon)..... 2697

Mr. Harris..... 2698

Mr. Bagnell..... 2699

Ms. Crowder..... 2699

Mr. Harris..... 2700

Mr. Bagnell..... 2701

Mr. Hill..... 2701

Ms. Crowder..... 2702

Mr. Efford (Avalon)..... 2703

Mr. Hill..... 2704

Mr. Bagnell..... 2704

Mr. Harris..... 2704

Mr. Cullen (Etobicoke North)..... 2705

Mr. Harris..... 2706

Ms. Crowder..... 2707

Mr. Hill..... 2707

Mr. Hill..... 2708

Mr. Efford (Avalon)..... 2709

Mr. Bagnell..... 2710

Mr. Chan..... 2711

Mr. Julian..... 2712

Mrs. Hinton..... 2713

Mr. Efford (Avalon)..... 2714

Mr. Julian..... 2715

Mr. Harris..... 2715

Mr. Siksay..... 2715

Mr. Bagnell..... 2717

Mr. Julian..... 2717

Mr. Abbott..... 2718

Mr. Bagnell..... 2719

Mr. Harris..... 2720

Mr. Julian..... 2721

Mr. Abbott..... 2721

Mr. Bagnell..... 2723

Mr. Merrifield..... 2724

Mr. Bagnell..... 2726

Mr. Harris..... 2726

Mr. Bagnell..... 2727

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