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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, April 26, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 26, 2006

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: As is our practice on Wednesday we will now sing O Canada, and we will be led by the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

• (1405)

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

MOOSE JAW WARRIORS

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House of Commons to congratulate the Moose Jaw Warriors for their outstanding play in this year's Western Hockey League playoffs.

It has been a great year to be a hockey fan in Moose Jaw. The people of Moose Jaw are thrilled to be part of the Warriors' best season ever.

The Warriors are a community owned club and are spurred on by their fantastic fans at home in the “Crushed Can” and on the road. They are the pride of Moose Jaw and a big part of the community spirit that makes Moose Jaw a great city.

With wins over the Brandon Wheat Kings and the Calgary Hitmen, all eyes in Moose Jaw are now focused on winning the eastern conference by defeating the member for Medicine Hat's Tigers and advancing to the WHL final.

On behalf of the people of Palliser, I want to thank Coach Steve Young and his staff, General Manager Chad Lang, President Darin Chow and all the players who have given their all to deliver great hockey and an outstanding year to the people of Moose Jaw.

Go Warriors go. Bring home the Memorial Cup.

[*Translation*]

SPORTS AND SOCIAL ASSOCIATION

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 8, the members of the sports and social association known as Les Braves du coin held their 33rd gala to recognize excellence in both sport and volunteerism.

Today I would like to congratulate the gala organizing committee, led by Jean-François Landry, as well as the many volunteers who made the evening such a brilliant success.

Since 1962, Les Braves du coin have been involved in the community, through their big provincial peewee baseball tournament and other events.

Under the leadership of Guy St-Gelais, the group's more than 400 members continue to support young amateur athletes through scholarships that enable them to pursue their athletic undertakings.

Congratulations to all and long live Les Braves du coin.

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JANE JACOBS

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, world-renowned intellectual Jane Jacobs passed away yesterday at the venerable age of 89.

In 1980, this great woman published a book entitled *Quebec and the Struggle over Sovereignty*. Drawing on the experience of Norway, which separated from Sweden and became a sovereign nation at the beginning of the 20th century, she concluded that we should find inspiration in that event and encourage sovereignty, which would be good for both Quebec and Canada.

She specifically emphasized the importance of Montreal taking on the role of metropolitan centre of a sovereign nation. In an interview with Robin Philpot on May 2, 2005, she expressed regret that the Canadian media refuse to discuss her point of view.

When she published her best-known work on cities in 1961, her peers rejected most of her theses, but today everyone acknowledges that she was correct.

I have no doubt that the true value of her ideas on the future of Quebec will also come to be recognized.

Ms. Jacobs, you have our grateful and heartfelt admiration. We will not forget you.

Statements by Members

[English]

CHILD CARE

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago here on Parliament Hill, New Democrats demonstrated the great \$1,200 disappearing act. I took a stack of \$5 bills and showed the impact of federal clawbacks shrinking the allowance to just \$199 for some families. That is just 55¢ a day, not enough for one diaper let alone child care.

Finally, today a headline in the *Globe and Mail* said it all, “Child care proposal gives least to poorest”. The poorest in this country have faces. They are women and they are children. They need child care, not empty slogans.

Stay at home spouses of wealthy Canadians will get more from this bogus scheme than working couples and single parents struggling to raise their kids.

We can do better. For the sake of our children, we must do better.

* * *

LAKE SIMCOE

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the numerous volunteer organizations that have committed their time and efforts to protecting and enhancing the health of Lake Simcoe's environment.

The Ladies of the Lake, in addition to an eye-catching calendar, have led the way on education efforts. The Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition has brought diverse groups together to project a united voice calling for action to protect the lake.

The Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority and Foundation has undertaken real world projects to protect the lake's health. The South Lake Simcoe Naturalists' Club and the York-Simcoe Naturalists have also done good work. I have been proud to work with them all.

Yesterday the Lake Simcoe MPs from Barrie, Simcoe North, Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock and I joined forces to put the case to the Minister of Transport on the need for mandatory rules to protect our lakes from the invasive species threat. After 13 years of the Liberal government's refusal to act, it was refreshing to have a minister who cared and is prepared to act to protect the environment.

Working together with local volunteers, I am optimistic we will soon see real results for Lake Simcoe's environment.

* * *

● (1410)

FISHERIES

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has decided not to honour a commitment made to salmon growers in the province of New Brunswick.

Last July the government announced a \$20 million aid package to assist this important industry and make it sustainable for the future. Now, as confirmed yesterday by the fisheries minister, the Conservatives have cut this assistance in half and are reportedly taking the funds from ACOA.

What is most unfortunate is that the regional minister for New Brunswick has suggested that the aid package was not approved by cabinet. This is simply not the case. I would like to thank the hon. member for Halifax West for his work on the file at the cabinet level, where it was in fact approved.

While we stepped up to the plate, Premier Lord's government once again remained on the sidelines, failing to provide the necessary loan guarantees that the industry needed. We were there and were pleased to help salmon farmers, but sadly it is another example of the Lord government abdicating its responsibilities and letting down the people of New Brunswick.

* * *

NEPAL

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has been monitoring the volatile situation in Nepal closely throughout this period of unrest and instability.

Most recently, the King delivered a speech calling for the reinstatement of parliament. The opposition parties have agreed that G.P. Koirala should lead a new government.

The Nepalese people have struggled and endured violent repression in their effort to restore democracy to their country. With the return of parliamentary democracy, it is incumbent on Nepal's political parties to work to ensure democratic, honest and accountable governance.

Canada will continue to monitor the situation closely and encourage all sides to restore democracy peacefully and quickly.

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[Translation]

WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY DAY

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge, in this House, World Intellectual Property Day, which this year has adopted the theme of “It starts with an idea”.

Intellectual property refers to creations of the mind, such as inventions, literary and artistic works, and also the symbols, names, images, designs and models used in commerce. Patents, trademarks, copyright, industrial design and protection of crop varieties are all encompassed by the term intellectual property rights.

Intellectual property is everywhere—at home, at school, at work. New products, new trademarks and new creative designs appear virtually every day on the market.

I therefore wish to remind all Quebecers and all Canadians of the crucial role that is played by creativity and innovation in our lives. Let us above all not forget that “It starts with an idea”!

[English]

JANE JACOBS

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we mourn the passing of Jane Jacobs.

Ms. Jacobs, who wrote a number of influential books, including *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, spent her life thinking about our cities.

Born in the United States, she chose to spend the last 40 years of her long and productive life in Toronto. In 1996 she received the Order of Canada. Her citation noted, "By stimulating discussion, change and action, she has helped to make Canadian city streets and neighbourhoods vibrant, liveable and workable for all".

Jane Jacobs challenged us to think about the future of our cities and she is held in high esteem by those throughout the world who care about the people who live there.

Today most Canadians live in cities and communities. On behalf of Canadians, we acknowledge the contribution of this remarkable woman and offer our condolences to her family and her friends.

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CHERNOBYL

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 20 years ago Chernobyl ignited. The radiation released was 400 times greater than in Hiroshima.

Following the explosion, the communist elites of the Soviet Union secretly removed their families from nearby Kiev and Minsk. Meanwhile, the children of those cities marched in obligatory May Day parades celebrating the grand achievements of communism. In those sun-drenched days as crowds watched and the children marched, within the sun's warm rays hid a terrible fate.

In the years that followed, doctors in Kiev have explained to me that they were instructed not to register stillbirths so as to falsify statistics. I have listened to young women too fearful of bearing new life in this world because their bodies are poisoned. I have held the hands of children, bodies twisted by the radiation.

How many have died? Is it 6,000 or 60,000? Can we quantify the human agony? We cannot, but we can remember and take stock of humanity's failings.

* * *

●(1415)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hypocrisy from the Liberal environment critic never ceases to amaze me, and after nine years in this place it takes a lot to amaze me. Today he supports the Kyoto accord, but in the past he opposed it and even voted against it. Where I come from, that is called a flip-flop.

As a new supporter of Kyoto, he is now criticizing the government for not implementing the Liberal plan that his government had 13 years to implement. This beacon for the environment, this new-found Liberal apologist, has said that the Kyoto agreement was

Statements by Members

basically written on the back of an airplane napkin on the way to Kyoto. There was no long term planning. There was no real negotiation with the provinces or with the industry sectors. In fact, it was a last minute, hastily drafted agreement.

This is the granddaddy of all flip-flops, but we should expect nothing less from the master of all flip-flopers.

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HAITI

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on May 14, René Prével will be sworn in as Haiti's new president. The economic hardships and political crises visited upon Haitians have been horrendous, but the Haiti I was privileged to visit on a parliamentary mission this week is charting a new course.

Confidence in the democratic process and appreciation of Canada's contribution were evident. Haitians' hopes and expectations of the new president and parliament are massive, which is why Canada must stay the course in Haiti while respecting Haitians' sovereignty and right to self-determination.

I was deeply impressed by the dedication and confidence of Canadians working with Haitians to build the desperately needed parliamentary, judicial, economic and security infrastructure.

During President Prével's upcoming visit to Canada and our Haitian Canadian Governor General's attendance at his May 14 inauguration, Canadians must seize the opportunity to strengthen our commitment to a mutually respectful and constructive partnership that will truly benefit all Haitian men, women and children.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the House for 13 years, I have listened year after year to the Reform, the Alliance and now the Conservative Party spew its ideologies, first as opposition and now as government.

Nothing has changed. The same ideological resistance to public policy continues under some guise or the other.

Let us take the environment. First they said there was no hard science to support global warming. Now, in the face of indisputable evidence of rising temperatures, shrinking ice caps and scientific reports, the ideology still exists. Opt out of Kyoto, the government says. Let us create a plan for Canada alone.

I have news for the Conservatives. The air, the ocean and the ozone layer did not read their script. They did not know that they had to stop at Canadian borders. Environmental changes are global. They require global solutions and cooperation.

The Prime Minister once suggested building a firewall around his home in Alberta. But around Canada? This is ridiculous.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CHERNOBYL

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on April 26, 1986, at 1:23 a.m., the alarm sounded in reactor number four of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. Ukraine and the world remember.

For 10 days, the explosion cast a radioactive cloud over the heads of more than five million people. This was one of the worst tragedies in human memory. The loss of thousands of human lives, together with the harmful impacts on the physical and psychological health of thousands of others, has highlighted both the fragility and the grandeur of human beings, and is an argument for the zealous protection of our environment.

Today the world commemorates the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear accident. May this sad anniversary remind us of the harrowing choices faced by the world's leaders with regard to energy policy, as well as the responsibilities that fall to them.

The Bloc Québécois shares the pain of the Ukrainian people and reiterates its commitment to continuing to promote a Quebec that has an environmentally sound energy footing.

* * *

• (1420)

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the decision to send our troops to a combat zone is made in this building. Ultimately it is Parliament that is responsible. It is a disgrace that the flag at the top of this building is not at half-mast as a show of respect for our soldiers who have made the ultimate sacrifice to defend our freedoms.

When we lower the flag, not only do we honour the latest casualties, we remember all our war dead. Lowering the flag is an expression of the appreciation of a grateful nation to those who are serving and those who have served. Remembrance should not be restricted to one day a year.

Further, the new policy to banish the media from the repatriation ceremony of the bodies of our fallen soldiers is a disgrace. I suggest that the new government policies on the flag and repatriation be reversed.

The firefighters, at their convention being held in Ottawa today, had a minute of silence in memory of our fallen soldiers. This sign of respect is being repeated by Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

I suggest that we in this chamber do the same by having a moment of silence in remembrance, gratitude and respect.

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MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, multiple sclerosis affects thousands of Canadians and is a disease for which there is presently no cure. Having a daughter with MS, I have witnessed first-hand how this disease knows no bounds as it affects young and old, male and female alike.

I rise today to recognize all the Canadians who have participated before or will be participating in this year's Super Cities Walk for MS. This year over 70,000 Canadians in 160 cities across Canada are taking to the streets to raise money for MS research. I am very honoured to be leading a team in my home riding of Lethbridge.

These Super Cities Walks are more than just an opportunity to raise funds to find a cure for MS. They are about Canadians supporting Canadians by taking the time to walk shoulder to shoulder with those who courageously battle this disease every day.

On the eve of next week's launch of MS Awareness Month, I encourage everyone in this House, indeed everyone from coast to coast to coast, to get involved to help find a cure for MS.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I presented a motion calling for the Peace Tower flag to be lowered to half-staff for a single day to honour Canadian Forces personnel who are killed while serving on active duty.

Sadly, with the typical commotion that followed question period, I fear the Prime Minister did not hear the wording of that motion. As the Prime Minister has now had time to review *Hansard*, is his government prepared to return to the practice, unanimously endorsed by the House less than two years ago, and lower our flag as a demonstration of national grief?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will know that there are families and veterans organizations who have conflicting views, very strong views on this issue. It is not a simple question.

The Minister of National Defence, who is a 30 years veteran of the military, has taken the decision, a decision which tries to balance the interests of public honour and private grief and which tries to ensure that all deaths are treated and honoured equally in this country.

I would suggest that rather than this Parliament focusing on our divisions on flags and coffins that we focus on the fact that we all deeply regret the loss of life in Afghanistan and we admire those who are willing to pay the sacrifice there.

[Translation]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone in this House feels deep regret any time one of our soldiers dies in Afghanistan. Yesterday, a ceremony took place in Trenton to mark the return of the remains of our soldiers. With his customary obstinacy, the Prime Minister decided to keep the media off the tarmac, a decision that overshadowed the solemn ceremony.

The Minister of National Defence now tells us that he did not even consult the families. There is still time for the Prime Minister to make the right decision regarding these ceremonies, a decision that will show respect for our soldiers and the Canadian people.

Mr. Prime Minister, are you prepared to change—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition knows that he must address his comments to the Speaker and not to the Prime Minister.

The hon. Minister of National Defence has the floor.

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the matter of repatriating our fallen soldiers, our policy is that members of the press have full access to the ceremonies at the place of origin, which is the ramp in Kandahar. However when the bodies are received at Trenton it is a private ceremony of grief.

After being there yesterday when the four bodies were received and seeing all the families, it is most appropriate that it be a private affair.

On the third stage, when they have funerals and when they have ceremonies members of the press can attend.

• (1425)

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I also had the sad honour, privilege and duty to attend at those ceremonies. This is a military ceremony. We have heard from the families of our honoured dead telling us how proud they were to know their country was receiving their sons home. We have heard pleas from family members of our fallen heroes who want to see the ceremony on television. We have heard from military families, Canadians at large and even members of the hon. minister's own caucus telling the Prime Minister that the decision is wrong.

Will the Prime Minister now do the right thing and reverse this highly misguided decision?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we also hear conflicting advice from people and we understand that there are two sides to the issue. However our policy, to be fair to everyone from now and into the future, is that if members of the press are at the place of origin they can have access and, depending upon the wishes of the family, members of the press can be at the funeral or the ceremonies honouring the dead.

However when the bodies arrive in Trenton it will be a private affair where those families grieve for the first time coming face to face with the bodies of their loved ones.

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THE BUDGET

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since every economist in the land is against the government's tax plan, it is clear the Conservatives are returning to their roots as incompetent fiscal managers. Since the member for Halton has already told Canadians that only those earning less than \$60,000 will face income tax hikes, they are also returning to their roots of fleecing the poor.

Oral Questions

Will the budget reflect financial incompetence or reverse Robin Hood behaviour, or both?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the budget will reflect the commitments of our party during the election campaign. We cannot do everything at once, of course, but we will move forward on a number of issues.

What it will not reflect is the requirements to join the save the GST club where one has to be on both sides of the GST issue: want to abolish it in 1993 and want to save it now. It will not be on both sides of the Dingwall issue about was it voluntary or involuntary. It will not be talking about people being entitled to their entitlements.

We will have our platform commitments in the budget.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he has confirmed that he is both incompetent and fleecing the poor.

I have a question concerning a more immediate issue with regard to the budget information just released by the member for Halton. The Minister of Finance has two choices: either he will tell the House that this information is wrong or he will admit that his budget is seriously flawed and immediately resign. Which will it be?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have not even presented the budget yet and I am incompetent and I am supposed to resign—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The Minister of Finance has the floor.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, what we will not see in the budget in 2006 are the kinds of flip-flops we saw last year where a corporate tax was supposed to be reduced, for example, in budget 2005 and then a deal was made to change that.

We take positions on issues. We do not surround and embrace issues. Our positions will not be contradictory like the positions in the save the GST club opposite.

* * *

• (1430)

[Translation]

TRUSTS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in this House, the Minister of Finance refused to confirm that trusts have been created for part of the 2005-06 surpluses. We learn today in the newspapers that the Minister of Finance contacted his counterpart in Ontario to let him know about the trusts and the amounts transferred there, including amounts for social housing and post-secondary education.

Will the Prime Minister confirm that his government has indeed created trusts and that it transferred some of the funds provided for in the Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make certain payments, to them prior to March 31, 2006?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has just said that we intend to honour our commitments in the upcoming budget. It includes a number of measures to increase certain spending in order to attain our political objectives and honour our electoral promises. The leader of the Bloc Québécois will have to wait for the budget.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, decisions were made by the government before March 31, 2006. That is past. We are now in April. The trusts have been created. The provincial governments have been informed and the money has been transferred. What the government has done cannot be hidden here in this House. We are not obliged to wait for the budget to find out if trusts have been created, since they have been, with money from previous budgets.

The Prime Minister should answer the question, otherwise he will prove to us that the transparency he talks about means nothing and that his much-vaunted responsibility is not particularly meaningful.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Bloc Québécois knows that trusts have conditions. Money cannot be transferred without a budget and other clarifications. I say this again to the leader of the Bloc Québécois. A sovereignist party that has been waiting over thirty years for Quebec's independence can wait less than a week for the budget.

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CHILD CARE

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the formula the government is using for its \$1,200 allowance is inequitable and could end up giving some wealthy families more money than low-income families.

Does the minister realize that there is still time to accept an amended formula such as the refundable tax credit proposed by the Bloc Québécois? In addition to being universal, it has the advantage of being much more equitable.

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report to the House that the numbers released in the report regarding this situation were in fact inaccurate.

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister should check her numbers again. Yesterday, she stated that parents would be able to use their \$1,200 allowance as they choose. This would hold true for both a single-parent family earning \$28,000 and a family earning \$200,000.

Does the minister not realize that, with her formula, she is giving some wealthy families far more choice than low-income families? In fact, some high-income families will receive more money than families that are really in need.

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I explained to the House yesterday, our intention for our choice in child care allowance is that it be a truly universal allowance available to all Canadians from

coast to coast, regardless of their incomes, and that is not just at the gross level, that is at the net level. I have been working since my very first week in this job with my officials to ensure as many families as possible get as much money net as possible from this new program because we want it to be a universal benefit.

* * *

OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, working families are getting gouged at the pumps at the same time as the oil and gas companies have record profits. Canadians are paying \$1 a litre and we learned just yesterday that Petro-Canada's profits are up by over 50%.

Is the Prime Minister going to follow the same old Liberal practice of giving massive subsidies to the oil and gas sectors, the most polluting and the most profitable, or will he do what Canadians want and what George Bush is now calling for, and direct those funds to energy conservation, to efficiency and to renewable energy?

● (1435)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I think the hon. member will know, as we continue to push forward and develop our environmental plans we will certainly want some of the money that is now being spent to go toward the objectives he has referred to. At the same time, in terms of the pain that consumers are experiencing, this is why the Minister of Finance has indicated that this government will go ahead with an immediate 1% reduction in the GST to reduce taxes on consumers by \$5 billion. I hope we have the support of the House in doing that.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, actually it would be nice if the Prime Minister would stop shovelling billions of dollars into the massive profits of the oil and gas companies.

[Translation]

The Liberal Party subsidized the oil industry to the tune of \$1.4 billion annually, double what it spent on clean water. Yesterday, George Bush asked Congress to put an end to these industry subsidies and offer tax credits for green cars. On the eve of the budget, can the Prime Minister say whether George Bush will be more progressive than him when it comes to the oil industry and the environment?

[English]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what to think of the NDP being in league with George Bush.

[Translation]

It is important to say that this party does not plan to give new subsidies to the oil companies. Profits are linked to the world price of gasoline. This government intends to reduce taxes on consumers by \$5 billion, and I hope that the NDP and the other parties will support us.

*Oral Questions***THE BUDGET**

Hon. John Godfrey (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last May the Prime Minister tried to make the government fall by voting against the budget.

Now, in another flip-flop by this government, the Prime Minister is trying to implement \$3.8 billion from that very budget.

Will the Prime Minister admit that he has already committed most of this funding, which according to him was a pact with the devil?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the budget will announce what disposition is being made of whatever surplus there is next Tuesday. There are conditions, as the Prime Minister has indicated, to any funding that there might be under Bill C-48, including necessary levels of surplus and the allocation of those funds. That will have to wait until May 2.

Hon. John Godfrey (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this has nothing to do with the budget. Agreements have been signed with the provinces. The money has been spent. It is also worrisome that the NDP appears all the more willing to trade electoral prospects for billions in social programs.

When it comes to last year's budget, we have flip-floppers to the right and sellouts to the left. How are flip-flops, sellouts, and budgetary secrecy supposed to instill confidence in Canadians just days before the budget?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member opposite that no moneys have been spent. The moneys will be referred to in the budget on May 2 and I invite the member to await that.

In terms of what is important to Canadians who voted for change, they want lower taxes. We are committed to providing all Canadians with lower taxes, unlike the member opposite and the other members of the save the GST club who want to keep taxes high for Canadians.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's cities and communities are anxious about the upcoming budget since there was absolutely no mention by the government of public infrastructure in the throne speech. The finance minister has already said he will honour the \$5 billion the previous government committed to strategic infrastructure.

Why will the finance minister not honour the previous government's commitment to renew all other existing federal infrastructure programs in the upcoming budget?

• (1440)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises a question that we addressed during the last campaign. As everyone knows, we are committed to change. Canadians voted for change. I invite the hon. member to wait for the Minister of Finance's speech on May 2.

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): With all due respect, Mr. Speaker, the Conservative proposal would deliver \$3 billion less in infrastructure over the next five years. I know when it comes to

transparency, the Prime Minister thinks less is more, but why is the government trying to convince Canadians that when it comes to public funding of infrastructure in their cities and communities, that somehow less is more?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I reiterate the same comment that I made a couple of moments ago. We will have to wait for the Minister of Finance to table his budget. We will know at that moment the answers and responses.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, although the Prime Minister is wrong to mimic President Bush by refusing to allow media coverage of the repatriation of the fallen soldiers in Afghanistan, when it comes to the price of gas he should follow the U.S. president's lead and limit the gasoline price hikes. The Prime Minister can and must take action.

Does he realize he does not have to right to stand idly by and leave citizens at the mercy of the oil companies, which he is doing by refusing to take action?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has assured the public of its intention to reduce consumption tax immediately by \$5 billion. The public voted for that and we will deliver.

I hope the Bloc will support this assistance for consumers in Canada and Quebec.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, two cents a litre when oil companies are making exorbitant profits at the refineries is unacceptable.

The government is standing by while taxi drivers, truck drivers and farmers are all hurting. It remains indifferent to the thousands of manufacturing jobs that are at stake.

Does the Prime Minister realize that he can choose to lead a government that serves the public or a government that serves the oil companies? Which option has he chosen?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was clear: we want to reduce the tax burden on all Canadians by reducing the GST immediately. That was our election promise and that is what we intend to do. It is very clear.

All Canadians and all fuel consumers will benefit.

*Oral Questions***SOFTWOOD LUMBER**

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Frank Dottori, formerly with Tembec, confirms that the lumber industry has everything to lose by being forced to negotiate with the Americans under unnecessarily tight deadlines. Michel Vincent, of the Quebec Forest Industry Council, has stated that Quebec producers will accept nothing less than full repayment of countervailing duties illegally collected by the Americans. Clearly, the industry is very concerned.

Can the Minister of International Trade guarantee that he and his government will absolutely not negotiate a watered-down agreement with the Americans at the expense of the Quebec and Canadian softwood lumber industry?

[*English*]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everyone in this House knows that the Prime Minister and the President of the United States have committed to try and see if there is a resolution to the softwood lumber dispute. There have been many discussions going on. These discussions have been into the complex issues that affect every company in this country that is involved in softwood lumber.

I can honestly say that at this stage there is not an agreement yet on the softwood lumber dispute and its resolution.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, does the Minister realize that if the softwood lumber industry feels so vulnerable and concerned it is because the previous government refused to take action and provide loan guarantees to this industry, as it had requested, and that this government is doing exactly the same thing, that is abandoning our Canadian and Quebec softwood lumber industry?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we wish to arrive at a final and long-term solution to the softwood lumber issue. The loan guarantees were an election promise. In due course, and if necessary, there will be a program on the table.

* * *

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know about the negative impacts of climate change. We see it every day. Yet, the government continues to gut the programs that are designed to reduce Canada's greenhouse gas emissions.

Regrettably, as evidenced by the throne speech, the environment is not a priority for the Prime Minister. Can we anticipate that he will flip-flop on this issue, and put in a concrete and specific plan to deal with greenhouse gas emissions from Canada? We need a made in Canada solution not a made in U.S.A. solution.

• (1445)

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment and I are working very much on this issue.

I would remind the hon. member that yes, we have cut some programs which were deemed ineffective and not in the taxpayers' interests and received failing grades. I want to remind the hon. member that under the previous government greenhouse gases went up to 30%.

You might want to look at the programs you created and actually see if they were working. This government is committed to real change.

The Speaker: The hon. minister was not suggesting the Speaker had a program. The hon. member for Etobicoke North has the floor. I remind hon. members to address the Chair.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish the minister would table all the analysis. We on this side know that many of the programs that worked are being gutted.

Let me be specific. Last year we introduced a program that would reduce the energy costs of seniors and low income Canadians by \$500 this year, next year and every year thereafter. The government is gutting that program. Why?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member that there was an independent review that was actually initiated by the old government. Its programs received failing grades. We decided that they were not effective for taxpayers and not effective in cutting greenhouse gases. Our party will not continue to fund programs that do not work.

The numbers speak for themselves. Greenhouse gases went up each and every single year that the old government was in office. This government is working to bring about real change for Canadians and the environment.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Industry.

The Conservative government is currently negotiating the future of the forestry industry in Washington without consulting it, behind its back and in secret. Worse still, the government has put the \$5.3 billion that belongs to the Canadian industry on the table.

Is the government grovelling so low before the Americans that it puts the United States ahead of the principle stakeholders affected by these negotiations?

[*English*]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there has been a tremendous amount of discussion and consultation with provincial governments, industries and companies. All kinds of issues are in play as the hon. member knows. It is a highly complex issue. The discussions are more broad-ranging than they have ever been in the past. No agreement has been reached at this time.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few months ago, this minister announced measures he described as urgent to help the industry, communities and workers.

What has gone on in his head that the matter is no longer urgent, that there is no longer a need for loan guarantees, help to workers and help to communities? What has changed? Is it his changing sides?

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that everybody in the industry wants this dispute resolved. They want the dispute resolved more than they want loan guarantees. If the dispute is not resolved, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Industry have indicated that a loan guarantee program will be given consideration. At this time, the priority is on a resolution of the dispute, if that is possible.

* * *

GOMERY COMMISSION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the very day that Canadians were turfing out a corrupt Liberal government, Reg Alcock, a defeated Liberal cabinet minister and former president of the Treasury Board, approved \$40,000 to pay Jean Pelletier's lawyer at the Gomery inquiry. This is additional money above and beyond that which had already been paid, and this was paid to a Liberal friend.

My question is for the President of the Treasury Board. Why are Canadian taxpayers still on the hook for this money paid out by a Liberal cabinet minister?

• (1450)

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former Prime Minister, Mr. Chrétien, when he sought a judicial review, said that he would not be looking to the taxpayers of Canada to fund his legal fees. The then Treasury Board president said that funding for this type of activity would be over. We learned in the dying hours of the previous regime that the Liberal Party felt the need to have one more flypast over the gravy train. It is regrettable and it is unfortunate.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are also horrified that in the last twilight moments, as the helicopters were airlifting the final evacuees from the Treasury Board, its president was sitting there cutting a big fat cheque to one of his Liberal cronies. Were there any others? Did the Liberal largesse go beyond just Jean Pelletier? Did it in fact go to other people who were fingered by the Gomery Commission?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts. Justice Gomery found evidence within the Liberal government of kickback schemes and corruption. The people of Canada, through their members of Parliament, threw the Liberals out of office by defeating them.

Minutes, even hours, before the people of Canada turfed the government out of office, the former government was stepping up to the plate to give a \$40,000 payment to a former senior Liberal. It is

Oral Questions

regrettable and unfortunate, and it was not in the public interest. This government will always act in the public interest.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that does not really answer my question.

I want the President of the Treasury Board to tell us here, within the privilege of the House, whether there were any other people fingered by the Gomery Commission? Were people like Alfonso Gagliano, Ran Quail, Chuck Guité, Benoit Corbeil, Jacques Corriveau, Jean-Marc Bard, any of these guys, given money for their additional legal expenses? Is anybody fingered in the Gomery Commission still enjoying the Liberal largesse as they appeal being named in the Gomery Commission?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to any other Liberals from the former government who might be lining up for money to go to a judicial review to fight the charges of kickbacks and corruption, I can confirm to the member opposite that any such requests landing on the desk of this Treasury Board President will be dead on arrival.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has remained silent on the most pressing economic issues, which the country must attend to. There was nothing in the throne speech on innovation, nothing on competitiveness, nothing on research and development and nothing on productivity.

How can Canada prosper if the Prime Minister lacks the political will to do something about the upcoming economic challenges?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was indeed reference to the competitiveness of the Canadian Economic Union in the Speech from the Throne and there will be more references on Tuesday next when the budget is delivered.

I would ask the member to kindly be patient and wait until next Tuesday to see the initiatives in the budget.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a feeling that we will be waiting forever for an economic plan to make sense.

In a G-7 country in the 21st century, faced with obvious challenges of an aging society and global competition, how can we ignore the most pressing issues like productivity, research and development and competitiveness?

Will the Prime Minister expand on his timid five-point plan and focus on securing the long term prosperity interests of our country?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to speak to some members of other parties in consultation and preparation for the budget. Certainly, the issues he raises, concerning competitiveness and productivity and the Economic Union in Canada, are important to all Canadians.

Oral Questions

I thank him for the work he has done on those subjects over the years, and I invite him to wait for Tuesday to see the initiatives in the budget.

* * *

• (1455)

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, increasing Canada's productivity was a priority of the former Liberal government. Canada now leads the G-7 in publicly funded research, and the fall economic update introduced measures that would drastically increase student accessibility, skills upgrading and literacy.

The Speech from the Throne did not even mention education, not a word. That is frightening.

What will the government do to maintain our strong record of research and what will it do to assist Canadian students to access higher education? How long will students have to wait?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if these issues were so important to the members opposite in the Liberal Party, what were they doing for 13 years?

We have a lot to do, and the initiatives—

An hon. member: \$10 billion a year.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: The Liberals published reports and they published papers. They had all kinds of ideas and there was all kinds of verbiage. They had lots of issues surrounded, but they did not take the steps to get the job done.

We will get going on getting the job done on Tuesday.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recognize that the finance minister was not a member of the House in the last session, but he could have read a couple of newspapers and learned a few things

We know that education is not a priority for the government. The Conservatives have told us that. However, it is for Canadian families and it is certainly important for the future of our country. Our plan, which could have been adopted by the House, went way beyond Bill C-48. In fact, we committed \$9.5 billion to student access, infrastructure, skills upgrading and other initiatives.

Will the minister commit today in the House to at least match that impressive record?

Hon. Michael Chong (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister for Sport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada currently provides significant financial support for post-secondary education and training. The Canada social transfer provides \$16 billion a year in transfers for post-secondary education, \$8.5 billion in cash and \$7.5 billion in tax transfers. In addition, our government currently provides \$5 billion in direct support for students and their families through direct grants and tax credits.

Our government is committed to working with the provinces and territories to ensure that this kind of strategy continues.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. It is clear that when a minister, who is as popular as the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, gets up to answer a question, it would be helpful if hon. members could constrain themselves so we could hear the answer.

The hon. member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while there is an oversupply of shrimp on global markets, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans could not come up with anything better than to allow a 7,000 tonne increase in quota to the shrimp fishers of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Will the minister admit that he is in conflict of interest because in taking this decision he wanted to please the voters in his province to the detriment of the entire industry, which outside of Newfoundland and Labrador recommended a freeze on the quotas?

[*English*]

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows a lot better than that. The shrimp allocations this year were given directly to the fishermen to ensure we could save an industry that is in severe trouble.

Nobody knows better than the member the state of the shrimp industry in Quebec. That industry is in the same state in New Brunswick and in Newfoundland and Labrador. Consequently, our quotas this year went where they should go, to the people who participate in the industry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec minister of agriculture, fisheries and food, Yvon Vallières, denounced the minister's decision. He said it was not the time to increase the catch when the oversupply has already dropped prices.

How can the government support such an unacceptable decision by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, made at the expense of the entire shrimp industry, including that of Quebec, just for the sake of his own popularity at home in Newfoundland and Labrador?

[*English*]

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the member knows it has absolutely nothing to do with geography. We have a 20% tariff on shrimp going into the European market on which we are working. He also realizes that the ministers from Quebec, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador all have talked to us about this. They agreed that fish quotas should go to the fishermen. Without the extra shrimp this year, they would not survive in the industry, and that is what is most important to us.

Oral Questions

● (1500)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence.

We learned this week that the Conservatives have killed their election promise to build an Arctic deep-water port. In the past few weeks the minister has openly contemplated that he would transfer 5 Wing Goose Bay out of his department's jurisdiction, and is about to strike another blow to the community by seizing the Goose Bay Airport Corporation's landing fees. It only took a couple of months, but people are losing their jobs now.

Could we be assured that the government will stop back-sliding on its northern commitments, and when will we see some action on 5 Wing Goose Bay?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is not back-tracking on any commitments to the north. We will fulfill all of them.

Specifically on Goose Bay, we will deploy a rapid reaction battalion in Goose Bay and we will put a UAV squadron in Goose Bay. We have also said that Goose Bay will remain as a vital face within the defence department and it will continue so all the employees continue to have jobs.

* * *

CANADA-U.S. BORDER

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our international bridges and tunnels are vital links with our best friend and largest trading partner, the United States. Businesses and communities across Essex-Windsor and Canada rely on these lifelines to move billions of dollars in trade.

In 13 years the Liberals failed to obtain powers to oversee our crossings and their security effectively.

Could the transport minister tell the House and the people of Essex how this government will get the job done right?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the act will ensure that the Government of Canada has the necessary powers to grant approval to build new international bridges and to impose the necessary terms and conditions to protect public interest.

Also, the legislation will help to ensure that our bridges are safe and that the federal government has the ability to ensure national security and to protect the vital trade links on which our economy is based.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I toured the Kashechewan nurses station, which is knee-deep in raw sewage. I met nurses who were scrambling to thumb flights out of Kashechewan because Health Canada had made no provisions for their safety.

I learned today that the Weeneebayko Health Authority is having to lay off staff in the region because of a fuel deficit because Health

Canada pays services at 1996 levels for fuel. My God, this is a fourth world condition at Kashechewan.

Will the health minister stand up and say today that there will be adequate funding for health services in the James Bay region?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member has just returned from Kashechewan, he knows full well that we are dealing with the greatest flooding there in a generation. Departmental officials from my department met yesterday with the chief and deputy chief of the Kashechewan First Nation. He will also know that meetings have been set up for next week in Ottawa between myself and the chief. He will also be aware that the Emergency Measures Act and a 1992 agreement between Canada and Ontario requires Ontario to be responsible for the evacuation.

Notwithstanding that, we have officials on the ground and the situation is under control.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. minister for his answer, but I had asked the health minister if Health Canada was going to step up to the plate, and I have not heard that.

However, last week we buried 4-year-old Trianna Martin in Kashechewan. Twenty-one people lived in that home. There was not a single fire emergency service anywhere nearby.

I ask the Minister of Indian Affairs to stand again. The people of Kashechewan need a message of hope. They need to know that the minister will be there as a friend, as a leader and as a colleague to work with us to rebuild that community on safe and higher ground, for a hopeful community tomorrow. I need to hear that message.

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member and I have discussed the very difficult circumstances of Kashechewan, the sadness that we have seen there over the last many years and the unfortunate flooding that happened this year.

In terms of the fire situation, he and I have spoken about that and he knows measures will be taken to ensure that there is some fire coverage in the community on a very short basis, as soon as the flooding situation has been dealt with.

Again, there are meetings scheduled between myself and the chief to discuss the long term options for the community.

* * *

● (1505)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last year in the budget \$150 million was allocated to brownfield remediation. In addition, last fall the Liberal government committed \$12 million for the cleanup of the Mohawk-Greenwich site in my riding of Brant.

On January 6, while campaigning in my riding, the Prime Minister said, "we will clean up the brownfields in this riding".

Routine Proceedings

Will the \$12 million that has already been booked be delivered, or is this just another pledge to add to the growing list of Conservative flip-flops?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again I would like to remind the hon. member that after 13 years, and they may want to look at their record, the Liberals were absolutely unable to clean up one site.

This government made a pledge this campaign. It made a commitment. We will fulfill our commitments, unlike the previous old government that did absolutely nothing for its record on the environment. It was abysmal.

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[Translation]

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police detachments were closed in Quebec during the last mandate. Quebecers are concerned by this situation. They elected us for a real change.

Can my colleague, the hon. Minister of Public Safety, tell us whether these detachments will be reopened? If so, when?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some mayors and some of my Conservative colleagues have spoken to me about these concerns. One thing is clear: this decision to close the RCMP detachments was taken under the former Liberal regime.

It is also clear that the Liberals did nothing and the Bloc cannot do anything. What we are going to do is allocate more resources to the RCMP in Quebec to improve the situation.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

UNPARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday during a vigorous debate on the accountability act, I made some remarks which some members of the House have deemed to be unparliamentary. In order to avoid further time spent on those heated remarks, I would respectfully withdraw them and, in particular, I extend a hand of friendship to the member for Pickering—Scarborough East in the hope that we can work together to improve the debate in the House of Commons.

• (1510)

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my thanks to the hon. member.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I am honoured to

present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association concerning its parliamentary mission on September 29 and 30, 2005, in Vienna, Austria, the country that will hold the next European Union presidency, and its participation in the fourth part of the 2005 ordinary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe held in Strasbourg, France, October 3 to 7, 2005.

[English]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association respecting its meeting with the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in London, United Kingdom, held January 19-20, 2006, and its participation in the first part of the 2006 ordinary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe held in Strasbourg, France, on January 23-27, 2006.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to present the first report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs concerning membership and associate membership of standing committees. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the first report later this day.

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[Translation]

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-227, An Act to change the name of the electoral district of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to introduce this bill to change the name of the riding of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine to Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine—Dorval.

[English]

It is at the request of many of my constituents of Dorval, and I am honoured to be able to table this with the support of my honoured colleague from Saint Boniface. I hope I will have the support of every member of the House for this bill.

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

* * *

• (1515)

BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY ACT

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-228, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act (student loans).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to introduce this bill to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act. As members know, many students struggling with skyrocketing tuitions and shrinking student aid face an additional hardship in recent years in the form of discriminatory treatment with respect to declaring bankruptcy in instances of crippling, crushing debt burdens. This bill simply proposes to remove that discriminatory treatment.

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

* * *

EXCISE TAX ACT

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-229, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (no GST on books or pamphlets).

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to introduce this private member's bill. We continually remind Canadians of the importance of education and literacy in today's world, yet the government continues to tax the sale of books and pamphlets. The purpose of this private member's bill is to remove the GST on books and pamphlets so that our taxation practices are consistent with our professed commitment to encourage Canadians, in every possible way, to read in this knowledge based economy, where knowledge is so necessary to navigate our world.

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

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HAZARDOUS PRODUCTS ACT

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-230, An Act to amend the Hazardous Products Act (prohibited product — hooks).

She said: Mr. Speaker, this private member's bill amends the Hazardous Products Act specifically to prohibit the advertising, sale and import of elongated display hooks that can pose a threat to the safety and health of persons. They are a particular threat to young children. This is a bill that I think of as Katie's bill, because of a two-year-old child in my own riding, but she is one of many in this country who have suffered either a total loss of vision or severe brain damage because of these unnecessarily dangerous hooks that we simply should not permit to be in existence.

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

* * *

SPECIAL SERVICE MEDAL FOR DOMESTIC EMERGENCY RELIEF OPERATIONS ACT

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-231, An Act respecting the establishment and award of a Special Service Medal for Domestic Emergency Relief Operations (SSM-DERO).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce this private member's bill. It establishes a special service medal for domestic emergency relief operations to be awarded to members and former members of the Canadian Forces and RCMP in recognition of honourable service performed for a period of not less than seven days in support of the domestic operations set out in the schedule

Routine Proceedings

and future domestic emergency relief operations specified by order in council.

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

* * *

● (1520)

PETITIONS

CHILD CARE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I again have the pleasure to present a petition, in this case from Daydreams Childcare Centre in Nova Scotia. The petitioners are concerned and even angry, I would say, about the government's alleged child care plan. They think it will roll back the clock on the early learning and child care agreement and that the cancellation will have dire impacts on Canadian families.

They say a taxable \$100 a month allowance amounts to a child benefit and it will not establish new child care spaces. Child care is an everyday necessity, they say, and they call upon the government and the Prime Minister to honour the early learning and child care agreement in principle and to commit to fund it for a full five years.

The Speaker: The Chair moved a little quickly. The hon. member for Cambridge indicated that he wished to move a motion by unanimous consent on motions, and I missed seeing him when he undoubtedly got up when I called for motions. I am proposing to go back to motions so the hon. member for Cambridge can now seek unanimous consent of the House to put his motion. I invite him to take the floor.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the first report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier this day, be concurred in.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Cambridge have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

S. O. 52

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

CANCER

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the 39th Parliament to present my first petition of this Parliament. It calls on the House of Commons to demand that the federal government implement and fund a national strategy on cancer control in collaboration with the provinces and all stakeholders.

On this side, we intend to live up to all our commitments, this being one of them. I look forward to seeing the government implement this national strategy.

SUDAN

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am tabling two petitions today on behalf of my constituents. I am presenting the first petition on behalf of many of my constituents who are urging the Government of Canada to take immediate and decisive action to prevent the atrocities occurring in Sudan. The petitioners ask the government to take the necessary steps to intervene and ensure that the United Nations and countries around the world respond in a way that will put an immediate stop to the loss of life and crimes against humanity occurring in the Darfur region and beyond.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I am tabling is signed by many of my constituents who are calling upon the Prime Minister to honour the early learning and child care agreements today.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of a large number of Canadians calling on the Prime Minister to honour the early learning and child care agreement that has been signed. As all of us here in the House know, 84% of parents with children are both in the workplace and 70% of women with children under six are in the workplace. The need for this is acute. I urge the government, as do those who signed the petition, to honour this commitment.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again I rise in the House to present a petition on behalf of many Canadians who are asking the government to find a humane and logical solution to the deportation of undocumented workers. I must state as well that yesterday I had the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, and I want to thank him for the courtesy that was shown to me and his attentiveness on this issue. I am hopeful that we will find a humane and sustainable solution to the situation.

SOMALIA

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I have the honour of presenting a petition signed by over 340 constituents from my riding of Etobicoke Centre. The petitioners express ongoing concerns about the immense challenges the people of Somalia face in rebuilding a civil society and they are urging the Canadian government to appoint

a special envoy to Somalia. With Somalia in the grips of a terrible drought, my constituents are calling on the Canadian government to do everything it can to help relieve the suffering in that country. A famine's death march does not wait.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

• (1525)

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that the notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

The Speaker: The Chair has notices of requests for emergency debates. I will hear first from the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as you know, earlier today I sent you a note, pursuant to Standing Order 52, in order to request leave to make a motion for the adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and I believe urgent matter requiring urgent consideration. If permitted, I hope to move that under the provisions of Standing Order 52, the House adjourn in order to discuss the matter of the implementation of the Kelowna accord signed on November 25, 2005 between the federal government, the provincial and territorial governments, and the leadership of the Métis First Nation and Inuit communities.

Very briefly, this matter is of urgent concern to communities from coast to coast to coast in this nation. I am not going to proceed to tell you the economic gaps that exist between aboriginal communities and other Canadians. All of us here in the House know the details of it, but there is some urgency to this matter.

Given that the budget will be tabled next week and that funds for the agreement have indeed been booked and committed by the previous government, it is important that this debate be held immediately. Time is of the essence.

Government Orders

Furthermore, the situations in the communities across the country, as evidenced by Caledonia, by Kashechewan and by other communities call for an immediate response by the government as to its position on this historic agreement.

Accountability is more than just financial audits. Accountability is the responsibility of governments to serve its citizens, to notify its citizens, to give leadership to their citizens and to provide opportunities for Canada's first peoples.

Yesterday in the House we heard the minister pay respect to aboriginal peoples by honouring the agreement in principle made by the previous government on the residential schools matter. It is now time to look forward. The matter is urgent. Aboriginal peoples across this country are looking for an indication from the government that their important and overwhelming needs will be honoured and respected. I ask you to give serious consideration to this issue.

The Speaker: The Chair thanks the hon. member for Winnipeg South Center for her able submissions and for her letter on this point, but having considered the matter and having heard her submission, I do not feel that the request for an emergency debate on this issue meets the exigencies of the standing order at this time.

The hon. member for British Columbia Southern Interior has a request for an emergency debate. I will hear from him now.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for an emergency debate as set out in sections three and four of Standing Order 52.

The current crisis facing Canadian farmers deals with the lack of immediate emergency funding they require to enable spring planting. With no commitment forthcoming from the government, they are unable to get loan guarantees to purchase the necessary seeds to get their crops into the ground and thus remain viable. They simply cannot wait until the budgetary process is complete as this could take months.

We must take this matter before the House to find a way to be successful in receiving a bankable commitment from the government to help the farmers now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, it is time for action. Many farmers are dangerously close to bankruptcy. The disappearance of our farms would have a disastrous effect on rural communities, especially on small regional businesses.

On behalf of all farmers, I ask that an emergency debate be held on the crisis currently facing the Canadian agricultural sector.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his letter and his remarks today concerning an emergency debate.

I have considered his comments and what he wrote in his letter.

[*English*]

I have to tell the hon. member that the matter he raises does appear to be a financial one, and while I have no doubt that there is some urgency to the matter he is raising, I note that the government has designated next Tuesday as the day for the budget. The budget will

be presented next Tuesday afternoon at 4:00 p.m., and I suspect that if there is going to be an answer to any issue that he has raised in his letter, we might hear about it then.

In the circumstances there will be a four day debate on the budget following its presentation, which in my view will provide ample opportunity to discuss whether or not the budget has done enough or anything to alleviate this crisis. I think the question of an urgent debate on the matter is one that is academic and accordingly, I am not satisfied that this again meets the exigencies of the standing order at this time.

The hon. member for Kitchener—Waterloo is rising on a point of order.

• (1530)

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Earlier today during my S.O. 31, I mentioned that Canadians from coast to coast to coast as well as the international firefighters who have been visiting us have been observing a minute of silence in respect of our fallen soldiers.

On Monday we in this chamber observed a minute of silence on behalf of the Armenian genocide. On Tuesday we observed a minute of silence in memory of the Holocaust. Actually, yesterday evening when I was at the Armenian reception, they observed a minute of silence in respect to our fallen soldiers.

Given the fact that it is the soldiers of our armed forces who are trying to prevent those kinds of events that we commemorated this week, it would be a good opportunity if members of this House would give unanimous consent to a motion that on Thursday, April 27 after question period we observe a moment of silence in this chamber, as Canadians are doing from coast to coast to coast. I ask for unanimous consent.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House, as I understand the motion, to have an observation of a moment of silence tomorrow following question period? Is that the request?

Mr. Andrew Telegdi: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent. I heard a no.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed from April 25 consideration of the motion that Bill, C-2, an act providing for conflict of interest rules, restrictions on election financing and measures respecting administrative transparency, oversight and accountability be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Government Orders

The Speaker: When the debate was interrupted yesterday the hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup had the floor. He had four minutes remaining to finish his speech.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the House of the Bloc Québécois' position on the accountability bill. The current title of the bill in French—Loi fédérale sur l'imputabilité—will have to change because it contains an unacceptable anglicism. I hope that the government will agree to the amendment proposed by the Bloc. According to our information, this is the direction in which we are headed.

In any case, it is important to know that this bill is in response to the sponsorship scandal and the corruption of the previous government, especially the Liberal Party of Canada, Quebec wing.

The Bloc Québécois would like to see some of the measures in this bill implemented. It suggested them a long time ago. For example, returning officers should be selected by the chief electoral officer rather than the cabinet; the Public Registry of Lobbyists should be independent; and corporate contributions should be banned—as Quebec has been doing for 30 years now. In addition, this bill needs to be considered more thoroughly in committee. A number of amendments should be made to it because, for example, it encourages an unhealthy snitch culture by offering rewards for whistleblowers. In my view, this goes too far. We will have to listen to the comments and suggestions made in committee. It is important to take our time and study this bill thoroughly. It should not be passed in great haste because it will become one of the cornerstones of this government and future governments.

The bill also contains a suggestion that is made in good faith but in my view would impede democratic debate. When a citizen lodges a complaint under the Federal Accountability Act, it is supposed to be forwarded to the commissioner. If he or she considers it appropriate, there would no longer be any right to discuss it further. I think that this is unacceptable. One of the main aspects of the task carried out by the members of this House would thus be eliminated.

In the four minutes that I was given to finish my speech, I wanted to say that the Bloc Québécois supports the bill in principle. It will propose a number of amendments to the bill, which needs to be fixed so that in the end we achieve our objective of ensuring that the kind of corruption that occurred under the previous government never happens again. It is important, therefore, for the House to take time to study this bill thoroughly.

• (1535)

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in effect it is an omnibus bill that is before us. One of the embedded bills is the whistleblower legislation. The member knows that the whistleblower bill was referred to committee before second reading so the committee could hear the advice of expert witnesses on a broad range of important issues. It also empowered the government operations and estimates committee to make substantive changes. The bill passed unanimously at that stage and unanimously in the House at third reading and received royal assent.

It seems to me that having an important bill like this one referred to committee before second reading would make a great deal of sense. The bill makes consequential amendments to a broad number of acts and the input of those who will be touched by it has not been received by members. I wonder if the member would care to comment on that.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question is an interesting one. Actually it is a fundamental one. The major issue throughout the entire election campaign was government transparency and past cases of corruption. If there is one thing the citizens of Quebec and Canada expect, it is that we do something about this quickly and that we examine the file in depth.

There first has to be a vote on the actual principle of the bill. All the parties and members in this House must vote on the merits of the legislation and decide whether or not they are in favour of the principle of the bill. Then we can take an in-depth look at each of its components.

This bill is really very significant. It touches on many elements, including the method of appointing returning officers that has long been recommended by the Bloc Québécois. As for prohibiting corporate donations, this goes right to the source of problems that arose in the past. We saw businesses and banks that acquired, as if by chance, the attentive ear of the government after having made very large donations. We hope that this measure will be corrected. We can cite the model of Quebec as an example. It is not perfect, but it has been around for 30 years. It succeeded in preventing the sort of situations we have gone through here and that greatly undermined the people's trust in their elected representatives.

To regain this trust, we must first vote on the actual principle of this bill, then refer it to committee for study, rather than proceeding the other way around.

In this regard, I do not share the opinion of my colleague. I find it important to show the public that one of the first parliamentary actions taken by the newly elected government, which saw the need to act on this matter, was in fact to have done so and let every member in the House vote.

On the other hand, this bill should not get steamrollered in committee. As many witnesses as possible must be heard so that in the end we adopt amendments that are going to have far-reaching effects. They will no doubt be put forward in large numbers. Perhaps the testimonies will continue until the fall. However that may be, when the time comes to pass this bill, a solid foundation will be necessary to ensure that, at least for a few years, the act will function as it should.

We will not stop some individuals from behaving in ways not entirely correct, but the role of Parliament and the opposition is to act as watchdogs. At least this bill will make it possible to clarify a certain number of situations, especially if we make the amendments to it that we and the other members of this House put forward. We must make this a solid bill whose effective duration will correspond to the importance of this issue in the last election.

Government Orders

• (1540)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his remarks. After 13 years in power, the Liberals failed to implement any measures to protect whistleblowers in the public service. This bill, the federal accountability act, will provide real independent protection for whistleblowers.

[*English*]

Parts of this protection would include a tribunal, which an independent commissioner would convene, of existing judges who would oversee cases where a public servant alleges he or she has experienced bullying as a result of his or her speaking out against corruption. It would remove the cover-up clauses that the Liberal government put into its Bill C-11, which never passed. It would remove those cover-up clauses and extend protection to all Canadians, including contractors and crown corporations which could otherwise have been struck from the previous Liberal bill at a moment's notice by Order in Council.

We have made all those changes to strengthen whistleblower protection and to introduce some of the best of its kind in the world.

Does the hon. member intend to support the principles I have just enunciated?

[*Translation*]

Second, I would like to know whether he and his party are going to support us in our goal, which is to pass this bill before the summer.

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois has already clearly said that it supports the bill in principle. However, given its scope and the number of subjects it deals with, it is important for us to take time to study them properly.

I do not believe that it is necessary to give the bill third reading between now and the summer recess. What is important is that we get to the bottom of things and that all witnesses have a chance to be heard.

Take the example of whistleblowers. There is a major step forward in the bill in terms of how this issue is to be handled. However, I think that we go too far when we say that we are going to offer rewards to whistleblowers, and I believe that a balance should be struck. We will therefore have to assess this situation, hear the witnesses, and perhaps consider amendments.

That is only one of the questions about this bill that is unanswered. I will mention a few others. For example, only three of the nine foundations are covered by the Access to Information Act. Is there not some way to expand that to the six others, or a portion of them? To do that, we have to know about the foundations that are not covered, what their mandate is, and determine whether they should be covered.

On the question of political party financing, there is still no ceiling for leadership races. Would it not be necessary for us to understand whether it is a good idea to have an amendment to do this?

In other words, it is obvious that this bill is going to need a lot of work in committee. The committees are not yet operational. I believe

that the motion has just been introduced that will allow the committees to begin work. The chairs and vice-chairs have to be chosen, as do the committee members, priorities have to be set, and the committee that will be responsible for studying this bill has to be decided. The people who want to testify must also be given time to prepare properly.

Let us not do things in haste, let us rather do them properly so that we can be sure that the situations involving government corruption we have seen in the past never happen again, situations that were the result of loopholes in the law and problems that have not been solved.

When we have taken the time to study it thoroughly, let us hope that this bill will solve a majority of those problems. One month more or less will not make any difference.

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to sincerely thank my colleague for his clearheadedness, but in particular for his sense of responsibility, because I think his response to the question that was asked earlier demonstrates a good deal of responsibility. There is in fact no electoral timetable in mind. This bill must surely not be dictated by the electoral timetable of any party.

Given the preceding question, it was my impression that the government had an election timetable in mind. It wants to get this done quickly so that it can move into an election and say what good work it has done.

Furthermore, I think we should underscore the sense of responsibility that the members of the Bloc Québécois have shown, and my colleague in particular. I therefore invite his comments on what I have said on this issue.

• (1545)

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine has clearly understood the spirit in which we intend to work on this bill. We are showing good will and we want this bill to be studied and passed with the appropriate amendments. So far as possible, this matter deserves to be studied in a way that rules out all partisanship and any short-term schedule. That way the government can say, in October or November when the election is called, that it promised an accountability act and, in the end, that is what it delivered.

Will the act be sufficiently clear, solid and precise so that we are not obliged to make amendments to it later? The message sent in the last election was clear: we have to do some housecleaning here, a thorough job, make sure we paint where painting is needed and restore the structure in the proper fashion. There is no urgency to have the bill passed in the short term, although it is important that it be adopted in the present Parliament.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Before resuming debate, I just want to advise the House that we have reached the point in debate where there will be 10 minutes maximum on speeches and speeches are subject to a five minute question and comment period.

The hon. member for Charlottetown.

Government Orders

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House today to participate in the debate on the federal accountability act.

As everyone is now aware, this is what I would classify as an omnibus bill. It is large, it is complex and it will be referred to a committee. I think that is a good thing. I have confidence in the committee system and it will be studied and analyzed at the committee. Generally speaking, I support the thrust of the bill. Any time we clarify roles, define expectations and increase transparency and oversight, I think those principles are good. However, from my first reading of the bill, my fear is that the law of unintended consequences may creep in, which is why it is good to refer the matter to a committee.

I wholeheartedly support some provisions in the bill but others need refinement and others are downright silly which, hopefully, will be dropped by the committee.

I should point out that this is really not that groundbreaking. Many of the provisions in the bill are a continuation of initiatives in Bill C-24, the whistleblower legislation, which the previous speaker spoke to, legislation that had been debated, discussed and passed by the House in the last Parliament. It dealt with some of the major changes dealing with procurement in the federal government, the institution of the Comptroller General and some of the changes with the Ethics Commissioner.

I certainly support the provisions for dealing with donations to political parties and the whole idea of secret donations. I do not know how extensive they are. I have never received one and I do not know anyone else who has but anything like that should be stopped in its tracks.

The whole issue of lobbyists has bothered me since I arrived in the House. I had to call a deputy minister or someone else when I was in government but it was difficult to meet with them. However when I would go to Wilfrid's or other restaurants around town I would see them meeting with lobbyists, which has always concerned me. I think that is something that we should bring to light in the House.

The intention of government with regard to government appointments is probably a positive development, although it has not been followed by the government so far.

The area I have real concern about is the institution of the office of the public prosecutions official. Given the limited scope of what this person would do, which would be drug offences, income tax and shipping act violations, I see it as being somewhat silly.

The parliamentary budget authority is something that perhaps can be discussed in committee but it seems to me that has been the procedure followed over the last 10 years, but by taking an average of all the economists across Canada a lot of times the economists had it wrong. These things are subject to tremendous variations and it will be hard to pin it right on the nose. I believe it is a duplication and a waste of time and effort.

When we go forward as a House discussing this bill I think we need to bear in mind the balance between allowing public servants to take risks and to accept change and that one is not always looking out for one's back. We also need to differentiate between making a

mistake and wrongdoing. We all make mistakes and in time when we take a risk, make a change or take an initiative a lot of times we do make mistakes.

I distinctly remember making a mistake in my first month practising law some 30 years ago. I thought it was serious so I went to the senior partner of the firm and I apologized for the mistake. He said that he did not see it as being that serious and he told me to show him a lawyer who did not make mistakes and he would show me a lawyer who did not make any money. We all make mistakes but we need to differentiate mistakes from wrongdoing. I think that will be very important with the bill.

● (1550)

Dealing with the whole issue of accountability, there are two measures that are not in the bill. If the two measures were in the bill, it would increase accountability in this town substantially. First, is the tenure of deputy ministers. One of the biggest problems in the administration of government is the short tenure for deputy ministers. They serve, on average, about a year and a half to a year and three-quarters, and there is no accountability.

If we look back at the function of departments, there are problems, but the deputy minister has only been there a year, and the deputy before that was there only a year and a half, so no one is accountable. They can always say they were not there or not there long enough. This was the recommendation which came forward in the Gomery report that the tenure of a deputy minister should be at least five years, so that there is accountability and that those deputies be held to account.

The second measure is the whole issue of sanctions. This is a tool that would be available to ministers and deputy ministers when we do have wrongdoing, not mistakes. This has been talked about in the accountability act with the financial administration and I agree with that, but it should be stronger than that. I have been on the public accounts committee for five and a half years now and I have seen problems. With a budget of \$200 billion and 450,000 public servants, there are going to be problems. If anyone in the House thinks that they are going to correct all the problems of the world by one act, they are fooling themselves.

I have asked the question at least 40 or 50 times, when there is a problem and someone sees wrongdoing, of whether there has been any disciplinary action taken? Every time the answer has been "no". Was there any disciplinary action taken with Mr. Guité? No. Was there any disciplinary action taken with Mr. Quail? No. No one has ever been disciplined, that I am aware of, in any of the cases of wrongdoing we have investigated in the public accounts committee.

Those two measures would increase and improve accountability tremendously in the House, although they are not in the bill. Having said that, this is why we debate these bills in the House. That is why they are referred to committee and it will come back, and I do look forward to the debate.

The only difficulty I see which disappoints me tremendously is what I call the pith and substance of what the accountability bill states is going on here in Ottawa. The government says it has five priorities but actually it has six.

Government Orders

The first priority of the Prime Minister was to appoint his co-chair to the Senate and then appoint him as the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. That absolutely destroys any line of accountability in the House. The House of Commons is an institution of accountability. Our job is to pass legislation, grant allocations for spending of money, and to hold the executive to account.

A very important part of the executive of the government is the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, who is not in the House. I asked a member who spoke to the bill yesterday and he said that there is nothing to worry about because the minister is accountable to another institution. That is not accountability. I find it offensive. I was disappointed. I thought the President of the Treasury Board would deal with that spectacle in this bill, but he did not. That is probably the situation I am most disappointed about and I do hope this spectacle does end very soon.

Regarding the whole issue of political fundraising, I agree with the pith and substance of what the bill says, but this Friday night, Mr. Speaker, if you have \$1,000, I can get you into a dinner with the Prime Minister in my home town of Charlottetown. If you have \$1,500, I can take you to Moncton the following night and you can have two dinners, and enjoy the company of the Prime Minister if you were so interested.

The bill talks about the Ethics Commissioner being of a judicial or quasi-judicial background. We had a spectacle a month ago where the Prime Minister was offering the job to an ex-member of the House. He was qualified, but he certainly did not have these qualifications. Again, it just goes to show that what the act says and what the government is doing are totally opposite and it is very disappointing.

I am thankful for this time to present my views on the bill. I look forward to further debate in the House and to the report of the committee.

• (1555)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague across the way touched on a number of points within his speech and I have a couple of questions for him.

Before I ask the questions, I would like to say that when the government came forward with the federal accountability action plan, the whole purpose of the government's ideas were to bring forward accountability to government, not because of the former government, not just to the present government but to government, period, the government as a whole.

I know the government and the Conservative Party certainly have wanted to promote a whole culture of accountability. They wanted to ensure that Canadians across this country would be able to gain again confidence in government, not confidence in the Conservative Party or in any other party but confidence in government because across this land we are seeing more and more people lose confidence in politicians, politics and government.

I will now go to the question that the member caused me to bring forward. I had not thought of it, but he talked about the tenure of deputy ministers. He mentioned in his speech that the average deputy minister would spend approximately a year and a half in that position. I want to tell a quick story.

I jumped aboard one of the green buses on Parliament Hill once. There was a new minister who had been appointed after one of the famous four from the past government was asked to leave office by the then Prime Minister. As I talked to this new minister, I asked him if he would consider one or two things in the ministry that he might achieve while he was there. He had great plans. He had great ideas of what he could do. About two weeks later, I spoke to the same minister and he said that the bureaucracy basically was running his department.

My question is in regard to the year and a half. If ministers were to have the ability to request the Prime Minister to remove a deputy and to have someone in the position that they can work closely with, why then would they not be in favour of ministerial accountability and ensure that their ministry is set up the way they would like to see it set up? Why would ministers not do that?

• (1600)

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, the member across makes some interesting and valid points. I am not disagreeing with him, but there is a premise in his question that is erroneous. He seems to be under the impression that ministers under the present structure can appoint and discharge the deputies. That is not the way the system works. The deputies are appointed by the Prime Minister perhaps on the advice of the Clerk of the Privy Council and that is the problem.

One of the biggest problems which I identified in my speech dealt with increasing the tenure of the deputy ministers, so that they would have a tenure of, let us say, four, five or six years. We could then hold them to account. That is one of the biggest problems. If we were to ask any ministers or senior officials in any department to name the last five deputies they had, we would find that over the last six or seven years there have been five or six deputies. If there were any problems or any failure to get things done, there is no one deputy anyone could point a finger at. Again, that is something that I hope is brought up in these discussions.

I mentioned the other measure of sanctions too because I do not see any situation in Ottawa where people who have committed wrongdoing, as opposed to making a mistake, are disciplined by their superiors in the public service.

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by sincerely thanking the voters of Calgary—Nose Hill for their continued confidence in me and for being willing to have me represent them here in this House. I take that duty very seriously. Some of them did not vote for my party, but I want to be a good representative of all the constituents of Calgary—Nose Hill, whether they voted for me or not, and also to help Canada in shaping its future.

As members know, today we are talking about the first piece of legislation that has come before this new Parliament, the federal accountability act. For those Canadians who are watching this debate, I wish to go over very quickly what this act is all about. Sometimes there is a lot of rhetoric, but people are wondering exactly what it is all about.

Essentially, this bill would make changes in five areas of government operation. This bill would bring in political reform, parliamentary reform, public sector reform, procurement reform, and finally, measures to make the public sector more open.

Government Orders

With respect to political reform, the bill would limit donations so that there is not undue influence put on politicians because of funding. It would ban secret donations and trust funds to politicians. It would prevent the immediate move from government to lobbying, so members who were our seatmates one day could not be getting favours on behalf of clients the next day. It would enhance the role of the Ethics Commissioner and pass the conflict of interest code, which has been an unofficial guideline, into law.

With respect to parliamentary reform, the law would give more power to the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, the Information Commissioner and the Chief Electoral Officer, and would create the positions of commissioner of lobbying and the conflict of interest and ethics commissioner.

It would be great if we did not need all these watchdogs, would it not, if our watchdog was in our heart and in our commitment to do what is right. However, we have seen that this is not sufficient in areas of endeavour in the public and, sadly, even in this House, and so these watchdogs would be put into place to help boost the conscience of members in the political arena.

In addition, the Auditor General would now be able to follow the money. Instead of just saying money was misspent and it disappeared somewhere, somehow, the Auditor General would be able to take the steps to actually follow the money trail so that we know, and Canadians know, exactly what happened to the dollars that went missing.

There would also be an independent parliamentary budget authority that would provide a financial reality check on the nation's finances. This individual would also provide a reality check on proposals by House of Commons committees and proposals in private members' bills. Again, because numbers that have been given to the House in different other settings have been, shall we say, not as reliable as they should be, we will put another reality check and another balance in place.

All these appointments would be confirmed by a vote in Parliament. These watchdogs would be officers of Parliament. They would not be beholden to the government but to this House, and all the members of this House and all the parties in this House.

With respect to public sector reform, there would be a clearer accountability of ministers and deputy ministers. There would be real whistleblower protection, including a reward for those who expose wrongdoing. There would be an independent tribunal to adjudicate cases of reprisal, so that public servants would feel they could actually be public servants without suffering a mortal blow because of their integrity.

There would be a new Comptroller General to ensure proper audits of departments. There would be a blue ribbon panel to review grants and contributions, including reviewing fairness in these contributions. There would be a specific initiative to streamline financial management policies and practices.

• (1605)

On procurement reform, there will be a new procurement auditor to provide an independent review of procurement policies to ensure fairness and openness. There will be a code of conduct for

procurement. Public opinion research paid for by the public will be made available to the public within six months.

On making the public sector more open, there are measures to expand coverage of the Access to Information Act, which is sometimes referred to as the ATI. This will now include crown corporations, agents of Parliament and the three federally created foundations. We will bring forward a draft bill containing the Information Commissioner's recommendations on ATI together with a paper on the issue for discussion and further action in the House of Commons.

We will establish a public appointments commission to set up a merit based appointments process.

This bill is about making everyone from the Prime Minister to MPs to public servants to grant recipients more accountable. The bill changes the way government works and makes it easier for Canadians to hold government accountable. Most important, it is a giant step in rebuilding Canadians' trust in their government.

We all need to be accountable. We have to remind ourselves of what happens when accountability is weak or non-existent as it was under the former Liberal government. There were misspent millions on the sponsorship program with everyone in government claiming total ignorance and no responsibility at all. There was a 1,000% cost overrun on the gun registry which failed to catch any criminals because criminals, being law breakers, do not obey registration laws. There were mismanaged billions in HRDC and other grants and contributions and loans programs. Then we saw the outrageous spending habits of those in high office spending money foolishly and unwisely, money that came straight out of the pockets of ordinary hard-working Canadians. We saw contracts for cronies and supporters of those in government. There were hundreds of specific examples of this kind of abuse of citizens' money and trust.

Canadians deserve so much better than this. No law can entirely weed out the bad apples, those who are on the lookout for what they can get for themselves. But we can move strongly to make sure that such actions do not remain hidden and do carry consequences.

Our government is committed to rebuilding trust and respect for leaders and for government. We are looking forward to working with all members of the House to make this a priority for Canadians.

• (1610)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this issue is of interest to all members. There is a difference between accountability, conduct and responsibility. Accountability is what this bill is not about. Accountability is the obligation of elected office holders and senior unelected office holders to express freely to the public what they are going to do before they do it. That is entirely different from conduct and responsibility.

Government Orders

The hon. member is a very intelligent person. Does she agree that the definition of accountability is the obligation of elected office holders like us to announce to the public what we are going to do before we do it? Does she agree that true accountability is the root of public confidence that we have to instill and engage the public in?

If she agrees with that, does she also accept the fact that this so-called accountability bill does not have any definition of accountability in it whatsoever? In fact it is a bill that has everything to do with conduct and everything to do with causing gridlock within the public service and with our ability to do our job.

Does she not agree with the definition of accountability that I have given her which is commonly used by those who are experts in this field? Does she not agree that this is not what the bill is all about?

Ms. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, that definition which, I might add, is very individualistic and highly selective, is not what the bill is talking about at all.

The former government, of which the member was a part, often, every day, talked about openness and accountability. I never heard the member get up and say, "and this is what we mean by accountability". He certainly never gave the definition which he just gave in the House before. And what is the reason? It is because we all know what accountability means. There are some things like honesty that we do not have to define.

Accountability means that when we do something, we take the responsibility for it. If we are not willing to take the responsibility and we are trying to duck it, there are other watchdogs and other checks and balances that will hold us accountable. That is what accountability is about.

I would say to the member that far from having any negative repercussions in the public service, like all of the measures on which the hon. member's former colleague, the former president of the treasury board, was working, this bill has been supported by the public servants. Why? Because it supports them.

Public officials now will be free to actually look their minister in the face and say, "I can't do that because now I am going to be held accountable for it". There will be some real measures to protect whistleblowers.

This bill will help to hold politicians and public officials accountable and that is exactly what it should do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the presentation by my colleague from Calgary—Nose Hill. The Bloc Québécois supports the principle of the bill, which should improve the credibility that is ascribed to politicians. They are in great need of it these days.

I am one of those members who have suffered greatly from the method of appointing returning officers. The bill would correct this problem in part. At the moment it is the Privy Council Office that appoints returning officers. My riding was notorious for having a political organizer as its returning officer. In letting such situations happen, we greatly damage the credibility of the entire democratic process and the trust placed in it.

I note, however, that under this bill, returning officers would be appointed by the Chief Electoral Officer, who would examine the qualifications. That approach is always one possible response. All the same, the best way of enhancing credibility is to hold a riding-wide competition for the purpose of staffing this position that is open to the general public. I would like to know my colleague's opinion on this subject.

• (1615)

[*English*]

Ms. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, the responsibility for appointing returning officers has now been handed over to the Chief Electoral Officer, who will be an officer of Parliament.

My colleague is right in that there has been some real concern in certain ridings of the country that the returning officers were not there to make sure that there were fair and free elections, but were perhaps perceived in some cases as working for the interests of a particular party, the party that appointed them. That, of course, is against democratic principles. I look forward to that not happening in the future because of this bill.

I appreciate that other members of the House from other parties also see the need for these kinds of changes and are willing to support them and work with them.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me say that I hold my colleague from Calgary—Nose Hill in high esteem. I really wish that she would have come back and served on the citizenship and immigration committee. When we talk about questions of accountability and holding the bureaucracy accountable, it is important that the government has members who know the issues of the department. She knows those issues very well.

Let me suggest that in terms of the bill the member talked about accountability, but what she is really talking about is conduct. This whole thing is in a lot of ways a charade. It does not matter what segment of society it is, whether it is a service club, a police department, a university, a law firm or a church, there will be some people who will engage in criminal conduct. That is why we have spent billions of dollars on the courts and the police and penal institutions for enforcement.

What really happened in the last Parliament is that the opposition parties were very successful in undermining people's belief in this place and in the role of government. I think our member from Vancouver Quadra spoke very eloquently on that subject.

What has to be remembered is that if the basic underpinnings in a system are undermined, we are all hurt. This Parliament is hurt, the government is hurt, the bureaucracy is hurt, and a bad impression is given to the rest of the world.

No one party has a monopoly on virtue. If we examine the record and if we want to talk about accountability, the first thing the Conservative government should have done when it came into the House was to apologize for the previous Conservative government that left office in 1993. I raise that because ministers and MPs were charged and convicted. Nine people went to jail.

Government Orders

Let me also underline a way that the Conservatives have undermined our belief in the legal system. I know the truth is not welcomed. I note that some of the members were not around. But the fact of the matter is that the Conservatives deeply undermined the system by trying to infer that all politicians are corrupt. This does not serve us well, Mr. Speaker. You would know more than virtually anyone else in this place since you are the dean of this Parliament.

The other canard that has been floated is that somehow former prime minister Mulroney was prosecuted by the government. In a democracy the prosecution is done by the police, the RCMP and the crown attorney. It is not done by politicians. Let me say that I would not want to live in a country where politicians can direct the police or can direct the prosecution to persecute someone.

● (1620)

I came from a country like that 49 years ago. This year will mark the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian revolution. I can tell members that the basis of democracy is that government should never be in a position to single out an individual and say politically to the head of the RCMP or the head of the prosecution that it wants the person charged.

A lot of people have come to this country from places like I did. They came as refugees. They came as immigrants from oppressive regimes. We have to ensure they do not get the wrong impression that any political party can direct the police or the prosecution.

It was because of what happened with the sponsorship issue that the former Liberal government launched-

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: You guys are all crooked. That is why you are over there.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: I am going to pick up on that. Recently it was on *W-FIVE* that the former prime minister, Mr. Mulroney, received \$300,000 from Mr. Schreiber. Surely we should have a Gomery type of inquiry on this because now this is an established fact. If the Conservatives want to be accountable, they would do the right thing. The Liberal Party did the right thing. The former prime minister called the Gomery inquiry.

However, even before the Gomery inquiry was called, we had the mother of all bills in terms of accountability, and that was Bill C-24. When we came into government in 1993, it was possible for corporations to give millions of dollars to political parties. It was possible for individuals to give millions of dollars to political parties. What this government did with its financing bill was limit corporations to \$1,000 from untold millions that they could give. The other thing we did was limit the contribution from individuals to \$5,000.

Those were the most sweeping changes that have ever been made. Whatever this bill now wants to do, it will be a small fraction of what we did. This is important because that is where we are coming from.

To get back to the whole issue of the bill, it gives me nightmares when I see that the Conservatives have introduced a part where they want to pay \$1,000 to somebody to snitch on somebody else. I have trouble with that because of where I came from. I have trouble with that because, unfortunately, in totalitarian regimes people denounce each other. I have trouble with that because I worked in the courts. I

know when testimony is given, it has to be given for the best of reasons, and certainly not because of \$1,000. It is an insult to the law-abiding men and women of our country to think that \$1,000 would be the reason they would do this. We are not talking about operation watch or rewards being offered for anonymous donations. We are talking about civil servants who have high ethics, for the most part. They are not perfect.

Our party will support the basic thrust of the bill, but I am particularly disturbed that we are going to be able to interfere in the affairs of the first nations, the section relating to the Auditor General. First nations have had a long and troubled history and we have to treat them with respect. We have to respect their leadership. We have to understand that we should no more to them than we do to the provinces.

● (1625)

The Liberals will support the bill. I look forward to further debate on it. We are all responsible for upholding the faith of Canadians in our elected institutions and other institutions.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member opposite and I have a number of issues with what he brought forward today. My first observation is that there was something wrong with an opposition that brought to the fore things that were going on. My guess is that his version of the accountability act would be hear no evil, see no evil and speak no evil, and for some reason or other Canadians should be satisfied with that.

I also question his recollection of history when he talked about a number of former Conservative members being convicted and sent to jail. I question his knowledge of history and ask him to present the names of the individuals from this federal party who went to jail. I do not think it occurred. I think he has come up with something that does not exist.

I would really like to know if the hon. member could tell us if there is something wrong in limiting political donations beyond where his party was. He takes great pride in the limit to \$1,000. This accountability act will limit corporate donations to zero. What is the problem with that?

I think those issues are important to Canadians. I would like to have his comments on that.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, first, let me very clear that I am the last member of Parliament in the House who anybody should be accusing of hearing no evil and seeing no evil. If I believe in something and I see something is wrong, I will defend the opposition party against the powers of the minister and of the government.

In terms of the names of the individuals involved, buy the book. It is called *On the Take: Crime, Corruption and Greed in the Mulroney Years*. The member will find all the names. If the member wants, I will table in the House tomorrow the names of the nine persons who were convicted of criminal charges.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Do it outside the House.

Mr. Andrew Telegdi: I will do it outside and in the House. It is a matter of public record.

Government Orders

Let me talk about one part, which I think will cause a problem in terms of limiting donations to \$1,000. If somebody goes to a convention, there is a cost. We are going to have one this year. The Conservatives and NDP had them in the past. It is a very expensive process. It will cost a couple of thousand dollars. According to the laws, if one is going to do it through a personal donation, one can go.

The other issue that is really lacking and is the weakest point in this bill, the real Achilles heel of the bill, is that it does not ban third party advertising. We know the problems we had with the former head of the National Citizens Coalition—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. In the interest of hearing more people, I was trying to get the member's attention, but he was lost in his remarks.

The hon. member for Gatineau.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Kitchener—Waterloo spoke of his support for this legislation, in principle. The Bloc Québécois also supports it, in principle. We know that the reason for this bill is the infamous sponsorship scandal. The Gomery commission has aired a fair bit of dirty laundry

This is my question. In a spirit of cooperation proving the goodwill of the party he represents, would my colleague be agreeable to his party repaying the \$5.4 million made available to the Liberal Party by agencies and individuals involved in the sponsorship program?

[*English*]

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, I have absolutely no problem in ensuring that moneys wrongfully taken are refunded. To establish that, it has to be done by a court of law.

Because it is important, everyone should remember the words of Justice Gomery, who stated:

Canadians should not forget that the vast majority of our public officials and politicians do their work honestly, diligently and effectively, and emerge from this Inquiry free of any blame.

I say that because it does no good for anyone of us in the House to diminish the roles of members of Parliament and our democratic institutions. It is really important to keep in mind.

Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to stand and make a few comments on what I believe to be one of the most important and progressive pieces of legislation to come before the House in a long time.

Recognizing that this is my first opportunity to give a speech in the House, although I gave a brief private member's statement before the Easter break, I would like to take a moment to say a sincere thanks to the wonderful people of the riding of Avalon in Newfoundland and Labrador for the honour and privilege of electing me to be their representative in this honourable House. Their vote of confidence on January 23 was the result of a clear desire by the people of Avalon to see a change not only in the riding of Avalon, but also to join Canadians from coast to coast to ensure that there would definitely be a change in Ottawa.

As the first Conservative elected in Canada on election night, I am proud of my constituents, the people of Avalon riding, who were the first to turn over a new leaf for a new Conservative government in our country. I take my role as an MP very seriously and look forward to working with my colleagues within our government on behalf of the people I represent. While there are always challenges that we have to deal with, I look forward to exploring the opportunities on behalf of my constituents of the Avalon riding.

I would like to recognize the fact that I am here with two political veterans of Newfoundland and Labrador, namely the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl and the member for St. John's East. I am delighted that my colleague, the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, has been appointed the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, an important industry in my riding of Avalon and in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I was delighted that one of the first acts of our government, in relation to our province, was last Tuesday. I travelled with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to our province, to Gander especially, to announce the bringing back of the Gander weather station to Newfoundland and Labrador. This was a promise made by the government during the election campaign, and I am proud to say a promise kept by the Prime Minister.

Bill C-2, the federal accountability act, is about trust. It is about cleaning up government. The bill, as the words themselves say, is about accountability, accountability to the citizens of Canada to ensure that their hard earned tax dollars are not wasted, to ensure their hard earned tax dollars are not used to reward friends and cronies and to ensure that their hard earned tax dollars are not used to prop up a political party in its dying days.

The sponsorship scandal disgusted Canadians from coast to coast. The HRDC scandal before that disgusted Canadians from coast. The gun registry, which was supposed to cost \$2 million but ballooned into a cost of \$2 billion, disgusted Canadians from coast to coast. All this brought on the Gomery inquiry. People from across Canada watched with interest and were more disgusted day by day as we listened to what happened here in the past 13 years.

Recent polls across our country have measured the level of trust that Canadians have in different professions. I was not surprised, and I am sure members on all sides of the House were not surprised, to see that firefighters, nurses, farmers and others topped the list. Politicians placed dead last right behind used car salesmen. As MPs, as Canadians, we definitely need to address this issue. The government plans on doing so through this bill.

• (1635)

We need to work together to rebuild the trust of Canadians. Some important components of the bill include: reforming the financing of political parties; the strengthening of the role of the Ethics Commissioner; toughening the Lobbyists Registration Act; and providing real protection for whistleblowers. Allan Cutler spoke up to expose a Liberal scandal and lost his position. That action was wrong and, through this bill, an independent officer of Parliament would have the power to protect those who expose wrongdoing.

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The bill would strengthen the access to information legislation. It would strengthen the power of the Auditor General to follow the money and, believe me, as we watched the Gomery inquiry there were many Canadians who wanted the opportunity to follow the money. That is what the bill is about.

The purpose of the bill is to give Canadians a level of understanding of how government works and that there is a difference between a political party and a government. There is a difference between spending taxpayer dollars and not being accountable and spending taxpayer dollars and answering for them.

I listened to members earlier talk about responsibility and accountability. We are elected to the House to be accountable and responsible. One goes side by side with the other. They cannot be separated.

Reforming the financing of political parties is an important part of this legislation. These changes would increase transparency, reduce opportunities to influence politicians with contributions and help Canadians feel more confident about the integrity of the democratic process. It would level the playing field among individual contributors and encourage political parties to engage the electorate more directly.

This is what Canadians want and what Canadians asked for and we as a party put forward an agenda. We are not standing here today bringing forward something in the House of Commons that is a surprise to anyone on this side or that side. We are delivering on a promise we made during the election campaign to clean up government, to clean up Ottawa and to clean up politics. I am proud to stand here and say that I fully support the legislation and I was glad to hear members today say that they support it because Canadians want this legislation passed.

The federal accountability act would see the banning of secret donations to political candidates. We cannot have this. I certainly have not received anything but, as we have heard in the past, there have been envelopes with tremendous amounts of money placed in them. No one needs to tell us that when an envelope with \$5,000 or \$10,000 is passed to someone, today, tomorrow or the next day, that person will come knocking for a favour. That is what the legislation is all about.

These changes would bring greater transparency and fairness to political financing. The government will heighten disclosure requirements regarding the personal finances of members of Parliament and hence reduce the risk of their holding problematic financial interests. These measures would allow members of Parliament to hold legitimate financial instruments that do not influence their elected positions. We cannot use our positions in any way that is dishonest or disloyal to the people who gave us the opportunity to be here.

There are many parts of the bill that will be discussed over the next few days. I am very pleased that we have the opportunity to discuss this and that the bill will be going to committee where there will be an opportunity for other party members to put forward their opinions.

On January 23, Canadians voted for change. They voted for a change in the way politics are conducted in this city. They voted for

a change in government because they wanted the wrongs righted, which is exactly what the federal accountability act would do. We are very pleased to put it forward and hopefully have it passed through the House so Canadians once again can trust us as politicians.

•(1640)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the jobs of members of Parliament in their committee work is to review the estimates, the supplementary estimates, et cetera. I remember that a former clerk of the House, Mr. Marleau, wrote an op-ed piece for the *Hill Times* in which he said that members of Parliament were ignoring 50% of their jobs. The reason he made that statement was that only about 20% of standing committees actually reviewed and reported the estimates, basically the spending of departments, to the House.

In terms of accountability, I wonder whether the member would support an amendment that would address this problem where members of Parliament either do not have the resources or maybe the tools to do an appropriate review of the spending estimates that come before the standing committees on which they serve.

Mr. Fabian Manning: Mr. Speaker, we may hear that a member of the House is doing 20% of his work but I do not think we can legislate people to do 100%. It is incumbent on us all as responsible MPs to stand up as part of a committee and of the House of Commons and to do 100% each and every day. That is what we intend to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Avalon for his presentation.

I note that the government wishes to uphold transparency in the workings of government, which is greatly needed. However, I wonder why only three of the nine foundations will be subject to the Access to Information Act? The result is that responsibility for hundreds of millions of dollars will continue to remain nebulous and beyond the control of Parliament.

I would like to hear the position of the member on this matter.

[*English*]

Mr. Fabian Manning: Mr. Speaker, the federal accountability act would give us the opportunity to control many of the dollars that go out to the citizens of Canada. We cannot control everything but this is a step in the right direction. As a government I believe we have put forward something that would make us accountable to the people of the country. It is the most accountable legislation that has been put forward in the House for a number of years and it is a step in the right direction.

Will the legislation solve all the problems? Will it find all the wrongdoing that happens within our House? No, not necessarily, but I am fully confident that this is a step in the right direction. It is about cleaning up government. Canadians wanted this and they will get it. I think Canadians from coast to coast will support it.

Government Orders

•(1645)

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the people of Avalon have obviously made an excellent choice in their member. However I must say that when I hear the word Avalon I think of *Anne of Green Gables* but perhaps that is another province.

Mr. Norman Doyle: That's Avonlea.

Mr. David Tilson: Is that Avonlea?

My question has to do with the member's comments about the strength of the powers of the Auditor General. The bill puts forward such things as the public service integrity commissioner and the public service disclosure protection tribunal. It puts forward a whole number of things to try to rectify some of the errors.

In the press we have heard the Liberals dismissing many of these things by saying that they are high-handed and that they are very critical of the excellent public service that we have in the country. Is it really designed against the public service?

Mr. Fabian Manning: Mr. Speaker, the legislation we are putting forward is not designed to be against public servants. Public servants serve the House of Commons and Canadians from coast to coast in a very reputable way. We are proud of the many thousands of public servants who serve Canadians each and every day to the utmost of their abilities.

The legislation we have put forward would put power within government and within offices of the House to ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent properly and accounted for and that any questions regarding where the money has gone will be answered in a timely way.

Just think for a moment that if we had had this legislation in the House during the scandals that went on over the past little while, with the sponsorship scandal and the HRDC scandal, all the questions would have been answered. I think that is what this legislation is all about. I look forward to not only having it passed but I look forward to ensuring that taxpayer dollars are spent properly and accounted for properly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is in favour of the principle of the accountability act.

Let us recall that, during the last two federal election campaigns, the Bloc Québécois criticized the Liberal government's misuse of public funds and corruption. With the word "ethical" are associated such synonyms as "integrity", "loyalty", and "reliability". This is in contradiction to such antonyms as "pettiness", "arrogance" and "ingratitude".

The Bloc Québécois wishes to spare Quebecers scandals such as the dishonourable sponsorship scandal, of which the Liberal Party of Canada showed us the entire ignominy from the mid-1990s, or the Option Canada scandal, which was orchestrated by federalist forces, both Liberal and Conservative, during the last referendum.

With regard to the current Bill C-2, called the accountability act, the Bloc Québécois took part in the Gomery Commission in the constructive spirit we are known for, by developing 72 recommendations which must now be implemented.

In this regard, I am happy to note that several proposals put forward by the Bloc Québécois, some since 1990, have been taken up. For example there is the merit appointment of returning officers by Elections Canada; the independence of the lobbyists registry; the act respecting the financing of political parties, which will be more like Quebec's in its prohibition of corporate donations; strengthening the power of the Auditor General.

The Bloc Québécois, however, has always maintained that the reinforcement of laws and policies was of no effect if there was no real commitment of elected officials to change things.

As far as lobbying is concerned, for example, it is curious to see the Prime Minister tolerate what he criticized the Liberals for. In the Conservative Party's ethical platform on page 3, the Prime Minister criticized the Liberals for allowing people to move back and forth between political offices and lobbying firms. I quote:

Under the Liberals, lobbying government—often by friends and associates of Paul Martin and other Liberal ministers—has become a multi-million dollar industry. Senior Liberals move freely back and forth between elected and non-elected government posts and the world of lobbying.

The new Minister of Defence, however, was a lobbyist for some ten years for ordnance suppliers. We are entitled to ask ourselves the following question: will he defend the interests of citizens or the interests of his former clients?

The same is true in the case of the Prime Minister's director of communications, who represented the interests of a dozen or so businesses potentially doing business with the government. Will she defend the interests of the public or of her former clients?

The same may be said for the current director of parliamentary affairs for the Minister of Public Works, who worked for Summa for a number of years. There, he represented the interests of Purolator Courier, Enbridge and SAS Institute Canada or he lobbied the government. Will he defend the interests of the public or of his former clients? That is the question.

It is surprising to note that the Conservatives have learned nothing from the mistakes of the Liberals. Like the Liberals with Alfonso Gagliano, the Conservatives appointed their political organizer in Quebec to head the public works department. The Minister of Public Works, who has acknowledged doing political funding work for the Conservative Party, is responsible for \$10 billion in government spending. If the accountability legislation freely permits this sort of activity, where does the accountability lie?

In this regard, we hope that the Conservative government will take the amendments by the Bloc Québécois into account to ensure it really does want to change things.

If the current government really does want to change things, it will have to revise the sanctions for conflict of interest. As my colleague from Repentigny said yesterday, a fine of \$500 for infringement of the Conflict of Interest Act is far from acceptable given that contracts can exceed \$200,000, as we have seen in the past.

•(1650)

If the government really wants to change things, it will have to examine this aspect of the bill very closely.

Government Orders

It is important to note that the conflict of interest and ethics commissioner is authorized to impose penalties. Unfortunately, this power is not very clearly defined. Can the commissioner impose financial penalties exceeding \$500? This issue must be cleared up.

With respect to the Access to Information Act, here again the government seems unwilling to budge.

This Act was adopted in 1983. Since then, despite numerous calls for it to be revised, it remains essentially unchanged. The Conservative government has chosen not to reform the Access to Information Act as part of its omnibus legislation, despite the fact that the bill proposes changes to about 40 acts in its 317 clauses. The Access to Information Act should have been among them. The President of the Treasury Board claims that additional consultations will be necessary.

Nevertheless, the Conservative government promised reforms to the Access to Information Act many times over during the last election campaign. For example, on page 7 of their election platform, they said:

A Conservative government will:

Implement the Information Commissioner's recommendations for reform of the Access to Information Act.

The Conservative members, like all the other members who sat on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, rejected the suggestions made by the former Liberal Minister of Justice, who wanted to study the bill further. On November 3, 2005, the committee unanimously agreed to the act proposed by the Information Commissioner and asked the government to legislate without delay.

Various governments have been holding consultations for 20 years. Back in 1987, the Standing Committee on Justice made 100 recommendations for reforming the act. In August 2000, the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Justice formed a task force of public servants to review the act, regulations and policies on which the present access to information scheme is based. In November 2001, the Bryden committee proposed a dozen recommendations that it regarded as priorities. It will be recalled that the present Minister of Justice signed that report.

This House also had an opportunity to debate this act, when a number of members introduced private members' bills. The Information Commissioner even proposed a complete bill to the government in October 2005, as he had also done in 1994.

Is the unspoken truth that the Conservative government is in less of a hurry to reform the act now that it is in power? That is the question.

The Information Commissioner recently observed that this is a consistent reaction by all governments. I quote him:

The reason that action, not more study, is required is that governments continue to distrust and resist the Access to Information Act and the oversight of the Information Commissioner.

In conclusion, I reiterate that the Bloc Québécois has always maintained that it was ineffective to strengthen laws and policies if this were not accompanied by a genuine intention on the part of the elected ministers to change things. Let us say that the signals we

have been receiving from this government in the last few months are a cause for concern.

We have identified a number of loopholes in this bill that might allow wrongdoing to occur. On that point, we invite the President of the Treasury Board to take the time that is needed to properly analyze the amendments to the bill that will be proposed, in order to reduce the risk of wrongdoing like that which has greatly contributed to the cynicism about politics and the people who are responsible for upholding the public interest.

My colleagues may rest assured of my full cooperation in efforts to improve this bill.

•(1655)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his comments. I would also like to know whether he is anxious to see this bill implemented quickly.

I ask this question because we have talked a lot about accountability, whatever word we use for it in French. We have talked about it for years and years. The time for talking is done; it is time for action. We have to act quickly to put in place the changes proposed in this bill. I think that this bill should be implemented before the summer. That is the position of this government. I even think that the members of this House do not deserve any summer vacation if this bill has not yet been implemented.

Does my colleague think that the members should stay here for the summer and that the senators should stay if this bill has not been implemented by the summer?

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board.

We currently have before us an omnibus bill that will amend some 40 bills through rewriting 317 clauses. This is purely and simply in the mechanical structure of the bill. As far as the content is concerned, we are dealing with a highly sensitive issue that shook up the guilty political parties during the last election. I say "parties" because we know that the Conservatives were just as involved as the Liberals in the Option Canada plot to steal the last referendum from us.

That said, it is important to get the best bill possible on such a major issue. It is out of the question to fast track this bill and make a mess of it. We will take the time we need in committee with the parliamentarians to ensure that this bill responds, as much as possible, to the questions that were raised at the Gomery commission, to avoid this type of situation from ever happening again.

There are also questions about what is lacking in this bill. I could go into detail about other problematic aspects of its clauses, but we do not have enough time. We will get into that in committee.

Government Orders

• (1700)

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, following up on the member's dialogue with the parliamentary secretary, this is the federal accountability act and I really am a little concerned to hear it suggested that somehow there is a deadline for parliamentarians to do their work, to make wise decisions and good laws, that this is somehow the criteria we have to follow, as opposed to what is the responsibility of the legislative committee to hear all appropriate witnesses on the key elements.

This is a complicated bill. We want to be absolutely sure we get it right and get it right the first time, but that is certainly not to suggest that somehow we have to get it done by such and such a date. I know the House could sit forever if it had to, but the reality is that even the whistleblower legislation, Bill C-11, which passed in the last Parliament, took one year from the time of first reading through royal assent. It was not more complicated than this.

I wonder if the member would agree that we must take all the necessary time to have the necessary witnesses and to be able to inform ourselves so we can make good laws and wise decisions.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague. The idea is to take the time we need in committee to meet the civil society partners who could enlighten us on how to get the best bill possible.

Considering that committees might start up this week, but more likely next week, we have to be sensitive to the schedules of the stakeholders we would like to meet with.

The summer ends on September 21 and the fall session goes until December 21. It is not a matter of season, or about when Royal Assent will be given. It is a matter of ensuring that we have the best bill possible on such an important issue.

[English]

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to speak here today. I want to start by first congratulating you on a job well done. Congratulations in your new role as Deputy Speaker in this House. You wear the robes well and we look forward to your continued performance in this position. It is a great pleasure to be able to congratulate you in that capacity.

This is the first time that I have had the chance in this session of Parliament to stand and address what I think is one of the most important pieces of legislation to ever come into this Parliament, I would say, especially after the performance of the previous government and in view of the fact that we have to move quickly in ensuring that Canadians restore their faith in politicians and their government. I am excited to be able to rise in the 39th Parliament to speak to this very profound legislation.

Before I do so, I would like to start by congratulating and thanking the residents of Edmonton—Strathcona, who have been so kind to send me back to this place for my fourth term. It is hard to imagine that I am approaching nine years in this place. Time goes by so quickly. I have learned a lot over those years. I have had some incredible debates and some incredible experiences. I must say that

even though my neck is a little sore as I face the Speaker from this angle, it is nice to be in government after all that time.

As we move forward in the House, I would like to start by addressing some of the key things to start cleaning up government, to start cleaning up the mess that was left behind by the previous regime after 13 years. We have heard a number of our colleagues on this side of the House and the minister who has been in charge of this legislation, the President of the Treasury Board, address the reason why it is so important that this legislation come forward at this time, and why Canadians, after January 23, spoke so resoundingly in saying that they wanted to have a change in environment. They wanted increased accountability and increased transparency. They wanted to change the way business was done in Ottawa. That was clear after January 23.

For those who are tuning in and watching to see how this debate is unfolding and to hear about exactly what criteria are involved in this particular legislation, I think it is important that from time to time we highlight some of the key points in this legislation so Canadians do see how important it is in the efforts of this government to try to clean up the way things have been going here in Ottawa.

There are some concrete and I think welcome changes. I heard that during the course of the campaign and even leading up to the tabling of this legislation. Canadians could not wait to see things like the strengthening of the powers of the Auditor General, banning union and large corporate and large personal political donations, and providing real protection to whistleblowers, which I think is something that we have heard about over and over.

They also could not wait to see things like ensuring that government contracting is proper, fair and open. We know about the problems that led up to the sponsorship scandal of the last Parliament and the last government, so I think this is something that is still top of mind for Canadians. There is also the preventing of lobbying by former ministers and other public office holders for five years, which is a very strict measure. We look forward to seeing how this will be felt, especially as we move forward in the committees. Finally, there is also the creating of more open government by improving access to information.

This last is something that I would like to start focusing on in the time that I have this afternoon for this debate. I would like to start with that particular topic and move on from there to address as many of the topics as I can, topics that are the basis of this legislation.

As I mentioned, during almost nine years in opposition there were some frustrating times when we were dealing with issues of ethics, accountability, and transparency, with issues of being able to show what was happening with taxpayers' dollars in different aspects of the government, wherever that might be. I am most surprised by some of the comments I have heard today in listening to this debate, especially those of our colleagues across the way, many of them who served in the previous government.

Government Orders

We heard questions on the semantics of definitions of what accountability means. We heard one of the members say that this is a facade. It seems to me that the members across the way would not know what accountability is even if it came and bit them in the you-know-what, Mr. Speaker. It is surprising to me, especially after all these years of problems we have seen in this place, in regard to these simple measures. I recall when I was sitting in the opposition benches how frustrating it was when we were trying to get access to information on crown corporations.

● (1705)

The most incredible thing is it seems that today we are hearing many of the Liberals complaining about this particular provision. The only reason I can imagine that is happening is, as we know, in many of the crown corporations, many of the members, directors and others were appointed cronies and friends of the Liberal Party of the past. There was no real transparency in that process, so it does not surprise me today that in trying to open up that process and accountability to those particular crown corporations, something for which opposition members had been calling for years, there seems to be some sort of pressure coming from the Liberals not to allow that to happen. It begs the question of why they would want that, unless they are still trying to protect their friends in many of these positions across the width of these crown corporations.

We have heard over and over again of problems at Canada Post, at the Mint and other crown corporations regarding lack of accountability and the attitude of being entitled to their entitlements. We saw a number of other incredible stories over the last era of 13 years of mismanagement, which we hope to change by ushering in this new aspect of access to information that all members of this House should be welcoming.

I know that the members of the Canadian public would love to see how their taxpayers' dollars have been spent, especially in the areas of Liberal appointments of cronies over the years in many of those positions.

Another area that I remember defending passionately when I was in the opposition benches was strengthening the power of the Auditor General. Members may recall there was a time when the whole sponsorship scandal was out in the open and the Auditor General continued to find in department after department problems of mismanagement, money going missing and lack of accountability. At one point we even heard the Liberals, at the time they were in government, wanting to try to restrict and curb the powers of the Auditor General. I was shocked when that was happening. I could not believe it.

We have a number of checks and balances in the system that we are trying to strengthen, but Canadians would agree that the Auditor General's power should be one of the fiercest, and the resources required to do that job should be put in place by any government and by members of this House. It is in the interest of all our members here and the interest of Canadians to have that office treated with the respect and the resources it needs and deserves to do its job on behalf of Canadians. I do recall there was talk in the previous government of cutting that budget and restricting the powers. I cannot believe we even heard those kinds of things.

Canadians can be assured that is not the attitude of this Conservative government. We are going to make sure that Canadians know that their hard-earned tax dollars are spent wisely. The Auditor General needs to have the power to follow the money to make sure that it is spent wisely and properly.

This government is going to give new powers to the Auditor General to audit individuals and organizations that receive federal funding. This will help the Auditor General hold to account those who spend taxpayers' money.

We all think back to our constituencies and the people who are affected most by government decisions. I know that the people in Edmonton can look forward to an independent authority to find out where their money is being spent and that they will not need to take only our word for it, that there will be open and accessible information available for them.

One of the things that I know makes the previous members of the Liberal government a little nervous is the idea of changing the financing regulations. I will admit they made some changes in the last Parliament over the years to restrict some of that corporate funding, but quite frankly, they did not go far enough. We still see the effect of lobbyists and big money in the decisions made by the previous government. The new financing components in this bill we are proposing, by actually banning donations by corporations and big unions, give back the power to ordinary Canadians to be able to communicate to their government and be taken equally as seriously as the unfortunate culture that developed in the previous government of big money being able to control the agenda.

Our members are passionate about these measures we have been speaking about in this new government. We are excited to be able to deliver a new era of good government to Canadians.

● (1710)

We are excited to be able to work with Canadians to finally restore the confidence they want so much in their government. Hopefully we will usher in, as I mentioned, a new era for all Canadians to take part in their democracy and take their democracy back from the 13 years of mismanagement, corruption and unfortunate malaise.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member covered a broad range of topics that the bill covers.

One which I know is very important to the House and I know to the member is the whole aspect of whistleblower protection. I have carefully read the bill. I find that the reference to the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act is on page 96 of the bill, clause 121. It is only one clause long in this bill.

Would the member inform the House how Bill C-2 in fact does anything for whistleblowers? It is not here. I would like to know why it is not here.

Government Orders

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Mr. Speaker, I can understand why a Liberal member would like a lot more words and a lot more discussion in trying to give teeth back to something that I think is so important in protecting the ability for the public service and public servants to speak out when they see something that is wrong. It does not have to be a long and complicated procedure. Whether or not the member thinks that particular clause of the bill is long enough, the fact is it gives the teeth that are required for public servants to be able to do their job.

The men and women of the public service deliver important programs and services and make a real difference in the lives of Canadians every day. I do not think anyone would dispute that. That is why the federal accountability act's key components focus on providing real protection for whistleblowers. People who see problems in government need to know that they can speak up. Too often in the past, whistleblowers have been punished for standing up for the truth.

Our member for Avalon identified Mr. Cutler, one of those particular people who, unfortunately, was penalized for standing up for the truth.

Giving the public sector integrity commissioner the power to enforce the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act will do just that. I do not know how it can be made any clearer than that.

• (1715)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the member for Edmonton—Strathcona. It is true that he seems to be absolutely out of his mind ecstatic about the legislation that is before us. There are many elements of this mega-legislation of which there is widespread agreement, and there is no question about that.

A very important part of this process is there will be extensive committee examination, discussion, analysis and so on. Obviously there are some aspects of this legislation that are a real disappointment. I do not think anyone questions that members of this House, and I include very much the government party, focused a lot on the need to clean up government, to clear out the corruption and to try to rebuild public confidence. There are many elements of what is needed to do that in this legislation.

In terms of specifics, I would ask the member if he could briefly speak to some of the things that are either very much missing or just grotesquely inadequate. Would the member agree that at the committee level there needs to be some real consideration of the failure, for example, to include any spending limits or requirements for full disclosure for contests for party leadership? In some ways that is where it begins within a political party.

The fact is there is no legislation proposed to ban floor crossing. I know it is easy for government members to make jokes about how we want to be concerned about our members crossing to some other party. The reality is that this is a real concern when people vote for someone who then disappears the next day into another party. Would the member speak to a couple of those matters in the time available?

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Mr. Speaker, there is truth to what the member says. I do take a great level of pride and there is a level of ecstasy when we rise and speak in this place on behalf of people within our

ridings. I do take a great sense of pride when I do stand up and speak.

One of the things that our President of the Treasury Board and others have said today is that we would like to see this legislation move as quickly as possible into committee so that we can discuss any measures that members feel can help strengthen this momentous legislation. A lot of hard work has already gone into it. There has been a tremendous amount of work done by the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and the President of the Treasury Board.

Those areas that the member for Halifax has identified, spending limits and she mentioned another one as well, those things are fine to be brought forward in front of the committee. Let the committee talk about these and see how we can strengthen the legislation even further.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the basis of this so-called accountability bill rests on something that I will refer to as the big lie. It is the false premise that government is corrupt and cannot be trusted and somehow that Ottawa needs to be “cleaned up”. The Conservatives managed to successfully ride that false premise into government.

Indeed, the accountability bill has everything to do with political strategy and nothing to do with accountability. True accountability is being confused with conduct. I think the strategy of the Prime Minister is if we repeat accountability often enough, something that we all agree on, it sounds good and we confuse it with conduct, that somehow we can put a bill through that is simply going to be adopted by all parties, including the opposition because no one will have the courage to call it what it really is.

Justice Gomery said that the vast majority of elected officials in the House, in Parliament and in government are honest, hard-working, diligent individuals who carry out their duties. That is the truth of the matter.

The bill sounds good on the surface but has, as I said before, very little to do with true accountability. It has to do with conduct. It will cause gridlock. It will cause a series of ritual and expensive investigations into what takes place in Parliament and will not serve the public well at all. It will cost taxpayers money. It will draw down the ability of this place to work effectively in the interests of the public.

It is interesting that in this particular bill there is not a single definition of what accountability is. That is remarkable. What is accountability? Let me quote a national authority, a gentleman who used to work in the Auditor General's office, Mr. Henry McCandless. He is an expert in public accountability. He said that responsibility means the obligation to act; conduct is the manner of carrying out a responsibility; accountability means the obligation to explain how responsibilities are being carried out.

That is what accountability is. That is not listed anywhere in the bill because the so-called accountability bill has to do with conduct and not true accountability.

In plain common language, accountability is the obligation of persons to explain fully and fairly how they are carrying out their duties and responsibilities to the public.

Government Orders

It also requires a set of reporting requirements on performance and that too is absent from the bill. Does this make a difference? Does this misrepresentation of true accountability make a difference in how this place works in the interests of the public?

Members have spoken about the issue of trust. Indeed true accountability is intimately entwined with trust. Trust is a function of a government's account to its citizens. A government must account and explain to the public what it is doing and why it is doing it before it does it. There are sufficient performance and accountability measures on top of that.

If that occurred, if the bill could be crafted in such a way, then the government would be doing something that has not truly been done before. It would be putting forth a bill that dealt with true public accountability.

When citizens understand quite fully what a government is doing, then citizens can either support that government, can alter the actions of the government, or can defeat the government. That is the basis of true accountability and that is the basis of trust. If the government wants trust and wants the public to actually trust it in what it is doing, then it would pay heed to what true accountability is and would include that true public accountability in the essence of the bill.

The bill contains a series of auditors which will cause gridlock: the parliamentary budget officers, the procurement auditor, the director of public prosecutions, a whistleblower system that pays money to public servants and will cause fear and paranoia in our public service. It will cause gridlock in the system. All of those auditors imply that the current system is not working and that the government does not trust the current auditors.

• (1720)

With respect to the sponsorship issue, people broke the rules. Was there a problem with the rules? The Auditor General was very clear and said there was no problem with the rules. The rules were there and they were broken.

Right now our public service, indeed our government, is mired in a lengthy overweening sense of obligation with respect to procurement. It is too slow, too complex and too expensive. It needs to be streamlined. As defence minister, the current Leader of the Opposition did that very well.

The Prime Minister has introduced a bill that has nothing to do with accountability. He has actually broken the rules on accountability on a number of counts himself. For example, he muzzles his cabinet and his MPs. He restricts the ability of the press to do its job. He appointed an individual as Minister of Public Works and yet that minister does not sit in the House. That ministry is responsible for spending billions of dollars of the public's money. Shielding a minister of the Crown, who is responsible for spending billions of dollars of the public's money from questions in the House, so he cannot account to the public freely and openly is an egregious violation of true public accountability. Nothing in the bill says anything to that practice. That particular appointment shields that individual from questions in the House and the right of the public to know what is taking place within the Department of Public Works and the spending that occurs there.

With respect to the issue of funding, we restricted public funding quite significantly, \$5,000 from individual donations and \$1,000 from corporations. The bill says nothing about third party funding from special interest groups and this is critically important. Bill C-2 is a political bill as opposed to one in the interests of the public service and the public. The bill would actually restrict the ability of political parties to do their job and restrict the public's ability to have their wishes and their views expressed through the people they elect.

Can a corporation buy influence from a member of Parliament for \$1,000? I do not think so. Not at all. I have never been offered any money and I do not know anybody in the House, regardless of political stripe, who has been offered money. Could someone possibly gain influence by making a \$5,000 donation or a \$1,000 donation? That is what we implemented when we were in government. The government of today will not restrict third party funding that could have undue influence on governments or political parties. This is a critical absence in the bill.

This particular bill says nothing about true public accountability. It is going to put true public accountability back more than 20 years. This is a political bill, not a bill in the interests of the public. This bill is overweening and overkill and is going to damage public accountability.

I would beseech the government to listen to the comments that have been made here today and to listen to the true public accountability experts like Henry McCandless and others who are working or have worked in the Auditor General's Office or in academia. The government should put a bill forward that would truly deal with public accountability and in doing so, the government would be doing something that has not been done in 20 years. To say that Ottawa is corrupt and needs to be changed does a huge disservice to what we do as members of Parliament. It also does an enormous disservice to public servants.

• (1725)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it would seem that the member has now reversed his party's position. He has now come out in opposition to the accountability act. Clearly, the act runs contrary to the practices of the Liberal Party and I can understand why he would therefore want to oppose it. He wants business as usual to continue here in this place.

I want him to defend the remarks made by his colleague from Mississauga South who stood in the House and said there is one clause in the entire bill dealing with whistleblower protection. I have in fact page 123 all the way up to page 161. If the member could do his math, that is almost 40 pages of legislation dealing with whistleblower protection.

Let me be clear on what is included in these nearly 40 pages. It says that an independent tribunal of judges would be made available to whistleblowers who believe they have experienced a reprisal. That particular tribunal would have the authority to restore whistleblowers to their previous jobs, give them their back pay plus pain and suffering compensation. It would also have the power, independently, to punish or discipline executives or politicians who have bullied whistleblowers. It would remove cover-up clauses from the existing system. It would give legal representation to whistleblowers.

Government Orders

Has the Liberal Party not actually read the bill? Is it not aware that there are 40 pages of ironclad protection here for whistleblowers? What is wrong with that group over there?

• (1730)

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary can ask the member for Mississauga South himself if he wants an answer to that particular question. He still obviously does not get it. The government does not understand.

He gave a long dissertation, not about public accountability but about conduct. That is not the same as public accountability. If Conservatives truly want to engage in and produce more trust from the public into this great institution, if they want to repair the damage they did during this past election by falsely portraying Ottawa as a place that was corrupt and needed to be cleaned up, if they truly want to do that, then they must define public accountability in this bill for what it is: the responsibility of the government and senior public officials to tell the public what they are doing before they do it and ensure the performance requirements there are measured.

If they do that, then we will truly have a system of public accountability and not a system of gridlock and conduct, which is what this bill does.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech with great interest. One particular point where I will focus my attention is with regard to defending the idea of being bought for \$5,000 in terms of political donations. I personally do not see the downside of lowering donations to \$1,000 as most Canadians cannot spend that to begin with on political contributions. I think it brings a greater accountability because it evens the playing field between those who can actually contribute during a campaign with a \$5,000 limit to businesses.

It should be noted that there could actually be a chain of different businesses that accumulate those donations versus, for example, union donations that were capped at \$1,000 per union across the country. Locals could not do that, but franchises could donate \$1,000 under the previous Bill C-24.

I would like to hear from the hon. member on limiting the \$1,000. What do we have to lose by having a better balanced approach to contributions, where more Canadians could have quality in their donations to political parties?

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, the issue of donations by individuals and corporations does not have to do with accountability. It has to do with conduct. The so-called rationale for putting this through was whether one could actually buy influence. The essence and purpose behind it is the premise that influence can be bought and peddled because of moneys going to elected and unelected officials. That is supposedly how this is being portrayed to the public. The reality is that is not the case. We already have significant restrictions in place. Penalties and laws do exist. They are strong laws and some of the best—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great interest that I take this opportunity to speak to Bill C-2, the federal accountability act.

Today is not a proud moment in Canadian history for Canadian democracy. The fact that it has become necessary, within our parliamentary system, to bring forward the accountability act speaks volumes about the previous administration.

While the legislation is being brought forth in the name of the President of the Treasury Board, Canadians know that the Prime Minister has been the steering force in bringing accountability back to Parliament.

I congratulate the Prime Minister, the right hon. member for Calgary Southwest, on identifying for all Canadians the importance our party places on accountability in government and the priority we have placed on maintaining our democratic institutions.

As a measure of this importance, I share with my party the principle of accountability on a regular basis. I canvass the opinions of the people in my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke to seek their guidance and support as I represent their concerns to the Parliament of Canada.

The number one issue people in my riding have identified as being of prime importance is the issue of honesty in government. They recognize that government is complicated. However, if government is not honest in its undertakings on behalf of its citizens when every decision is made, it is not honest. It is wrong.

A strong house can only be built on a solid foundation. Confidence right now is at an all time low in our democratic institutions because of the actions of the last 13 years. This gradual deterioration did not happen overnight. It is instructive to quote from a speech in the 35th Parliament:

Mr. Speaker, this government has set high standards of integrity and probity for itself. I have made integrity a number one priority personally.

I have said it before, and I will say it again: Setting such standards for the holders of public office is essential in renewing and maintaining the faith of Canadians in their public institutions.

This is the case in particular of ministers who must remain above reproach at all times and in all of their activities, whether it be as ministers, members of Parliament or private citizens. That is the burden of public office, and one that we all gladly accept to bear.

This quote comes from the now disgraced former leader of the Liberal Party after being found out in the first of what would become an ever lengthening list of corruption and scandalous behaviour. These are hollow words from an administration that will forever be known in history for the sponsorship scandal.

Let us be clear. It was the activities of the Liberal Party that prompted the commission of inquiry into the sponsorship program and advertising activities that has led to Parliament debating the legislation now before us, the federal accountability act.

In the words of the fact finding report, from 1994 to 2003, the amount expended by the Government of Canada for special programs and sponsorships totalled \$332 million, of which 44.4% or \$147 million was spent on fees and commissions paid to communication and advertising agencies. These amounts do not include the salaries or costs of the public servants who worked on the sponsorship program, the cost of the numerous audits, and the investigations or the cost of the present commission of inquiry.

Government Orders

According to the Auditor General, from 1997 until August 31, 2001, the federal government ran the sponsorship program in a way that showed little regard for Parliament, the Financial Administration Act, contracting rules and regulations, transparency and value for money. Parliament was not informed of the program's objectives or results it achieved. It was misinformed as to how the program was being managed.

Those responsible for managing the program broke the government's own rules in the way they selected communications agencies and awarded contracts to them. Some sponsorship funds were transferred to crown corporations using unusual methods that appear designed to provide significant commissions to communications agencies while hiding the source of funds and the true nature of the transactions.

Further, the Auditor General stated that documentation was very poor and there was little evidence of analysis to support expenditure of more than \$250 million. Over \$100 million of that was paid to communications agencies as production fees and commissions.

• (1735)

While the Auditor General identified \$250 million defrauded from taxpayers, Justice Gomery put the figure at \$332 million for this program alone. Oversight mechanisms and essential controls at Public Works and Government Services Canada failed to detect, prevent or report violations.

While the Auditor General was conducting her special audit, more details slowly emerged of massive, systemic looting of the public treasury by certain members of the Liberal Party. The commission of inquiry found a complex web of financial transactions among Public Works and Government Services Canada, crown corporations and communications agencies involving kickbacks and illegal contributions to a political party in the context of the sponsorship program; five agencies that received large sponsorship contracts regularly channelled money, illegitimate donations or unrecorded cash gifts to political fundraising activities in Quebec with the expectation of receiving lucrative government contracts; certain agencies carried individuals on their payrolls who were, in effect, working on Liberal Party matters; the existence of a culture of entitlement among political officials involved with the sponsorship program, including the receipt of monetary and non-monetary benefits; and the refusal of ministers, senior officials in the Prime Minister's Office and public servants to acknowledge their responsibility for the problems of mismanagement that occurred.

The fact that only certain persons or organizations are mentioned does not absolve the others assigned blame by Justice Gomery. By limiting the scope of the Gomery inquiry, the Liberal Party prevented Justice John Gomery from investigating chapter 5 of the Auditor General's report. That chapter criticized the Liberal Party for using taxpayer dollars to conduct polls for partisan political purposes with questionable value to Canadian taxpayers. By preventing Justice John Gomery from including the entire November 2003 report of the Auditor General from being investigated, suspect practices were allowed to continue in the Liberal government.

According to the commission report, the method of financing the Liberal Party using kickbacks from persons deriving benefits from the sponsorship program is described in the fact finding report of the

Gomery commission. The persons who accepted contributions, cash and other improper benefits have brought dishonour upon themselves and their political party. Liberal Party members deserve to be blamed for their misconduct. They disregarded the relevant laws governing donations to political parties. The Liberal Party as an institution cannot escape responsibility for the misconduct of its officers and representatives.

According to Justice Gomery:

The Commission has heard abundant evidence of irregularities and improprieties committed by the five communication and advertising agencies specifically identified... including systematic overbilling, failure to fulfil obligations, charging for work not performed, conflicts of interest, assigning work to subcontractors without justification and without competitive bids, and other very dubious contracting practices.

It became evident to a majority of Canadians that the only way justice could be served and those guilty brought to justice was for a change in government to occur. Canadians voted for that change. While the federal accountability act seeks to accomplish many things, strengthening the role of the Ethics Commissioner and establishing clear judicial qualifications for that role is imperative for the proper functioning of that office.

If the public is to be allowed an opportunity to bring forward complaints through a member of Parliament, there must be confidence that complaints that are frivolous, vexatious or made in bad faith are rejected. By requiring members of Parliament to attest by oath or affirmation that a public complaint they were sponsoring is well-founded, is the one check on potential abuse of this process. The commissioner must then be suitably well versed in the law with a judicial or quasi-judicial background in order to uphold the integrity of the Office of the Ethics Commissioner for that office to maintain respect in the job it is required to do.

• (1740)

Unfortunately, this has not been evident as the position was established under the previous government. The fact that rulings have been inconsistent with the member's code suggests that this might be the most important change of all to rebuild public confidence in our democratic institutions.

If anything tells us that history repeats itself it would be in the comments of the member for Calgary Southwest in the 35th Parliament to sum up that first session and how those observations could have been made at the conclusion of the 38th Parliament of Canada.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals were in power they reduced the contributions from corporations, which could have been millions of dollars or whatever, there were no particular limits, down to \$1,000 and it was the same for unions. For private people they reduced them down from the same unlimited amount to \$5,000.

Does the member think that increased accountability is good public management?

• (1745)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the Liberals broke all the rules so we are making them tighter.

Government Orders

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the point the member and many other Conservatives raised. It is important to end the culture of entitlement that existed under the Liberal Party in Ottawa. That is why Canadians voted, certainly for more Conservative MPs in this new Parliament, but also voted for more New Democratic Party MPs as well. They wanted to see things change.

The member and a number of other Conservative MPs have talked about the issue of democracy and respecting democracy. Fundamentally what we saw after the election on January 23 in a riding that neighbours mine, Vancouver Kingsway, was a betrayal of democracy. A candidate for the Liberal Party, who promised to be the worst enemy of the Prime Minister, ran on that banner, was elected as a Liberal in Vancouver Kingsway and then negotiated a deal to cross the floor, get the salary and perks that come with being a minister, and become a minister in the Conservative government.

Fundamentally, if democracy is to be respected, that individual should submit that change, that broken promise that he made during the election campaign, to the voters in his riding. However there is nothing in the bill that deals with floor crossing, something that the vast majority of Canadians oppose. They want to see democratic accountability. They want to know that when they vote their vote counts. They want to know that when they cast their vote for a candidate of whatever party that the person is beholden to them as a candidate for that party. If that person decides to change they should submit to a byelection.

Why are there no provisions in the accountability act to stop floor crossing?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, those are very interesting observations and we will be taking them under advisement. Further to that, the member for Calgary Southwest in the 35th Parliament, to sum up that first session, stated that:

Mr. Speaker, as this session comes to an end the great imperative for the Prime Minister is to re-establish the ethical standards of his government.

When the government came to power it promised to make government integrity its number one priority but 20 months later that red book promise is in tatters with ministers flouting the federal code of ethics, the ethics counsellor reduced to impotence, and the Prime Minister defending party loyalty and discipline over the principles of democracy and ethics.

Will the Prime Minister send a clear signal to Canadians today that unethical behaviour in government will not be tolerated? Will he can tainted ministers...?

In the past few weeks, however, we have seen nothing from the government but a growing disregard for the democratic process: time allocation and closure, Liberal backbenchers being punished for voting the wishes of their constituents, and cabinet ministers who break conflict of interest guidelines being defended by the Prime Minister himself.

It is my sincere wish, on behalf of the people of Canada, that with the federal accountability act respect in our democratic institutions will be restored.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her speech. The Bloc Québécois supports the accountability act in principle.

The Bloc is happy to see that the bill includes a number of proposals that were made.

This afternoon, a number of members who took the floor seemed to be saying that we should move quickly and pass the bill at this stage, before the summer holidays. The Conservative government seems to be in a hurry to pass this bill.

Can the member appreciate that we need to take the time to examine the bill in detail? It is an important bill that affects a number of acts.

• (1750)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, if the Bloc Québécois is sincere about supporting the accountability act, why will it not guarantee or promise us that we can get this act through before the summer? The Canadian people want this government cleaned up. They want the ethics package through. It is more important to finish this than going to the cottage. Let us get it done before we start fishing.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this second reading debate, but I am sorry we are here at second reading. I wish the bill had gone to committee before second reading, just as Bill C-11 did in the last Parliament, which was the whistleblower bill.

For some of the members who may not be familiar with the process, if a bill is tabled in the House and we have second reading debate right then, we have a vote on it to give it approval in principle, once the debate is completed and we have heard all members who wish to speak on a preliminary basis. What it does at that point is lock in the general principles of the bill, and those will be untouchable.

The bill then goes to committee where we receive witnesses. The witnesses represent all the stakeholders who will be touched by the legislation and who have input. They may be people within the public service or people who are not in the public service who have a vested interest in the matter. The experts will comment on the practical implementation of the various aspects of the bill.

In my experience, when members of Parliament get a bill after first reading, they do not have a lot of time to do the research necessary on an average bill, and this is a very substantial bill. It is long and it touches a large number of acts, as members have said. It means that the speeches we are hearing today, unfortunately, are speeches about generalities, about titles, about the general purpose of the bill, but not about the substance of it and the operational efficacy of it.

We are talking about high points. We are not talking about the functionality of the bill and the fact that it relates to a large number of bills. We will be touching the Financial Administration Act, the whistleblower bill, which was passed in the last Parliament, the Access to Information Act, the Canada Elections Act and a large number of other bills.

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We cannot read the bill in isolation. It does not tell us what we need to know because we need to have the bills that will be amended by this bill in order to see the context in which most of the amendments in here will be made.

The point is that we are going through a process now where we are not really very productive. We are basically laying out some of the points of interest or concern to the various members.

The bill will go to committee. The committee will go through all this process and get a chance to consider it and make committee stage amendments. However, because the bill has passed at second reading, there is a restriction on the extent to which they can amend the bill. They can fine-tune it, but if it has been voted on at second reading, there is a significant restriction on the committee's ability to make changes to the bill, which has been approved in principle in the House.

The alternative would have been to refer the bill to the committee before second reading, before the vote at second reading. That would then empower the committee with the full input of all appropriate witnesses who are expert in terms of various aspects of the law, whether it be the Privacy Act, or the Access to Information Act, or all these other acts with which not every member of Parliament is totally familiar. They can talk generally but not with certitude on the implications of a change proposed in Bill C-2 with regard to one of these acts.

That process, which was used very successfully in the last Parliament, is an opportunity to ensure that the bill is the best bill possible. It is the responsibility of members of Parliament to make good decisions, responsible decisions and informed decisions, having the expert testimony to give us the insights into what the implications of making this change or that change might be. This bill would have had an opportunity to be a much better bill and the confidence level of members of Parliament would have been much higher had they had the opportunity to hear the experts first so they could then start digging into those areas where there clearly was no consensus of the witnesses or maybe among the members.

I wanted to raise that because I think it is an opportunity missed.

•(1755)

I have heard often, and it concerns me a little, that there is a timetable for the bill. It has to be passed before we rise for the summer.

Let me tell the House what happened with Bill C-11, the whistleblowing bill, in the last Parliament, and it was much smaller than this bill. It was introduced in October 2004. It was referred to committee. The committee got it on October 18, 2004, just a couple of weeks later. A little less than a year later, the committee finally reported the bill back to this place. We had report stage and third reading. After that, it went to the Senate and it passed, with the support of all parties, and received royal assent.

It is law in Canada but it is not in force because the bill still has not been proclaimed.

However, we can make amendments to a bill that is not in force. That is why I mentioned to one of the other speakers that, in my opinion, there really is only one new clause to the whistleblower

protection. Almost all of the 40 pages of matters relating to Bill 11, which is the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, are referred to in Bill C-2, the federal accountability act, which in part incorporates a number of amendments.

All of the substantive provisions of providing protection for whistleblowers were in Bill C-11 in the last Parliament. That was passed by Parliament and unanimously supported by all parties. It was the best job we could do with the best advice we had from the broad range and almost a full years of hearing witnesses and negotiating for changes. Our committee did an excellent job of ensuring that we had the best possible bill for Parliament to consider. That is why it passed so quickly after it came back to the House.

There are a couple of other things about the bill. I do not like the idea that the federal accountability act has to meet a certain timetable because it smacks of perhaps a political timetable as opposed to a legislative timetable.

How can we say today that we need to have this bill done by this time when we have not even heard any witnesses? We have no idea whether there are any problems to deal with. We have no idea how long it will take for members to do the necessary work to consider and propose amendments, to debate them and discuss them. How long will it take after it comes back from committee to do report stage motions? Every member of Parliament who is not on that committee, who did not have an opportunity to participate in committee stage amendments, will have an opportunity to propose other amendments. Then we will have third reading and then it will go to the Senate.

There are probably only about 35 or 40 sitting days between now and the scheduled June 23. It is somewhat unrealistic to suggest that parliamentarians should give up their responsibilities and say, "Let's just pass this". That is not the way it happens. I certainly would not want to vote for a bill on which we had not done the work.

Therefore, there is a sense that perhaps we should be a little more realistic about what we can do to ensure that we get a good bill. In general I think there is support for the whole aspect of improving the accountability, but it is really important that we do the job well, that we make good laws and wise decisions. It takes whatever time that it takes based on the experience we have as we go through the legislative process.

I support the bill in principle, but I very much look forward to having the input from the public service and those outside the public service so we can make Bill C-2 a very good bill.

Government Orders

●(1800)

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand much of what my colleague is saying, although he seems to be suggesting that we need to go on and on with respect to debate on the bill in committee. The member has not been taken by surprise. There was a scandal. There was a lengthy commission of Justice Gomery where all kinds of problems were released. I cannot believe that the member did not go around his riding and discovered that people had lost faith in our system. This is all about that. It was a priority that we listed in our election platform. Details were given as to what we were going to do. In 1995, the now Prime Minister presented a large package, which I assume all members of the House have seen, setting forth all kinds of things that this bill has been listed to do.

Having gone through the Gomery Commission, a very lengthy commission, even a couple of trials where no one has gone to jail, and an election where this was a large part of the platform, why is the member suggesting that there should be a delay to these proceedings?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I do not believe I suggested there be a delay to anything. If the member would reflect, it was basically that Parliament have the opportunity to go through the legislative process, as we always have.

If the member felt that we should move forward on this, having referred the bill before second reading to the committee would have saved us all this time we have been spending talking about generalities without the benefit of expert testimony.

The member will know that if we look at a typical bill, we go through second reading, a vote and a referral to committee. Then we have to get the witnesses called in and go through all that process, and who knows how long that takes. I assume the committee will not unreasonably turn down any witnesses who want to appear and have input. That is important. On top of that, it is important that the process happen naturally and that the members feel comfortable that they are informed and prepared to vote on a particular bill.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member commented on the choices of sending a bill to committee before second reading or after second reading. We are sending this to a legislative committee, which I think it is a good way to go. It seems to me that it can go either way. I think he raised an interesting point.

If I go back to the years I was here before 1993, all bills were debated at second reading and passed at that stage. That meant the House had given its approval in principle. It seems to me that is the usual way to go.

I am never quite sure of the strategy of referring a bill prior to second reading. I think the hon. member said in his comments to a member of the New Democratic Party that it may be because it gives greater latitude to the committee. In any case, the usual procedure is to send a bill to committee after the House has pronounced on it at second reading. I appreciate the hon. member comments. It is one we can go either way on it.

●(1805)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the hon. House leader of the government is quite right. It is not a thing I would propose for all legislation. In this regard, though, we are touching a number of important acts. If we have a bill, which is omnibus in nature, and we are making consequential amendments to so many other acts, it is going to take a long time to wrap our minds around each of the elements. Once we do this, that is fine. However, to appreciate the implications of those amendments, we need help. By referring it before second reading, it allows the members to have input from witnesses who will then give members the information they need to make a better decision with regard to second reading voting.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak in the House of Commons to Bill C-2, the accountability act. It is very apparent that 13 years of Liberal problems in the House have created the urgency or the need that is seizing this 39th session of Parliament to draft, right away, some sort of legislation and procedures to deal with cleaning up politics at a federal level in Canada.

It is important to note that Canadians have become a little cynical about their democracy. They have become concerned about its future, for not only themselves but for their children. This is one of the reasons that we need to address some of the measures in the accountability act and why the New Democratic Party is actually supporting it. We have suggestions and we will have some amendments to the legislation. We believe it could use some improvement. However, we will be making sure that we are going to be part of a process to restore faith in Canadian democracy. That does not just happen overnight.

I am not going to spend a lot of time on this, but it is important to acknowledge that prior to the 13 years of Liberal involvement there was the Mulroney era, where we certainly had enough public venting and concern about the course of democracy because of the actions of the PMO, his office, and the numerous scandals that took place on that watch.

That is what led to the transition to the Liberal government of yesterday, which had 13 years to clean up and to create more accountability, but did not do so. Hence, once again the public voted for a shift in government. This time, I am hoping that all members of the House can bring in some new procedures and reforms and can offer substance to real and significant change to gain back the Canadian democracy that people seem to want and yearn for in the House, in this chamber and this country.

I point to the quite significant work of the member for Ottawa in the previous Parliament, formerly the member for Oshawa, now retired, Mr. Ed Broadbent. He put forth a significant contribution to get us here today. Ed's ethics package, which is how we affectionately refer to it, offered a series of principles to change Canadian democracy. It was a road map, in fact the first one introduced in this chamber in modern times. It was done before the Conservative Party started to table a package. It was one where he worked cooperatively with many experts. He discussed it with the public to get vetted information.

Government Orders

Unfortunately, Bill C-2 does not live up to all of what Ed worked toward. There are various gaps in this legislation, but at the same time we recognize that this is a step forward. Hence, New Democrats will be working at the committee level to make sure that we actually get some reforms to the legislation and we will be working for it to be passed. There seems to be a threat by the government about passing it in a shorter window of time, which is very important to the government, but I would suggest that we will do everything in our corner of the House to make sure we pass this responsibly and as expeditiously as possible.

I know that members of the Liberal Party are going to have some difficulty with this legislation, but I invite them to find elements they can support because, frankly, I think it is part of what is necessary for them to admit: that they are partly and quite significantly responsible for the decline in the credibility of Parliament that we have seen happen.

One of the things I want to talk about are some of the changes we have happening here, but at the same time, we are missing a few strong points. It is also a contradiction, because it was campaigned on strongly in terms of ethics by the Conservative Party of Canada and its leader, and at the same time we have witnessed certain elements of hypocrisy or not following through.

One element I will touch on to start with is one that is very important to British Columbians and I think all Canadians: the crossing of the floor by the member for Vancouver Kingsway, who quite frankly literally could not wait to take his lawn signs out of the ground before crossing the floor from the Liberal Party to the Conservative Party.

I worked with him when he was formerly the minister of industry for the last two years in the previous session of Parliament. I am hoping that since the public comments were from members of the Conservative Party, they find his ideology and sense of delivering policy in tune with their actual mandate, which shows that the two main parties in the House at the moment really are not that far apart. Second, I hope the Conservatives are going to actually act on some of the things he promised as a Liberal but that the Liberals never delivered.

● (1810)

The previous Liberal minister promised in committee on two separate occasions in November that he would bring in an auto policy but he never delivered. The Conservative government now has that member in cabinet because they like his ideas and his policies. If that is the case, let us see his auto policy. If a member crosses the floor to another party then that party should take his baggage as well, which is that he did not act on the auto file despite promising publicly, in the chamber and in committee, that he would take action. He has yet to deliver an auto policy to an industry that is suffering. His crossing the floor has violated the accountability bill because banning floor crossing is not in the legislation.

I would point out that other governments are banning floor crossing. The Manitoba government of Gary Doer has enacted legislation. Part of accountability is not only conflict of interest or the actual benefit one gets, it is the perception of that to the public that erodes things. When a member crosses the floor to become a cabinet minister, receives an increase in salary, a driver, expenses,

power and influence, all of these things leave a mark on all of us as members of the House. We could basically sell ourselves for another option that would benefit us.

Ed Broadbent's idea of banning floor crossing was a significant contribution to Canadian politics because it gave people options. When members cross the floor to join another party they are not punished. If they decide to sit as an independent I have no problem with them not being forced to go back to the electorate. We have to remember that every voice in this chamber counts, no matter what party one belongs to, even an independent. The value of our democracy is that the people who occupy the seats here are the voices of our constituents who work day in and day out to have influence.

The member could have chosen to sit as an independent. The government could have told him to sit as an independent and then run for the party when he felt it was necessary. He could have voted with the government at any time and could have done speaking engagements in terms of the work of the House of Commons and in terms of private members' business. None of that would have been hampered by the principled position that Ed Broadbent had advocated.

The other option the member had was to go back to the electorate for a byelection. This would have given the people in his riding an opportunity for choice. His constituents could have let him know whether they minded him switching parties or not. They would be able to listen to his arguments as well as the arguments put forward by other candidates in a campaign. However that is not what is being done and that is a serious flaw in the bill and it has to be fixed.

As New Democrats we would like to see fixed election dates, which was introduced by Ed Broadbent. This is an important element of accountability. It would stop a government from playing around with election dates just because polling, internal resources or other circumstances make it favourable. Fixed election dates would bring patterns, predictability, accountability and, more important, stability. We do not have the element when we have someone crafting the date to their own advantage. We saw that with the previous administration. Before this administration is dissolved I would suggest that it bring this to fruition as other provincial governments and other democracies have done.

● (1815)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I actually believe that fixed election dates are a good idea for the reasons mentioned by the hon. member. We should not have this wild card situation where the prerogative is strictly in the hands of the prime minister to call an election at his or her advantage. Much can be said about fixed election dates.

Government Orders

We have seen a couple of examples now in Canada. Ontario and British Columbia have moved to fixed dates but at the same time they are careful to protect the prerogatives of the provincial lieutenant governor. Any action by the federal government would protect the prerogatives of the Governor General to dissolve Parliament. I suppose those of us in a minority Parliament might like to see it go for the whole four or five years but that is another matter. Preserving the prerogative of the Governor General would have to be a part of this. There is much to be said about fixed election dates and I am glad the member raised the issue.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I am encouraged by the words of my colleague, the House leader for the Conservative Party. It is important, not only because it affects things in terms of how people can predict and we could have campaigns that do not overlap with other jurisdictions. I am quite concerned about the economic ramifications, as we have investment decisions as well as a number of different budgetary items that could actually be turned over because a government decides to pull the plug earlier, or because there is some type of game being played that then changes things quite dramatically.

I would suggest that in the interim, if we are not ready to go to the first step, we could introduce types of windows or opportunities and limit when the PMO actually in a sense creates non-confidence. Then Canadians and parliamentarians could understand exactly how and when elections can be created on other than a personal whim.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have just a quick question. I do appreciate the comments of my hon. colleague. On his comments relating to floor crossing and how that should be prohibited and so on, I understand that. In fact, many parliamentarians do have some sympathy for that point of view.

I wonder what the member's take might be on a possible scenario, a scenario that actually was demonstrated in his own party in the past Parliament. What does he think about the situation in which a member of Parliament wants to vote with his constituents on a particular issue but that would go against his party's policy? It happened with one of his party's members. If that member then got expelled from the caucus for that action, and if, let us say, it happened at the beginning of one of these fixed term, four-year Parliaments, what is supposed to happen to that member? Does the member sit in limbo for three and a half years, not having a caucus to sit in because he or she is not allowed to cross the floor to another one? I wonder what the solution to that might be.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage my colleague to actually get the facts correct with regard to that case. There was an individual who, because of our convention, voted with party wishes in the constituency and was not expelled from our caucus. The member sat as a New Democrat for the continuation of Parliament and then subsequently lost her nomination. She is a very close personal friend of mine. I actually received encouragement from her because of her work as transportation critic, a role she held with the party. The reality is that this never happened in that context or form.

It is very interesting to hear that type of misinformation, because it is not the truth. The truth of the matter is that the individual lost a nomination. The individual sat in this chamber as a New Democrat and with caucus. I would suggest, once again, that everyone in the

House has the decision to vote with his or her conscience and probably does so every day, and we encourage all members to do so.

• (1820)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be taking part in the debate about the Federal Accountability Act.

[*English*]

On January 23, Canadians from coast to coast voted for a new Conservative government. They did this for several reasons. They wanted change because they were tired of scandals, mismanagement of their hard-earned tax dollars and of government not delivering on its promises. They voted for a new government which would replace a culture of entitlement with one of accountability.

I cannot help noting the release a week or so ago of the report by the arbitrator, retired Justice Adams, about Mr. Dingwall's case. The government of the day said in this place that his leaving his post at the Mint was voluntary. The independent arbitrator, the retired justice, said in his report that it was clearly involuntary.

It is the notion of being entitled to one's entitlements that Canadians want changed. They want a government that will now put the interests of the country ahead of the interests of a privileged few. This is an exciting chapter in our country's history. Canada's Conservative government is turning over a new leaf. We trust in the Canadian people and our goal is that Canadians will once again trust in their federal government.

Our government has promised to deliver on five key priorities: reducing the GST from 7% to 6% and then to 5% over the course of our mandate, and I look forward to delivering the budget on Tuesday in this place; cracking down on gun, gang and drug crime; giving parents a choice in child care with the \$1,200 allowance, and by providing tax credits to employers who cover the full cost of creating child care spaces; working with the provinces and territories to establish a patient wait times guarantee in health care; and restoring trust and accountability to government with this bill, the federal accountability act.

Accountability is the foundation on which Canada's system of responsible government rests. An accountable government assures Parliament and Canadians that their government is using public resources efficiently, effectively and honestly. It also promotes ethical practices, since actions undertaken by the government must be motivated by the public interest and carried out in accordance with legislation and policy.

Accountability means that those who manage public resources must be prepared to report openly on results achieved. A high degree of transparency makes government more accountable and is vital to the effective and meaningful participation of citizens and organizations in developing sound public policy.

[*Translation*]

Canadians expect politicians and public servants to adhere to the highest ethical standards.

Government Orders

[English]

Recent political scandals, notably those concerning government sponsorship and advertising activities, have contributed to a further erosion of Canadians' trust and confidence in their government. They have brought issues of accountability, transparency and integrity to the forefront of public discussion and debate.

On November 4, 2005 when he first introduced the federal accountability act to Canadians as leader of the official opposition, the Prime Minister gave his word that if elected, our first priority would be to clean up government by introducing and passing the act. The Prime Minister committed that this act would be the first piece of legislation presented to the Parliament of Canada, which it is.

On April 11 the President of the Treasury Board did just that. He tabled Canada's first federal accountability act, the toughest anti-corruption legislation in Canadian history.

With this act the government is creating a new culture of accountability that will forever change the way business is done in Ottawa. We are holding government to a new standard never contemplated before. We will restore the principle that government should serve the public interest of all Canadians, not the personal interest of its members, nor the political interests of the party in power.

We will also restore Canadians' faith in our public institutions by making them more accountable and effective. The federal accountability act will enable Canadians to once again have faith in the integrity of the political process. With this legislation, our government will tighten the laws around political financing and lobbying.

We will ensure government is more accountable by eliminating the undue influence of big money donors, banning large personal and corporate donations to political parties, toughening the rules surrounding government lobbying, providing real protection to whistleblowers, ensuring government contracting is proper, fair and open, improving access to information, making the federal government more transparent and accountable by increasing the power of independent officers of Parliament, such as the Auditor General, and ensuring truth in budgeting.

Every day, Canadians in my riding of Whitby—Oshawa and across this country leave their homes and their families to go to work and earn a living. They work hard and they work long so that they can provide not only for themselves, but also for the people they love and who depend on them. The government is obligated to treat the tax dollars from hard-working Canadians with respect, to manage their money prudently and to give its citizens the opportunity to see where it is being invested.

●(1825)

[Translation]

The money that the government spends and manages does not belong to the government, but to Canadian taxpayers, who work hard to earn that money.

[English]

Most of my hon. colleagues are likely aware that under the previous government, federal spending jumped by almost 15% in one year. That is more than six times the rate of inflation. As the Prime Minister concluded, that kind of spending is simply unsustainable. We must do a better job of controlling government spending and making every dollar count.

We must also do a better job of budgeting and forecasting. Canadians deserve to know the true state of their economy and to live within a budget which is based on accurate, open and honest figures. We must put an end once and for all to the previous government's habit of getting it wrong. Governments cannot be held to account if Parliament and Canadians do not know the real state of public finances.

For example, in the spring of 2004, the Liberal government told Canadians that the 2003-04 surplus would be only \$1.9 billion. It was in fact \$9.1 billion. As the Prime Minister likes to say, it was a case of fiscal dyslexia. In the 2005 budget, the Liberal government estimated the 2005-06 surplus to be \$4 billion. In the economic update only nine months later, the estimate had ballooned to \$13.4 billion.

The International Monetary Fund has pointed out that the Liberal government consistently underestimated its budget surpluses for the past 10 years and suggested that Canada is the only country that shows such consistent errors. The IMF stated that Canada's federal government was the only one among the group of 11 countries studied, including all of our sister and brother countries in the G-7, that both underestimated revenues and overestimated spending every year since 1995. This cannot continue.

That is why with the federal accountability act we will expand the mandate and resources of the non-partisan Library of Parliament by establishing within it the first ever position of parliamentary budget officer. The officer will have the mandate to provide analysis to the Senate and the House of Commons concerning the state of the nation's finances and trends in the national economy, to undertake economic and fiscal research for the Standing Committee on Finance, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Senate Standing Committee on National Finance on the request of these committees, and estimate the cost of proposals currently or prospectively under consideration in either House when asked to do so by a member, a committee of the Senate or House of Commons, or a committee of both Houses. As well, instead of providing fiscal forecast updates once each fall, our government will provide them quarterly.

These measures will increase transparency in the government's fiscal planning framework and enable Parliament to better hold government to account. Our purpose, our commitment in all of this, is to make government more accountable, disciplined and effective. I look forward to the budget speech on Tuesday when I hope I can assist in moving forward that agenda of accountability, discipline and effective government.

●(1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The minister will have some time for questions and comments the next time this bill comes up for debate.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

(The House adjourned at 6:30 p.m.)

It being 6:31 p.m., the House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow, pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

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