



CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, May 15, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 15, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

• (1005)

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, please. The Chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt and I will hear from him now.

PRIVILEGE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under the stewardship of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, her department has engaged in placing advertising in numerous newspapers praising the virtues of the changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

Unfortunately, the changes the ads are praising are contained in part 6 of Bill C-50, which is presently being studied in the Standing Committees on Finance and Citizenship and Immigration. Bill C-50 has not yet passed this House.

Another problem is that the moneys being used to pay for these ads have not been approved by the House. The moneys are contained in Bill C-50.

This blatant disregard of parliamentary procedure shows the complete contempt for this House on the part of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking you to rule on this matter and, should you rule in my favour, I am willing to move a motion to have the matter referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The Speaker: I have to advise the House that I have received two notices in respect of this matter. I think the other one will be raised later today so I will defer any ruling until I have heard other submissions, and, of course, there may be a response in due course as well.

We will proceed with routine proceedings.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(b) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to seven petitions.

* * *

FIRST NATIONS AGREEMENTS

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to subsection 20(5) of the RCMP Act, it is my pleasure to table, in both official languages, 20 Royal Canadian Mounted Police First Nations Community Police Service agreements for first nations communities in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

These tripartite agreements, totalling over \$21.3 million in funding, are negotiated among the Government of Canada, the provinces and the first nations under the first nations policing program.

These agreements send a clear message that the Government of Canada is committed to making communities safer and working in collaboration with the provinces as well as first nations communities.

* * *

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-548, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act (understanding the official languages — judges of the Supreme Court of Canada).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Etobicoke Centre for seconding this bill. The Official Languages Commissioner, Graham Fraser, said that the highest court of the land must be composed of bilingual judges in order to reflect our values and our Canadian identity as a bilingual and bilingual country. I would add that legal skills must include linguistic skills, especially since this court represents a last resort.

Routine Proceedings

I propose an amendment to the Official Languages Act. Section 16 (1) of the act sets out the requirements concerning the understanding of both official languages for every federal court, with the exception of the Supreme Court. I propose that this exception be removed, so that the highest court of the land truly reflects our bilingual and bicultural values and identity.

Translation is not enough, because as members know, there is parallel drafting. Judges must grasp legal nuances in both English and French. I urge the House to vote in favour of this bill.

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

* * *

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move that the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Status of Women presented on Monday, February 25, 2008, be concurred in.

I am especially proud to speak to this motion today because we have been trying to get the current government to find solutions to this recurring and difficult issue.

I would like to read part of the report to the House. It states:

It requests that the Minister for the Status of Women and the Minister for Indian Affairs:

- increase recurrent core funding for aboriginal women's shelters, as is already the case for shelters in Quebec;
- put a stop to the delays in the evaluation of aboriginal women's shelters, scheduled for March.

I represent the riding of Churchill, which is located in Manitoba, and I have dozens of first nations in my riding that are represented by a number of political organizations, one of which is a northern political organization referred to as MKO, a second political organization called the Southern Chiefs' Organization, and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

I mentioned those organizations because a lot of critical work has been done on this issue in conjunction with first nations political organizations and first nations women's councils within those political organizations. This is a key point in this discussion because one of the discussions we are having with the current government is on an issue that is specific to first nations women, which is the issue of matrimonial real property.

Earlier this week, the government introduced Bill C-47 dealing with the issue of matrimonial real property. The reason it is important for Canadians to understand why all three opposition parties want the bill to go to committee for further discussion and to hear from witnesses is that there was a process in place on that bill. The current government engaged in a process with the Assembly of First Nations Women's Council and the Native Women's Association of Canada and, as we all know, the Assembly of First Nations represents first nations all across the country.

I would like to add that it is often inferred that the Assembly of First Nations is a male organization that is made up of men who represent women. However, the Assembly of First Nations and the first nations women's council are very proud of the fact that they

have a high representation of women in politics and, in fact, a greater representation of women in politics than here in the House. There are over 120 women chiefs in Canada who feel that their voices are vital and that there is an equitable relationship at that political table.

It would be great if we could work with a government that respects those voices, as we saw in the process for the creation of the matrimonial real property legislation. The government communicated with first nations women and hired a fine representative, Wendy Grant-John, as the ministerial representative to undertake dialogue sessions across this country. It was encouraging because first nations women felt that they were participating in the process, which is what the House called for.

First nations women and aboriginal women across the country have called for development on this matter for 25 years. Since Bill C-31 in the mid-eighties, we have seen that first nations women and aboriginal women in Canada have felt it was critical that their voices be heard on these issues. We cannot have bodies making laws and policies without their input and participation because it will not work. We saw that with Bill C-31 and we see the impact of that today as that case moves to the Supreme Court of Canada.

● (1010)

It is now more than 20 years later and we do not want to be doing that any more. The role of parliamentarians is to represent Canadians and my role, as the member for Churchill, is to represent my constituents and ensure we engage Canadians in a process to responsibly make legislation.

I will go back to the process in which first nations women and aboriginal women across the country were encouraged by the process of developing MRP legislation. A comprehensive report was written by the ministerial representative and it had many recommendations. Lo and behold, the legislation was created without any participation by the Native Women's Association of Canada or the Assembly of First Nations Women's Council. The legislation was introduced and a big press release went out from the federal government but neither of those organizations were informed.

It is discouraging and disappointing that the legislation does not take into account the numerous recommendations that were made. I think that is sort of the fundamental dialogue that has been happening in many of the departments.

Although we were encouraged by the process in the beginning, we could have been looking to other patterns from the federal government that might have indicated to us that we were being too hopeful.

Routine Proceedings

On the issue of Status of Women Canada, it has been very clear from the time the Conservatives took power that there were serious concerns from the opposition parties and from women across this country because one of the initial steps the government took was to cut \$5 million from Status of Women Canada. The government referred to that as an effective savings exercise. I think the former president of the treasury board, now the Minister of the Environment, used the crass term "trimming the fat".

There still are great inequities for all Canadian women. In fact, the women in this caucus have made a commitment to undertake a gender equity study. We want to commit ourselves and continue to put pressure on the government toward women's equity. We know, after decades of discussion around women's issues, that Canadian women still only earn 70% of what men earn in this country.

When I talk about Canadian women, we need to be cognizant of the inequities. We have a gender inequity to begin with. What has happened to aboriginal women in this country has no comparison. Aboriginal women fall far below what non-aboriginal women have in terms of access to services. Myself and many members in this House have talked about the great inequity in services for first nations women.

When we talk about women's issues we need to talk about it in a holistic manner. There is absolutely no other way that we can talk about this issue around family violence, women's shelters and the critical need to deal with these issues. This is not an issue in and of itself. It is about all the root causes. When we talk about the root causes of inequity for Canadian women we need to talk about it for aboriginal women as well.

• (1015)

I have met with aboriginal women in my constituency over the last couple of years to discuss women's issues. Often, people would think that women's issues would deal with gender equity, but what the aboriginal women and first nations women have repeatedly said is that their priority issues are their families.

There is a cumulative effect of policies that have not worked for first nations people. For instance, yesterday we had the aboriginal affairs minister at committee and one of the things we were talking about was child and family services for first nations. This is grossly underfunded compared to services for Canadians, so we have that inequity.

We have education systems for schooling on reserve. The Conservative government tends to use this type of language that would make Canadians think that first nations schools do not follow provincial curricula, as if the tripartite agreements really are the only way in which there can be a relationship with first nations where they are educating their children with similar standards to other Canadians, but that is not so.

All first nations schools have to follow a provincial curriculum and meet provincial standards, yet their per capita funding for their students is significantly less than that for Canadian students. It may range per capita between 50% and 75%. Again, what we are talking about is underfunding for first nations children education, which is K to 12. That is not even post-secondary.

The other area of concern is health services. We have unanimously adopted Jordan's principle in this House. Jordan's principle originated from a family in my home community of Norway House Cree Nation and I am so proud of the family for being able to go public with their story because it was a tragedy.

For those Canadians who do not know, Jordan was a boy who had been born with a rare syndrome and had to be hospitalized for the first couple of years of his life. When the doctors said that Jordan would be able to go home but would require certain services, some medical devices and such, these were services that any other Canadian child would have. Any other child in that same situation would go home and provincial health care would pick up those services. That is normal.

In this case, because the child was residing on reserve, the provincial jurisdiction in Manitoba would not provide those services on reserve. The federal government, through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and through the First Nations and Inuit Health branch, said that it did not have a responsibility to provide those services.

It developed into an interdepartmental battle, even though first nations are under federal jurisdiction, and there was a jurisdictional battle between the province and the feds. So, when Jordan was ready to go home, there was no jurisdiction that would pick up the cost of his services, which any other Canadian child would have been entitled to. It is what we refer to as universal health care in this country.

Jordan was two years old and as this battle waged on between departments and between jurisdictions, two years passed and Jordan lost his life. He passed away at a hospital and he never did get to go home because the issue of who would pay for his services was never settled.

• (1020)

It is a tragedy beyond belief in this great country of ours, a country which is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, that this would occur and yet these are issues that first nations families are dealing with on a daily basis.

There are systematic challenges in health because we do not have the same spectrum of health services under first nations and Inuit health grants. We do not have the ability to access provincial health services on reserve. So we are talking about health services. We are talking about chronic underfunding in education for first nations children. We are talking about chronic underfunding for first nations educational infrastructure and we are also talking about chronic underfunding for children and family services.

Last week the Auditor General released a report on the first nations child and family services program. One of the items which the government has been so proud of is that it is working on a new model in Alberta. We have heard about this model now for over two years. One of the things that I thought was really interesting in this report was that the current minister and the previous minister have said publicly that "money is not the solution to the problem". I am paraphrasing but if the parliamentary secretary is going to insist on the exact wording, I will have that later today.

Routine Proceedings

I found information within the Auditor General's report on the Alberta model. Although on the one hand Conservatives keep insisting that money is not the problem, even though all these systems are underfunded, on the other hand their Alberta model, the operation and prevention components, will have increased in funding by 74% when the new formula is fully implemented.

That is really significant because it says that we do need to look at equitable funding. Absolutely, we need the systems to be effective. When we talk about effective results, we are talking about the lives of children and that is a priority concern for first nations women. That has been inextricable from the discussions on first nations women's issues.

The reason I went into all of this discussion around all of these issues and this dynamic with the current government and the historical impacts that are affecting first nations women and their families is because it is really important.

There are two points. We have a government which has not increased funding on reserve by one penny in the last three budgets. Conservatives talk about the \$300 million that they transferred to the provinces for off reserve housing, yet we can get no accounting for that money. In Manitoba that meant \$32 million, so again, we have aboriginal women off reserve, on reserve.

Off reserve means we have no accounting for that money. On the issue of housing we have heard the Conservatives talk numerous times about the \$300 million they committed to private home ownership on reserve. Again, we have no accounting for that money. We had the departmental officials at our committee yesterday and again no information was forthcoming.

The reason this is all so important is because all of these issues are contributing factors to the whole issue of violence. When people are frustrated, when people are challenged, when people are dealing with the residential school impact, what we refer to as historical trauma, then we are dealing with challenging situations. In my riding I have some communities that are so challenged for housing that they have two dozen people living in one home. They have no health services and no adequate education services.

• (1025)

It becomes an enormous burden on women and families. There is a need to address the issue of shelters at a time when they are so critically underfunded, as well as prevention and supports for families, not only in shelters but for child and family services. It is time the government commits itself to truly do work that will benefit aboriginal women.

• (1030)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for putting this motion forward this morning. It is an important issue that should be discussed. I am glad too that she made the connection between the provision of emergency shelters and safe houses, and the overall housing situation for first nations in Canada, but that is true of women all across Canada.

She will probably be aware of a major report that was done last fall in Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Yukon about the housing situation in the north. One of the key conclusions in that report was that the situation for women was particularly troubling given that the

lack of housing options often forced women to return to relationships and homes that were not safe for them. Because they did not have other options for safe housing, they were forced back into their relationships.

I wonder if she could relate that to the lack of a national housing program here in Canada. It is something that the previous Liberal government got out of in a major way. The current government has taken no significant new initiatives on housing at all and I wonder if she could talk about how the need for shelters relates to the lack of a national housing program in Canada.

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is an excellent one. One thing that the NDP often either directly refers to or infers about the past Liberal government concerns the cuts that government made in the mid-1990s. I remind the House and Canadians that we Liberals inherited a \$43 billion deficit from the previous Conservative government, and it looks like we are on the slide again with the current Conservative government.

However, we really do need to talk about housing. The Conservative government does not want to talk about housing, particularly on reserve housing. Just yesterday the minister was asked specifically about housing for Inuit people in Nunavut and there was no response.

Again, aboriginal people have been through inordinate circumstances through the processes of policy and legislation in this country. I think we have been making significant impacts in terms of our voices being heard at the federal level, which I attribute to our first nations leadership, Métis leadership and Inuit leadership insisting upon that and organizing our political structures over the last number of decades.

Also, however, what I believe is necessary is a conciliatory relationship between the federal government and aboriginal leadership. What is so critical about this is that the federal government needs to respond to the realities of what has occurred over this last century. One of the critical issues is housing.

I would like to clarify something about my riding, which is about two-thirds of the province of Manitoba, if not a bit more. We have about three dozen first nations in the riding. We have two safe houses for first nations women, both in remote communities, although one is easier to access because of a rail line. Neither safe house has funding for programs for the families. They do not have access to services in terms of supporting the workers and their own capacity development.

Again, we are talking about an enormous region in which we have two safe houses. As the member has discussed, if we are going to talk about just those two communities, both of those communities have a chronic lack of housing. Where are women to go? Numerous times I have heard Conservative members ask why they do not just move away, move to the city.

These are their traditional territories. Although we are in a process of transition, people lived on the land and these communities are where we have been for thousands of years. This is where these families have been for thousands of years. They have had a traditional lifestyle. This is their home.

Routine Proceedings

We are in a transitional period in which we are developing this, but without safe and adequate housing for the women and their families, they are going to continue in this cycle. Also, we are without program dollars to help the families and the women in breaking these cycles.

As well, dealing with historical trauma is well known within the aboriginal community. I am sure we will adhere to the truth and reconciliation process, which is a matter directly related to the residential schools system. We have what is called an intergenerational impact. In regard to the children who were removed from their homes, a lot of families and individuals did not understand the concept of family. They were three years old or five years old when they were taken from their homes. Many of them were never allowed to go home again until they had finished school.

• (1035)

Again, not only was that a complete interruption in the family dynamic and the cultural dynamic for these people, but it was a complete alienation from understanding their role as family members and as parents. These are the types of challenges that people are dealing with in addition to the systemic inequities. What we are talking about, obviously, are cumulative effects. It is a critical issue.

This government needs to commit itself. The government says it is concerned about aboriginal women and children. Why are we not seeing concrete steps? Why have we not seen one penny for housing for first nations people on reserve in the last three federal budgets? Why have we not had an evaluation of our women's shelters? Why do we not have core funding? Why do we not have program funding?

We are not even talking about the first nations women's shelters that are provided for regions of my riding. We have two in two remote communities in my riding. That is grossly inadequate.

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have one more question for the member for Churchill. I myself understand her background of being a first nations woman. I also understand her view of women's shelters. Having been with the RCMP for 18 years, I have utilized many shelters for victims of domestic violence. It is quite a need and it has to be looked at. I believe that we in the government are looking at it.

Today, the Tsawwassen First Nation's final agreement, Bill C-34, is to be debated. With us being first nations, we have to progress one step at a time to get everything done or try to meet everybody's needs as first nations, but what I see here today is an attempt at filibustering, at stalling. Are we going to go on with the Tsawwassen First Nation final agreement? Why is she delaying this bill today?

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Speaker, I find it shocking that the member would infer that because we are both first nations we have the same priorities. I appreciate that the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River is new and I congratulate him on his arrival here. It is encouraging for me as an individual to see aboriginal people in the House. However, to infer that because we are both first nations we should have the same priorities I think is a little unfair.

Because of his experience, he does know that first nations women and first nations families and, I would add, all of us, women and men, are challenged by the historical trauma, by the years of

colonization and its policies and legislation, which have had a detrimental impact on our communities.

• (1040)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in relation to this debate today, I, like the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, am quite surprised that the member for Churchill would bring about a concurrence motion stopping important debate on bills such as Bill C-47, which would extend matrimonial property rights to first nations women on reserve, and the Tsawwassen bill and debate later today.

It is surprising that the Liberal Party would bring a concurrence motion in this middle of this, so I feel that on behalf of our government we need to bring forward an important motion. I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 111*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Arthur
Baird	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Boucher	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Calkins	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casson
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Comuzzi
Cummins	Davidson
Del Mastro	Devolin
Doyle	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty

Routine Proceedings

Fletcher
Gallant
Goodyear
Grewal
Hanger
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Jean
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie
Menzies
Mills
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Norlock
Obhrai
Paradis
Poilievre
Preston
Reid
Schellenberger
Skelton
Stanton
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Tweed
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Watson
Yelich — 111

Galipeau
Goldring
Gourde
Guergis
Harper
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Jaffer
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Khan
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lemieux
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Manning
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Petit
Prentice
Rajotte
Scheer
Shipley
Sorenson
Storseth
Tilson
Trost
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Williams

Perron
Priddy
Rae
Regan
Rota
Savage
Scott
Silva
St-Cyr
St. Denis
Stoffer
Telegdi
Thibault (West Nova)
Valley
Volpe
Wilfert

Picard
Proulx
Ratansi
Rodriguez
Roy
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PAIRED

Members

Allison
Batters
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Day
Gaudet
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Mayes
Nadeau
Plamondon
Smith
Sweet

André
Bouchard
Cardin
Deschamps
Guay
Lalonde
Miller
Pallister
Richardson
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The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

[*English*]

Order. Before the vote on the motion, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians had the floor. There are 10 minutes for questions and comments on the parliamentary secretary's speech, so I therefore call for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

• (1125)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's speech was very interesting. I would like to ask the hon. member a fairly simple question.

The Indian Act shackles aboriginal people. It impedes their ability to move forward with the economic development they require. The absence of the ability of people who live on reserve to own land is a major restriction in their ability to borrow money and engage in economic development.

Does the member believe that the Indian Act should be amended or scrapped?

Another question I would like to ask is based on the fine speech by my colleague from Manitoba. She gave a passionate speech about the horrible gaps that exist in health care for aboriginal people who live on reserve. They are betwixt and between a federal government that will not enable aboriginal communities to have the resources to provide the needed health care and provincial governments that are cash strapped and do not believe it is their mandate to provide that health care. We see the implications of this on the ground in that aboriginal people on reserves have the worst parameters in terms of health care in our nation by far.

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
Asselin
Bachand
Barbot
Bell (North Vancouver)
Bennett
Bevington
Blais
Boshcoff
Brunelle
Carrier
Chan
Christopherson
Comartin
Crowder
Cuzner
DeBellefeuille
Dhalla
Dryden
Easter
Folco
Gagnon
Goodale
Guimond
Hubbard
Kadis
Keeper
Laframboise
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lévesque
MacAulay
Malo
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Masse
McGuinty
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Minna
Mulcair
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Ouellet
Patry

Angus
Atamanenko
Bagnell
Bélangier
Bellavance
Bevilacqua
Bigras
Bonsant
Bourgeois
Byrne
Casey
Chow
Coderre
Crête
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
Demers
Dosanjh
Duceppe
Faille
Freeman
Godin
Gravel
Holland
Jennings
Karygiannis
Laforest
Lavallée
Lee
Lessard
Lussier
Malhi
Marleau
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Mathysen
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Mourani
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Nash
Paquette
Pearson

Routine Proceedings

I ask the member, what is his government going to do to bridge this gap and enable aboriginal people to get the health care they require? Right now they are in limbo.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite speaks to important reforms that need to happen in first nations communities across the country.

I wonder though why he sits in that party. That party has set aside so many initiatives and has voted against so many initiatives that would actually improve the system which unfortunately shackles, as he has said, first nations people on reserve.

Even today we are supposed to be debating extending matrimonial real property rights to first nations women, but his party brought forward a concurrence motion which actually delays that debate. It does not make any sense why someone who would want to extend benefits to first nations women on reserve would stand in the way of matrimonial real property. That is very difficult for me to understand.

Our government has taken a number of initiatives and will continue to, including today hopefully, once the Liberals get out of our way.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year the government announced some money for aboriginal women's shelters, for 35 existing shelters and 5 new ones. That is certainly not enough for most of us who are concerned about the situation regarding shelters and safe houses and given what we have already heard in the debate this morning of the number of communities where aboriginal women do not have access to shelters.

One strange aspect of the announcement was that northern aboriginal women were excluded from any of this funding. There was no funding for aboriginal women in the north.

Could the parliamentary secretary explain why the government ignored the needs of first nations and Inuit women in the north for new shelters and funding for existing shelters in that announcement last year?

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, the question speaks to some important matters that our government has begun working on. The investment we made of nearly \$56 million toward women's shelters that are on reserve throughout southern Canada has been very well received by the communities.

The member's question was in relation to the north. Of course the north is covered by important territories where our government has continued the process of devolving province-like powers to these entities. Our government tends to believe it is important that territories have the full wherewithal to deliver the services that are within provincial jurisdiction.

We have increased transfer payments to the territories. We are hopeful they will be able to continue their important work in delivering the services that they need to actually take part in for themselves.

The New Democratic Party has voted against all of our budget enhancements in terms of equalization to the territories. Perhaps the member could talk to his leader to change that perspective in the future.

● (1130)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in her speech, the mover of the concurrence motion raised important issues related to violence against women. Although the parliamentary secretary says that we are delaying, we have been debating Bill C-47, which deals with the matrimonial real property rights.

In relation to Bill C-47, Bev Jacobs, the president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, said:

There is nothing in the legislation that addresses the systemic issues of violence many women face that lead to the dissolution of marriages nor is there any money available for implementation.

She goes on to suggest that we need non-legislative measures, not just legislative measures. The member yesterday in his speech on Bill C-47 argued against this and said that we should just pass the bill as is.

There are non-legislative issues related to housing, poverty, governance, access to justice and violence. Therefore, would the member not concede that there are non-legislative initiatives that should be taken to complement the legislative initiatives?

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately this argument posed and continued to be suggested by the member opposite is one that is rooted in fallacy. It suggests that outside external issues will fix this very legislative measure, which is extending matrimonial real property benefits to first nations women.

I would be the first to suggest that there are many issues throughout our country, but for us to bring forward some omnibus super bill that would deal with everything is impossible, although the Liberal Party likes to suggest a massive panacea approach, which was its approach in the last election.

However, a substantive measure needs to be taken on this very specific issue. If we were to pass this, we would see it as a starting point to addressing the larger issues. That is the most important approach, and I do not buy into the fallacy he has brought forward as an argument.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am a bit surprised by the parliamentary secretary's position. He definitely was not there yesterday—I know that he was busy here in the House—when the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and top bureaucrats from his department came before the committee.

Today we are talking about violence against women, poverty and many other things. One of the government's problems is that the increase in its spending is capped at two per cent a year, while the population is growing by six to seven per cent a year. That means that problems in aboriginal communities and on reserves are multiplying.

I hate the word "reserve", but that is exactly what these places are becoming: sites where we stick aboriginals. It is a terrible situation.

Do not try to convince me that Bill C-47 will solve all of the problems, as was suggested here in the House yesterday. It is simply a band-aid solution.

Routine Proceedings

Does the parliamentary secretary not feel it is time to review the two per cent cap that has been imposed since 1996? The Liberals are no better with their maximum annual increase of two per cent. Is it not time to review and increase that two per cent cap, or even remove it, so that communities can take charge of their situation and receive a bit more money than usual?

• (1135)

[English]

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, the member has been a very important part of our committee deliberations over the last almost three years now, wherein we have been able to bring some very progressive, important legislation forward in the House to get a number of things passed on behalf of aboriginal Canadians throughout our great nation.

He speaks to an era where, unfortunately, the previous government placed some considerable financial restrictions on first nations communities and maintained that throughout its entire tenure. That party and previous government liked to promote themselves as being the greatest friend of first nations and aboriginal people. I do not believe it to be the case. It is one of the reasons why I ran for a seat in the House.

One thing he forgets is that in our first budget we brought forward an additional \$450 million on top of the previous amount allocated to the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, which went above and beyond the 2% cap. Although there needs to be continued investment, there needs to be systemic reform. That is part of what we were debating today, which is a massive systemic reform extending matrimonial real property to first nations women on reserve.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in this House to discuss the motion introduced by my Liberal colleague. As we begin this sort of debate, I am very surprised to hear the members opposite talk about the need for reforms and say that it is the previous government's fault that the situation has not improved more. They remind me of grade school children in the schoolyard, saying, "My Dad can beat your Dad." Things do not work that way.

The "new government", as it referred to itself for so long, has now been in power for two and a half years, and it should stop saying that the former government did not do its job. It is time the "new government" did its job. I would be very happy to finally hear the "new government" say that it will do what is needed to make things better, especially for our first nations.

Women's shelters in aboriginal communities have been underfunded for some time now. This is not the first time we have had reports about this. Exhaustive research has been conducted into the situation in aboriginal communities and has shown why we need to change the situation for the better. Johnson Research and Development Co. even submitted a report on July 31, 2006 describing the situation. Company representatives visited aboriginal communities to find out first-hand what people who live in these communities and benefit from programs and services had to say about shelters, or the lack thereof, on their reserves.

The research found that most shelters were underfunded. Unlike shelters for battered women in Quebec, which now receive nearly \$500,000 a year, shelters for battered women in aboriginal communities were always underfunded. Unfortunately, the only way to supplement their funding was to apply for project funding. This sounds good in theory, but it takes six months to plan a project and six months to get the funding, which disappears as soon as it is received. As well, there is no recurrent funding to address recurrent problems.

In some aboriginal women's shelters, in many cases, the bedding had not been changed in 10 years. This may seem trivial, but when a woman goes to a shelter, a woman who has been demeaned and beaten, and has little or no resources, it is nice to be able to comfort her by giving her a clean bed, where she can feel comfortable. That is important. The most basic facilities had not been changed or updated. Furthermore, nothing has been done to ensure security, due to lack of funding. Rather than allocating money to security or the alarm systems, the money must be used to pay the people who work in the shelters.

In some shelters, a single person works 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There are not many people in this House who would do such a job for the wages paid. Some residences have even had to close for a while, in order to ensure that they would be able to provide services to the people who would need them later on.

Other shelters have had to stop offering individual, one-on-one counselling, because they did not have the resources or money necessary. So they decided to go with group counselling instead of individual counselling. However, when it comes to spousal abuse, if there is one thing that is crucial, it is counselling and prevention. Such an approach can help these women heal, become more autonomous, find their way and avoid potentially negative relationships.

• (1140)

Entire families have been decimated because shelters could not offer the support they needed. Yet in October 2006, when the economic forum was held in Mashteuiatsh, several of the Conservative ministers in attendance told the aboriginal community that aboriginal women were among their first priorities. Unfortunately, that promise did not materialize into money for aboriginal communities.

We realize that new money has been invested in shelters. Quebec has benefited from that, but it is not enough. They were lagging behind even then, and they were having problems. Yes, the shelters were very grateful to receive that money, but at the same time, they were wondering how they would manage to carry on. What do we have to do to convince the government that safety is a right? These women have the right to safe places where they can get away from the community whenever and for as long as they are not safe at home.

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Some women and children have not sought services or help because no help was offered, because there was not enough help available, or because shelter workers no longer had enough energy to meet their needs. It is very difficult to find oneself in situations like that.

Money was transferred to aboriginal communities to keep the shelters operating. In Quebec, a new shelter opened. The government agreed to help with the acquisition of a new house to meet the needs of abused women in the community. But that was not enough. No matter what anyone says or does, we know that 54% of aboriginal women are more likely to be victims of abuse than women living outside of aboriginal communities. That is a very high number. We know that often, the violence these women experience is related to alcoholism or drug abuse. Some have even been strangled. This is not minor violence; this is serious.

The most important thing for these communities is to ensure that those who use the services provided by shelters for abused women are not stigmatized when they leave the shelter. If shelters cannot guarantee their safety, if they cannot apply the necessary rules, if they do not have enough staff to meet their needs, these women will not leave the shelters feeling independent and able to take care of themselves because they will not have been able to heal the damage done to them.

It really is a shame. For years we have been talking about helping aboriginal communities, but in reality we only ever come up with band-aid solutions, as my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue was saying earlier. And yet it is a right. These communities have the right to safety, well being, dignity and respect.

Some might say that, to those of us who live outside all that, who live in comfortable homes and surroundings, this is a quaint matter and nothing really to worry about. If we truly did worry about it, we would make the necessary changes to ensure a different life for aboriginal communities and to secure more resources and money for them to better manage their values and to better respond to their various needs.

We know that \$56 million has been offered to aboriginal communities. That is not enough. Roughly one million people live on the various territories in Canada, including several people in Quebec. These people live in some 600 different communities that have different values, cultures and concepts. These people also have some very different needs.

• (1145)

For example, they have needs in education and needs for healthier housing and \$56 million is not enough to meet all those needs.

Some people in these communities have been forced to leave their homes because they do not have potable water for drinking and preparing food. Again this week, inhabitants of entire communities had to leave their homes because dams were about to burst and possibly cause flooding. We have seen entire destitute communities being moved around without any concern for the changes involved in this type of situation.

We know how trying it can be to go through a fire or a tragedy in our families. It is difficult, but we have a network of people around us; we are equipped for it. However, when this happens in an

isolated community that does not have the same resources we do, it is very different.

The bonds established among the members of aboriginal communities are also very important. When people are moved and one group is sent to one place and another group to a different place, those bonds are broken. These people will have to build trust once again and become accustomed to a new place, a new home. That is very difficult.

In addition, women may experience domestic violence or abuse in their daily lives. A woman may not go to a shelter every time she experiences abuse. She may think about it and consider it for a long time before going to a shelter. She knows that once she crosses the threshold of the shelter she will probably be stigmatized because her colleagues, friends and family—the whole world—will know she has gone there because she had problems with her spouse or with her children.

Life is not easy for people in aboriginal communities. I would like most of us to spend one or two weeks in an aboriginal community to experience and truly understand the life they lead and to understand the people based on their surroundings. The saying goes that you cannot understand someone's life unless you walk in their shoes. We cannot understand what life is like for aboriginal people without having lived in their community, without truly understanding what it is like to live in that community.

I have had such an opportunity. I lived in an aboriginal community in northern Ontario, where they live by hunting and fishing, for a few weeks. I saw and understood many things. I was particularly touched by the moral and human values that such communities pass on to their members and to total strangers. I arrived in their community as a stranger and yet they treated me with a great deal of respect.

There are calls for the government to take better care of aboriginal communities and do more for women's shelters in aboriginal communities by investing more money in recurring funding so that they do not need to ask for it every year. We are not asking the government to give handouts to aboriginal peoples. That is just common sense.

The government would have us believe that we need to invest \$96 billion over 30 years in the army. If that is common sense, a few billion to help aboriginal communities should also be considered common sense. It is hard to succeed when one is living on crumbs.

These shelters are having to temporarily lay off or fire staff. Often there is a single staff member to welcome, advise and help those who come for assistance. There is no relief staff.

• (1150)

The first to be let go are those who are in charge of security. If someone tries to break into the shelter when the security staff has been let go, everyone inside the shelter can be in danger.

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The next to go are the outreach workers and counsellors. That means that staff training and development are eliminated. Staff training is important too. When a person works in a battered women's shelter, it is important to have a good understanding of the problem and the challenges. Staff must have ongoing training to remain up to date.

We, as MPs, ask for ongoing training. We have ongoing training offered by the various parliamentary departments. We receive briefings on new bills or the government's new policies.

It is a bad sign when we cannot even offer training to shelter staff on the new policies created to supposedly help the women in these shelters and the shelters themselves.

They also have to cut services and staffing. As I was saying earlier, they have to switch from individual to group counselling and close shelters from time to time. When shelters close their doors, it becomes very difficult for women to believe that the shelters can help them. They can never be sure. They live in a state of constant worry: how can they be sure that they will not be turned away from the shelters because there is not enough money for them to stay there?

Food is also essential. Anyone looking at me can tell that I like to eat. Liking to eat and being in good shape and good health do not mean quite the same thing in aboriginal communities. People in those communities want to be in good shape and in good health, but it takes so much money and effort just to get food to the community that the only food available in the community is food that weighs next to nothing, like bags of chips, chocolate bars and all kinds of things that are bad for people's health, not things that are good for people's health, like juice, fruit and vegetables. That makes it very hard.

It is very difficult for people in these communities to organize themselves to have a good life when they know that a shelter for battered women within their communities cannot provide adequate services to suffering women. It is very difficult.

Therefore, I wish the government would understand—it is ready to rush through bills such as Bill C-47 and to quickly deal with other bills without doing the groundwork. That work consists of strengthening what already exists and providing the necessary resources to improve the situation in aboriginal communities. The right groundwork needs to be done.

A few years ago, Sisters in Spirit received \$5 million to undertake studies and research. We know that this is ending soon and that Sisters in Spirit will no longer have access to this money. I hope that new funding will be available for this organization as well.

The fact that Status of Women Canada reduced its advocacy and research budgets was a huge setback for aboriginal women and communities. Not long ago, I received a letter from Ms. Gabriel saying how important these programs were, as well as how important the court challenges program was. She hopes that these programs will be reinstated.

I hope that the government, in its great wisdom, will see that it is time to stop talking about the former government and will invest the

necessary funds so that communities can have the shelters they and the women need, shelters they could benefit from.

• (1155)

[English]

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the intervention by the member opposite. She often presents herself as an advocate for women's issues, so that would come to the root of my question, in part because today the Liberals have brought forward this concurrence motion that she is speaking to.

This concurrence motion is actually preventing us from dealing with the matter of matrimonial real property, so I find it difficult to understand the logic of this initiative in the sense that debate on this concurrence motion seeks to discuss women's shelters throughout our country and how we need to continue to be diligent in that area.

However, matrimonial real property will actually help keep women in their homes. Women on reserve are sometimes subject to the very unfair practice of being removed from their homes when marriages break down. The irony of the concurrence motion is quite astounding.

Does the member not agree that it is important to keep women in their homes and that in fact this is what the matrimonial real property debate was about? Does she not find this concurrence motion rather bizarre?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I recognize that my colleague may not agree with this motion. However, because I am defending the cause of women, of all women, I support this motion. In speaking of matrimonial property and land distribution, we are not just referring to the case of a woman who may be able to remain in her home. The issue is much broader than that.

As I was saying earlier, it is important to strengthen what we already have and what we know aboriginal women need rather than attempting to establish something they do not want and about which they were not consulted.

We know what they want with regard to shelters for battered women. They want them, they want to keep them and maintain them in good condition. They want to have the money to provide the services necessary for individual or group counselling. We know that. We know that is what they want. There are other things we do not know because of insufficient consultation with respect to the process and the other bill my colleague just spoke about.

However, I can assure you that we will be just as diligent with Bill C-47 as we have been with this motion. I am very pleased with this motion and the Bloc supports it wholeheartedly because it meets an essential need of aboriginal women. They have told us that and shown us the proof.

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• (1200)

[*English*]

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her participation in this debate, as her commitment to women's issues is well known. Not only is she an excellent speaker on issues pertaining to women's lives, but she speaks about particulars that we often do not address in the House, such as common sense and basic things like the dignity of human beings and the dignity that is integral to how people want to move forward in their lives. I really appreciate that.

I do have a question for her. She has just mentioned Bill C-47 on matrimonial real property. Something we heard very clearly was that in the end the government developed the legislation without input from aboriginal women and first nations women. In fact, I have heard from the Manitoba region that for the first nations family violence prevention program, the criteria also in the end were developed without participation by the first nations women who had been engaged in that process. They were told that would politicize the program.

I would like her to comment on this pattern we are seeing and on whether she thinks it impacts this issue in particular and women's issues across the board.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I think my hon. colleague is right. We are seeing a movement, a tendency, a way of doing things that is somewhat paternalistic. Some people think they know better than others what those others need, what women need, what men need, what aboriginal nations need. The government knows because it is a father figure to everyone. "Father knows best", as they say.

Personally, I see an attempt to muzzle women and take away the tools they need to exercise their rights and to conduct research. As for residences and shelters for aboriginal women, they are being given only the bare minimum they need to survive. People are not in a position to complain or revolt when they are struggling just to survive, because they are afraid of losing what little they have.

Furthermore, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages has already threatened women's groups. Moreover, one of the opposition leaders did not dare attend an event, because the organization had been threatened that its subsidies would be cut off.

This government is trying any way it can to stop any action that might allow people to take a stand, to say that this is not what they need, that this is what the government should give them, that this is their right, since their tax money is being used, since they pay their taxes and they want that money to serve their needs and not the government's needs or what the government decides for them, that it is not up to the government to decide what they need, that they are big enough—mature enough—to know what they need and that is what they want the government to give them.

[*English*]

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr.

Speaker, I do have to take exception with a number of statements that this member has made.

In her previous intervention, I think in an answer to a question from the member for Churchill, or it might have been earlier, she did mention that she knew that women wanted women's shelters. That is something that she knew unequivocally. That may be the case. Is she also suggesting, as she said in her answer, that we are not sure if women want matrimonial property rights?

I just do not understand this. Why would women on reserve not want access to matrimonial real property rights? Why would a woman on reserve who is going through a marriage break-up not want to have at least the opportunity to stay in her home with her children? Is she suggesting that women would simply prefer to be removed from that home? Why would they want that? Why would a woman want to be removed from her home with her children? I do not understand that, so perhaps she could explain it further to me.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that a member of this Parliament who knows so much about other areas does not seem to grasp this. Perhaps he does not understand women's problems because he is a man. Certainly, women who live in aboriginal communities want to remain in their homes.

Under the government's bill, women who want to stay in their homes would have to pay compensation to the spouse who leaves the home. However, in aboriginal communities, women with children are often the ones who look after the household, which is unpaid work. They are also the ones who care for the children and do the cooking, which is also unpaid work. Where are these people supposed to find the money to compensate their spouses who have to leave the family home?

Moreover, there is a serious housing shortage in aboriginal communities. If a woman who wants to stay in her home with her children kicks her husband out, where will he go? He will likely go into the community and try to come back into the family home, which can lead to assault and violence and force the woman to leave the home.

I take exception to the suggestion that I do not understand that women want to stay in their homes. They do want to stay in their homes, but not at any price. Proper parameters have to be put in place so that women can take advantage of them and not remain prisoners.

• (1205)

[*English*]

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I most certainly appreciate this opportunity to participate in this debate. While listening to what has gone on so far, I must say I am a little breathless and shocked that a member of the governing party would not understand that women do not want to leave their homes. Sometimes they are driven out. Statistically, we know that on average women leave an abusive situation 17 times before they finally feel that they have the support and the security to make that a permanent situation.

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There are many things to consider. One of those things is the economic security of the woman's children. What on earth is she going to do without a home and a livelihood? What on earth is she going to do without the support of even that abusive man? For many women their children come first and they tolerate the beatings, the physical abuse, the rape, and the psychological and emotional torment. It is not until he turns on her children, when now it is not only her enduring all of this, but it is her children, that for most women it becomes time to leave.

To say that women should not be driven out of their homes or we should be supporting them staying in their homes, of course we support them staying in their homes, but not in a situation where they and their children are subject to not only beatings and mistreatment but to the possibility of murder and death. We have seen that over and over again. Women and children have been found dead because they have lived in a situation of violence that they have not been able to escape.

Now the government is telling us that we should tolerate that and that somehow or other women and first nations women, in particular, should be subject to this because, my goodness, the government has given enough and done enough. If the government has done enough, why does this situation continue? Why does it continue day after day, week after week, year after year? Have we learned anything?

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states in article 21:

Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing,—

I underscore the word “housing”. It goes on:

—sanitation, health and social security.

It is a disgrace, that goes beyond comprehension, that Canada, a nation that was so long a leader at the United Nations in support of the rights of first nations and indigenous peoples, was among those four nations that voted against this declaration. Canada even went further and actively lobbied the other countries to vote against this historic declaration. Fortunately, Australia, after the election of a progressive labour government, changed its vote and voted with the other 44 countries that believed in the importance of this UN declaration.

Here we are alone. There are three countries out there, with Canada apparently leading the pack, denying the rights of indigenous peoples. We have seen those rights denied over and over again, in the past, in the present, and apparently this is going to continue into the future.

I would like to cite what happened in this Parliament in budget 2006. The government cancelled the court challenges program. In addition, the government slashed funding to Status of Women Canada. My colleague from the Bloc has alluded to the fact that Status of Women Canada was a victim of the government's spending cuts, of its austerity program.

We know where that largesse went. We know where all of that saved money went. It went directly to the oil patch. It went to the corporations that needed it the least. It undermined the work of

Status of Women Canada and the work of women's organizations across this country.

● (1210)

We would not want them to be doing the work that they had always done in terms of research, advocacy and lobbying. We would not want women to have a voice for all the women across this country, including first nations women.

I come back to the court challenges program and the fact that it was intended to support language rights and equality rights. We grew and developed as a nation after the introduction of the court challenges program to embrace equality rights.

One of our sisters, Sharon McIvor, was using the court challenges program in order to write a historic wrong. Because she had married a non-status Indian, her children no longer had status. Her children no longer had the protection and support of being part of the community of first nations. She went to court in British Columbia, fought against that and won, but now she needs to take that fight to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Lo and behold, she cannot. The funding is gone. The court challenges program is gone. This is an absolutely essential and key part of re-asserting the rights of indigenous people, including women and their children, to status as first nations people. The government saw fit to end that and continues to refuse to listen to all of the groups across Canada who have been very clear about how integral the court challenges program was, not just to what goes on in this country but to our reputation around the world.

We were known as a leader in terms of language and equality rights. Now we are nowhere. In fact, in so many areas our reputation internationally is going right down the drain in terms of the environment, support for people, and the way we conduct business in this country.

The government has said very clearly to the people of this nation, “The jobs that you do don't matter because we don't care about manufacturing”. It has said very clearly, “We don't care about the kind of stress that families feel while trying to make ends meet”, as we watch the gap between those who have and those who have not increase and grow. The government has been very clear about what it will not do. Housing to first nations women is most certainly among the things the government is not prepared to do.

I want to come back to the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous people. Canada's position in refusing to support the declaration is absolutely contrary to the wishes of aboriginal and human rights organizations and even some government officials. Even officials within the bureaucracy stated their opposition, but the government in power now refused to listen.

As the current debate on Bill C-47 has illustrated, first nations, Inuit and Métis women have no place to go when they become victims of violence in their own homes. There is a lack of shelters and transitional houses, especially in remote communities, leaving women to suffer in isolation, and putting them and their children at risk of further violence and even death, violence that escalates as time goes on and, as I said previously, violence that can lead to death.

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In forcing women to abandon their communities because there is no housing, we are cutting them off from all that sustains them: from family, their culture, and the support systems that the community provides. Their children lose touch with their heritage and who they are. How is this different from what we did to children when we sent them off to residential schools? We know what happened to those children. We know how they were physically abused and became the subject of forced labour. We know they were often raped, prevented from using their own language, and when they returned to their homes and families, there was no connection.

They could not speak the language. They had been raised in an alien situation and they were not able to reconnect with community. That lack of reconnection has led to all kinds of social ills in first nations communities. The violence that women endure is just one of those ills. Drug abuse and alcoholism that is prevalent is just one of the outcomes of those residential school days.

● (1215)

The 2004 background document on aboriginal women and housing by the Native Women's Association of Canada states:

...Aboriginal women facing violence have limited to non-existent housing choices when they leave violent relationships or relationships break down for reasons not related to violence. Many women are forced to choose between staying in (or returning) to a violent home environment or leaving the reserve. Even where women's shelter programs are available, 'second stage housing' which is vital in the transition from emergency shelter to secure, independent, self-sufficient living, may not be available due to program funding cuts or highly restrictive eligibility criteria.

I am reminded of what we endured in Ontario with a Conservative government, not unlike the present federal Conservative government. The Harris years were marked with the same kinds of cutbacks, the same kind of refusal to acknowledge what women face when they are in violent home situations. The Harris government cut second stage funding and programming in shelters and the end result was that women, in some cases, were being driven to the street.

I worked with some of those women because eight years after the end of the Harris government years, we still feel the repercussions. We still feel the dilemmas. We still feel the effects of those funding cuts and women and children still suffer. Families still suffer. It is a legacy that goes on and on. I suppose it will be the legacy that we will experience when the present Conservative government is gone.

The report from NWAC goes on to state:

At the same time, while other sectors address root causes and propose solutions to the high prevalence of violence against Aboriginal women in the home, women's shelter programs need to be better funded to provide for more new shelters and capital upkeep and maintenance of existing shelters.

The current funding, as has been so clearly stated, simply does not stack up to what is needed. The report goes on to state:

Aboriginal women's vulnerability to becoming a single parent and/or the victim of spousal violence needs to be anticipated, accounted for, addressed and accommodated to achieve positive, equitable outcomes in all existing and new housing policies and programs. Priority wait listing and placement of women who are victims of violence must be further fostered and followed in housing practice by all levels of government and authorities involved in housing

An older report from NWAC on second stage housing for native women states:

Counselling and second stage housing are required for battered women and children. However, there must be more services directed at the batterer such as

residential treatment programs which both reform the batterer yet allow the victims to remain in the matrimonial home....

That comes into the discussion in regard to what the parliamentary secretary was talking about in terms of matrimonial real property. Yes, women should be allowed to stay in their homes and, yes, there should be programming. What on earth is wrong with taking the advice of the Native Women's Association of Canada and ensuring that the batterers have the support and counselling they need to perhaps change and perhaps continue to live in a more positive environment with their children?

The report goes on to state:

As it stands now, most non-aboriginal shelters are located in urban areas which means the woman must leave her community, frequently travelling a great distance, to find help. Moreover, the aboriginal victim of family violence may even experience racism and further victimization at the shelter....

As good as it is to have these shelters, there is a disconnect between what a woman experiences in a community as part of her understanding and reality and what is available in the city where first nations people are in a minority. Certainly in the outside community, if she cannot find shelter in a women's shelter, there are often experiences of racism and further victimization.

● (1220)

We are also finding that women and children are not leaving abusive situations because other than the shelter they have no place to go. The homes of relatives are already full.

In 1991-92, 88% of all women reporting to the shelter had been there at least once in the past year. We are seeing a return of women because there is nowhere for them to go. They must go back to shelters, even if the shelters are not an ideal situation. The government is repeating the sins of the past by refusing to acknowledge these realities.

However, few shelters are able to address the needs of special groups, such as natives, immigrant women or the physically challenged. When native women go to non-aboriginal shelters, often the other women and the service personnel cannot fully identify with the racism and social ills that they have experienced. Native women do not open up to social workers or employees because they feel perhaps a bit alienated. Their experiences are unique and different.

Without adequate outreach and critically necessary follow-up services that are culturally appropriate and a vital function of second stage shelters, emergency shelters can become a revolving door, a place where true safety and support is not felt. These offer little more than a temporary way station for battered women who use this service only during times of intense crisis and who, because of the lack of adequate follow-up services, return to the violent home with no other option but to endure what has previously existed.

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In a 1999 report by the Saskatchewan Women's Health Secretariat, entitled, "Profile of Aboriginal Women in Saskatchewan", it illustrates the important linkages between health and housing. We have not talked very much about health, but I would like to read from the report because it is important that we understand the connection between housing and health. The report states that housing conditions are a major contributing factor to physical well-being and mental health. It also states that crowded housing conditions can also result in increased incidences of abuse.

Last spring, the Status of Women committee heard the same thing from the Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada who talked about conditions in the far north that were unacceptable by any standard.

What basically happens is that airtight little boxes are dropped into communities and families move in. Sometimes several families move in and as many as 20 to 22 people move into these tiny little boxes. They have no privacy, no proper ventilation and no sense of home. It is understandable that this kind of crowding can lead to violence and substance abuse and can compel children to give up.

The stats are there that children raised in these circumstances often do not thrive. They do not do well at school because they do not have the space they need nor the support systems they need.

Furthermore, a report by the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women states:

Because of chronic housing shortages, existing units are overcrowded, sometimes housing two or three families together.

In 1999, Saskatchewan reported that over 70% of aboriginal households on reserve were below housing standards, and we know that. We do not need to go to Saskatchewan. We know that in our own communities. I have, as a previous MPP, firsthand knowledge of that in the community that I used to serve.

I will finish by reminding the House about the hundreds of thousands of aboriginal women who have disappeared, never to be found or who have been found murdered. In a 30 year period, over 40 women alone have disappeared along the highway between Prince George and Prince Rupert. This highway has been renamed the Highway of Tears.

One has to wonder how many of those victims were the victims of Robert Pickton in Vancouver's eastside, who included first nations women who were fleeing a situation where they were the victims of violence, fleeing a situation where they had no hope of adequate housing or no hope for the future.

● (1225)

We know that the first nations population, women in particular, experience violence three and a half times more often than non-aboriginal women and that close to 35% of aboriginal women have been the targets of violence. We cannot tolerate this any more because it is intolerable. We know from our own communities that first nations women are in need of extra and special support. Unfortunately, the government has not provided it. There are solutions, we have heard them, but we need to listen to those solutions.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr.

Speaker, these issues the member has spoken to today are important issues but I must continue to point back to what we were debating before this concurrence motion began. We were dealing with a bill to extend matrimonial real property rights to first nations women, which includes a provision that would allow for an emergency protection order, which would allow a court to order that a spouse or common-law partner be excluded from the family home on an urgent basis in the situation of family violence.

That is not something that occurs on reserve right now. I am sure the member is aware that the occupants of any home on reserve are at the behest and discretion of the chief and council. There is no opportunity to apply to a court to be able to continue living in a home if there is a violent situation. The bill we were discussing would extend that to first nations women.

Does the member feel that is a valid approach to moving forward? Does she think first nations women deserve that?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I do not know how I can get through to the member that no woman on the face of this planet ever deserves to be beaten, raped or abused. Why he keeps coming back to this is a mystery to me.

The Native Women's Association of Canada and the AFN Women's Council have been very clear. While they welcomed the consultations that took place, headed by Wendy Grant-John, they made it very clear, not just to the minister responsible, but to us in the committee for the Status of Women, that they had to be part of the legislative process, that they had to be consulted in regard to both the legislation that came forward and the non-legislative solutions. These women have a very clear understanding of their reality.

I understand that reserves are communal in their nature and that, as such, there needs to be special consideration. NWAC and the AFN Women's Council brought forward solutions but they were very specific in stating that they had to be involved in the consultation around the legislation. That did not happen. We were warned that the government would come up with this canned legislation and that it had already been written before any consultations took place. Lo and behold, the concerns and the fears of NWAC and the AFN were verified by the government because it did precisely that. It came up with legislation that did not involve any consultation with NWAC or the AFN, and that simply is not good enough.

The Conservatives can stand in their place or spin for all I care, but it does not change the fact that first nations were not consulted when it came to the legislation. That is disrespectful, patriarchal and it underscores what we and first nations have been saying for so very long, which is that they are quite capable of determining their own future. They are quite capable of self-government. They are quite capable of overseeing what happens in their communities. They do not need this paternalistic kind of behaviour from the current government or any government.

● (1230)

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for London—Fanshawe for participating in this debate.

Routine Proceedings

I agree that there is a particular hypocrisy by the federal government which is quite dumbfounding sometimes. When the parliamentary secretary speaks in such a derogatory manner about chief and council it is quite stunning, because the government moved forward with specific claims legislation in which the government refused to implement a ratification process for community members, deeming chief and council with the supreme and sole responsibility to make decisions for the communities. It was a funny statement.

I would like to get back to the member's speech. I really appreciate that she mentioned the Sisters in Spirit. The Sisters in Spirit campaign is about the missing and murdered aboriginal women. There is an extraordinary number of missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada. The per capita rate if it were non-aboriginal Canadians would be about 180,000 murdered and missing women which would be completely unacceptable to Canadians.

Does the member think that the efforts by the government have been consistent on women's issues to what it claims in its matrimonial and real property legislation?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that when it comes to issues surrounding first nations and women in particular, the government is not interested. The 2% cap that was placed on first nations funding is still in place and it is not adequate. We know that the cost of living, the cost of doing anything has risen significantly and that settlements outside of government in terms of funding and the need for increases is well beyond 2%. It is somewhere around 3.5% in many cases.

To say that the government is concerned and getting down to some serious work in terms of trying to change the reality that first nations women and communities face is clearly not the case.

I am glad that the member underscored the Sisters in Spirit. I wish I had had more time to talk about that. We know that the initial figure of 500 is clearly tragically much less than the reality.

In speaking with Bev Jacobs, the president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, she said that the money that had been granted to Sisters in Spirit in order to do the investigation about the missing and murdered women showed that there were many more. The finding of the remains of Amber Redman and Tashina General in the last few weeks I think underscores the fact that there are crimes and atrocities that have been committed that we have no understanding or information about.

• (1235)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for London—Fanshawe for her intervention and her broad perspective on this debate around emergency shelters and safe houses for aboriginal women who are fleeing domestic violence.

It was great the way she pointed out the limited or non-existing housing options for many aboriginal women and indeed for many women in Canada when they are leaving domestic abuse. For aboriginal women the member pointed out that they could leave the reserve, they could face homelessness, or they could return to a dangerous domestic situation. She also pointed out that second stage housing, the stage after being in an emergency shelter, might not be available.

The member for London—Fanshawe has an important private member's bill on the order paper, the NDP's housing bill of rights. I wonder if she might talk about how that particular piece of proposed legislation would assist women in Canada with the kind of housing situations that they face. It is a very important piece of proposed legislation.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas for raising the housing bill of rights. As the NDP housing critic, he is going to do a remarkable job in making sure that the legislation is never far from the conscience of every member in the House. It is important.

There was a time in this country when we did have affordable housing. A program was in place and it served the needs of this country very well. It was an NDP caucus that moved on that in the early 1970s under the leadership of Ed Broadbent and David Lewis in terms of bringing it to the fore. For years Canada did exceptionally well. Canada was internationally renowned for its housing policy. I was a member of the provincial government in Ontario between 1990 and 1995 and we tried to replicate that kind of spirit of making sure that decent affordable housing was available. Unfortunately in 1996 it was lost. We need to have it again. Canada has a homeless rate unparalleled in the world.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the committee for its recommendations. Committee members have identified an important contributing factor in improving the quality of life of aboriginal women and children.

As parliamentarians and as citizens, we have an obligation to protect the vulnerable. We want children to live in homes free of violence, and we believe that people should raise families and live their lives in dignity and in safety.

Women's shelters fulfill a vital role by helping to safeguard the security of women, children and families in our communities. By investing in shelters for first nations women, we are acting on values that we all share.

Our government is committed to working with the first nations, the aboriginal organizations and all members of the House to ensure adequate services are provided for those who need them.

An October 2007 report by Statistics Canada describes serious issues related to family violence. Spousal, emotional or financial abuse among aboriginal women and men is twice the national rate.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, together with other partners, develops programs and services that address family violence in first nation communities and create a more secure environment for children on reserve. This includes both family violence prevention and protection services.

As part of this effort, the family violence prevention program supports a network of 35 shelters and community based prevention projects. These shelters serve about 265 first nations communities. About 1,900 women and 2,300 children turn to these services each year.

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Indian and Northern Affairs Canada provided \$18.5 million to these shelters in fiscal year 2007-08, with \$11.5 million for shelter services for first nation women and children on reserve. These funds are used to support an existing network of 35 first nation shelters and to reimburse provinces for related shelter services where they are not available to the community.

Our government recognizes that more work needs to be done, and we support the intent of the motion before the House today.

In fact, we are already taking action. Our government is helping first nations communities address the critical need for family violence prevention programs and services on reserve through a five year investment of almost \$56 million. These funds are above and over the \$6 million that was announced in 2006 as a one time allocation in the family violence prevention program to meet the immediate operational needs of the shelters.

We are increasing the funding available to existing shelters and we are providing funding to build five new shelters in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has been collaborating with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, which helps build shelters through its shelter enhancement program, on the selection process for these five new shelters.

We need to invest in our future, a future where we see first nations women and their families enjoy a safe and secure home environment.

Today's debate is a welcome opportunity to discuss another important initiative that would help provide first nations people with the legal protection they require to live full and meaningful lives.

Our government has introduced legislation to ensure that people living on reserve have clear matrimonial real property rights. Bill C-47, the family homes on reserves and matrimonial interests or rights act, proposes to fill the legislative gap concerning on reserve matrimonial real property, or MRP. It would correct an intolerable situation that has existed far too long. Off reserve, if a relationship dissolves, spouses have access to laws that will guide them as they determine how they will divide their matrimonial real property, but this is not so for people living on reserves.

Even in the most difficult cases, such as those involving custody disputes, no court can order a change in possession of an on reserve family home. The courts cannot order the sale of a home, for instance, or prevent a spouse from selling or mortgaging a family home without the consent of the other spouse, regardless of the severe repercussions these actions might have.

• (1240)

The proposed legislation strikes a balance between individual and collective rights on reserves and respects the integrity of reserve lands. It also recognizes the importance of developing community-specific MRP laws. Providing spouses with clear matrimonial real property rights is a vital component of improved quality of life.

This is a prime example of the approach our government is taking to improving the quality of life for aboriginal people. The proposed legislation is advancing a real practical solution. It is an approach that we are successfully implementing in other areas as well, focusing on innovative, progressive measures that address the

priorities of the first nations people and truly that make a real difference in their lives.

We are backing up our plans with real resources provided by budget 2008. For example, two years ago we implemented a plan of action for drinking water in first nations communities. At that time, 93 drinking water systems serving first nations communities were deemed high risk. Today, that number stands at 85 and continues to fall.

The progress we see is because of our government's commitment to work with first nations communities and deliver real results. We are supporting that commitment with a budget 2008 commitment of \$330 million over two years to improve access to safe drinking water in first nation communities.

We are taking the same approach to improving child welfare services on reserve.

Several years ago the first nations government and the first nation child welfare agencies in Alberta came together. They wanted to find innovative ways for improving services for children who came into contact with the child welfare system. The starting point for all their actions was to focus on a long term stability for the child. They developed new methods for intervening early with families before they reached a crisis, so children did not have to be removed from their home. In 2007 we concluded a framework on child and family services with the province of Alberta and treaty first nations in Alberta.

We are working with several provinces to develop similar prevention based child and family services models in other parts of the country. Budget 2008 dedicates \$43 million over two years towards the transition of child and family services on reserve.

Today's debate and motion put forward by the committee are all about ensuring the stability of aboriginal families so children can get a good start and succeed later in life.

Quality housing is a fundamental goal. An adequate home can provide the stability for children to help them succeed in school and set high goals for themselves. It is one of the foundations of prosperity.

Therefore, we have moved to address the lack of adequate housing in first nations communities. Budget 2007 committed \$300 million to the first nations market housing fund. The program is expected to spur the construction of 25,000 new units over the next decade, giving first nations families and individuals a greater range of housing options, particularly home ownership and market rental units.

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A home ownership approach to housing will increase access to financing for first nations, enabling more individuals to own or rent their own home on reserve. When young families plan for their future, they dream of a good home where they can invest savings, build equity and enjoy pride in their ownership and to get ahead. We look forward to working with first nation organizations to make it a success.

This is the kind of initiative, the kind of approach to first nations issues that gets tangible results and makes a difference in the lives of people. That is because we are putting the tools for progress into the hands of the first nations people themselves so they can address the priorities that matter to them in a way that fits their unique circumstances.

● (1245)

Economic development plays a strong role in building safe and stable communities. There will be no escape from poverty without an active economy, one that generates not just wealth, but generates purpose and a sense of progress toward a better future.

The government will continue to foster partnerships that help aboriginal people get the skills and training they need to take advantage of the job prospects in the north and across Canada.

The recent budget dedicates \$70 million over the next two years to develop new measures to assist first nations, Inuit and Métis individuals and communities participate more fully in the economy and in all parts of Canada.

We also continue to explore new agreements under the aboriginal workforce participation initiative. The initiative helps employers recruit, retrain and promote aboriginal employees. It is a very successful, progressive initiative that makes enormous progress.

We will continue working with employers to identify and overcome barriers in the workplace that limit aboriginal employment opportunities. We will support career and business development projects for aboriginal youth.

The government is committed to making real progress in improving the quality of life in aboriginal communities. In fiscal year 2007-08 the government will spend \$10.2 billion on aboriginal programs and services, a billion dollar increase over any previous federal budget.

However, just as important, we are committed to taking practical measures that make a difference. We will continue to work in partnership with aboriginal organizations to realize concrete results in a range of areas, including land claims, education, housing, child and family services, safe drinking water, economic opportunity and the extension of human rights protection to first nations on reserve.

I want to once again thank the committee for raising this very important issue. We will continue to work with our partners to strengthen women's shelters on reserve. We will continue to make steady progress in building strong communities where aboriginal people and families can succeed and prosper.

● (1250)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will give my colleague enough time to get the simultaneous interpretation because I have to explain a few things to her.

It seems as though my colleague lives in a wonderful world where everything is going well, where thanks to her government, everything is just fine for the aboriginal communities. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am the Bloc Québécois critic for Indian affairs and northern development and I have visited a number of aboriginal communities. If her wonderful world existed, we would know it and we would see it. There is a problem and I hope that the hon. parliamentary secretary will agree. The government's annual spending increase for all aboriginal communities has been capped at 2%.

What impact does this have? I have had it with all this talk about separate programs for water, housing and so forth. I have checked for myself and there will be less than \$230 million for 2008-09 alone. My colleague should try to convince the person seated next to her, who could try to convince the minister, who could perhaps convince the Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance that we cannot keep this up. Aboriginal communities need 13%, and that is not our figure. Studies by her government show that the 2% ceiling needs to be eliminated because the aboriginal population is growing by 5% to 6% a year. The government can create as many programs as it wants, but they will not be enough.

Is my colleague willing to support aboriginal communities by approaching other colleagues in her government and asking them to remove the 2% ceiling imposed by the Liberals in 1996 and still maintained by the Conservatives?

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the member was listening to my speech. Many programs cost a lot of money, but money is not everything. We know there have to be some other solutions to the challenges facing the aboriginal people. Today the debate has turned to women and the problems, issues and concerns they have. This is why I am surprised we are not debating Bill C-47, which talks about women and the rights they would have through this legislation.

We have invested in housing and continually invest in training and skills programs. I do not know if the member was not listening, but the investments have been increasing and most communities across Canada have benefited.

Most of all, I would like to see the debate go back to Bill C-47 to give rights to aboriginal women.

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am also perplexed by the speech from the other side. It fails to take into account the overall picture that first nations face. It also fails to take into account a strong, comprehensive knowledge of the historical background to this whole situation.

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I will not to get into a history lesson, as the member opposite can do that for herself, but there is a whole structure of colonization that has had an impact for many years. I understand what she is saying. I understand the goodwill in terms of saying, "We are doing this and we are doing that", but addressing the root issues is a significant part of it.

An earlier mention was made that we were not debating Tsawwassen. The government could have put Tsawwassen on the order paper at any time and chose not to.

The comment and question I have for the member is this. She said, "We will put the tools into the hands of first nations people themselves". I would like to add to this very issue the first nations family violence prevention program. Manitoba has a federal commitment. I will quote the First Nations Women's Council, which said, "The commitments to improve the INAC family violence prevention program in June 2006 have fallen short, to say the least. Women's leadership and women's recommendations for real life solutions have been ignored—

• (1255)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I will have to stop the hon. member there to allow the hon. parliamentary secretary a chance to respond.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, our government is helping first nations communities by addressing the critical need for family violence prevention programs and services on reserve through a five year investment of almost \$56 million.

I am surprised the member across the way is not interested in giving aboriginal women rights through the legislation that we would like to see go forward. I am surprised the Liberal government never brought any sort of legislation to the House. She, of all members, would understand how important it is. I could see such legislation taking us forward.

I also sat on the Standing Committee on Status of Women. I heard some of the members today say that they thought it gave them some sort of edge on having knowledge of some of the needs. I heard many times at committee that aboriginal rights would be very welcome. We should be trying to move this through the House.

I am surprised the past Liberal government never introduced such legislation or made any attempts to help aboriginal women. This is a question Liberals should ask themselves. They have to live with the fact that they did not advanced the rights of women on reserve.

I would like to see the debate go back to the rights of aboriginal women.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the important work that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development continues to do in this area. She has a key role to play in extending many of the benefits that we are talking about today.

I would like to talk a bit more about what she alluded to in her last answer, which is, of course, that this very concurrence motion comes

on a day when we were about to make history on so many fronts. We were about to send the matrimonial real property rights bill to committee. This bill is something that has not been done before and would extend to first nations families the benefits that we all take for granted off reserve. Women on reserve would be able to utilize these provisions to potentially retain their homes.

We also were going to be debating the Tsawwassen final agreement between Canada and the Tsawwassen First Nation, which already has been signed and which again is an historic piece of legislation that is being delayed by members across the way who have brought forward this concurrence motion.

I would ask my colleague to give some further commentary on why it is so important that we set aside all the partisanship and move forward now with these important provisions.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, I came into the debate after listening to other members. I find this perplexing. This is not going to help us advance aboriginal women's rights. I never realized that there was such a difference between aboriginal women's rights and non-aboriginal women's rights and I am happy that our government has brought forward this legislation.

I am sure that this is all about partisan politics. I think the opposition parties appear to want to keep aboriginal women from having their rights advanced. I have no idea why. First of all, this kind of legislation has never been introduced before. I think it is something that aboriginal women's groups have been asking for. I think they want to participate as we do. If there is a marriage breakdown, they want the same rights as non-aboriginal women.

I am surprised that this legislation would be delayed by a concurrence motion put forward by a party that claims to really care.

• (1300)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed in that I have about an hour's worth of information here and there are only about five minutes left in the debate. I will quickly get through as much as I can.

However, obviously this debate is happening because of the insufficient speed of action of the government in funding aboriginal women's shelters and also because of its actions in cutting them back. The original proposal was for 10 shelters and was cut back to 5. It is important for government to deal with the most vulnerable. Who could be more vulnerable as far as violence against women is concerned than the aboriginal women of this country? The percentage of violence is so much higher for them than it is for other Canadians.

That is why, like previous speakers, I support the Sisters in Spirit mission about missing and murdered aboriginal women. I encourage the government to take faster action in that area.

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Also, on the holistic manner of helping aboriginal women, I certainly encourage the government to provide more and continuing support to parenting for aboriginal moms, which often is done so excellently through the Friendship Centres of Canada. Their funding should be increased. The healthy moms and healthy babies program is an incredible success. The prenatal nutrition program is very successful.

As well, I have been lobbying for years for the head start program for young aboriginal children. It can have such an effect on their lives and, in particular, can help women who are single parents.

The Liard Aboriginal Women's Society in Yukon does excellent work and should have its support continued by the government. It does great work on the first nations developing a constitution and on input from the women's groups and also runs wonderful healing camps. Of course, support for FAS-FAE is incredibly important, as it is for housing and those other types of organizations.

We have three shelters in Yukon. There is one in Whitehorse. Watson Lake has Help and Hope. There is one in Dawson City. The one in Whitehorse is always oversubscribed and certainly needs new help.

The member for Churchill mentioned Jordan's principle, which she fought so hard for. I want to put on record a letter I received in relation to that, which states:

As you are aware, the Canadian Parliament unanimously adopted "Jordan's Principle" on December 12, 2007. Jordan was a First Nation child who lived the entire 5 years of his life in a Manitoba hospital because government officials could not agree on which level and department of government was responsible for his well-being.

I recognize that many Yukon First Nations are self-governed and therefore "Jordan's Principle" may not apply to these groups. I encourage you, however, to do everything in your power to ensure that "Jordan's Principle" becomes a reality for Canada's First Nations people.

I can tell Marie Stevens of Whitehorse, Yukon that we in the opposition are certainly fighting for that to occur.

There have been national conferences to further aboriginal women's equality. The first one was in Newfoundland and Labrador. There was a sub-conference in Whitehorse after that to follow up. I want to go through a number of items recommended for the government to undertake to help aboriginal women. There are four categories: education, leadership, wellness and other messages.

There are about 16 recommendations in each section, so I am obviously not going to get through them all, but this is a huge list. I have already asked the government to follow up both on the recommendations from the national conferences and on those from the follow-up regional conferences. There is going to be another one next year, and I believe it will be in Yellowknife. We who were at the Yukon conference will certainly be watching the government to see what action there has been on all these items.

The Yukon conference was held last November, with over 200 participants from Whitehorse and Watson Lake. We will be following up on those dozens upon dozens of recommendations for action to help the most vulnerable, the aboriginal people in our society, to progress with the solutions that they have designed.

There are a lot of programs in non-aboriginal shelters for which aboriginal shelters do not get the same support from the Department of Indian Affairs. Some of these include: child support services; a transition home program; a 24 hour toll free crisis line; community awareness; a satellite program; and last, support groups.

● (1305)

Therefore, this is about not only the number of shelters but the services provided in those shelters, where there is certainly a very high need. They should be near the top of the list of things that the government is doing for aboriginal people.

One thing that concerns us locally is that quite often we hear an announcement related to aboriginal shelters, such as this one, which says that support will be on reserve. This has happened over many years. As we know, more than half of the aboriginal people in Canada do not live on reserve now. How are they supposed to be funded? Often this falls through the cracks in these types of announcements.

I am speaking for a lot of the people in the north, a lot of the first nations that have self-government agreements and are now doing their own governance. Hopefully Tsawwassen will be doing so soon. We will be debating that in a few minutes.

All of those people sometimes lose out because the announcements are just for first nations on reserve. I encourage every party and its analysts, in government or in opposition, to make sure when announcements come out for on reserve first nations people that provisions are made for those who are not on reserve so that they get the same types of needs met in some sort of mechanism. They still live in their own communities. They are self-governing.

It can be a different funding mechanism, of course, and a different delivery mechanism, but obviously people have the same needs to some extent whether or not they live on reserve. We cannot keep having this huge group, over half of the aboriginal people in Canada, fall between the cracks on some of these initiatives.

I want to talk about some of the recommendations that came out of the local aboriginal conferences.

The first one is to ensure that curriculum development in schools includes cultural components such as land claims, the history of Yukon first nations and traditional roles of first nations women and men.

On leadership, recommendations are as follows: include the voices of female aboriginal elders as advisers in meetings of all first nation women; increase the representation of aboriginal women in decision-making positions in governments, corporations and non-profit organizations; and increase representation of aboriginal women at decision-making tables dealing with water, land and traditional knowledge.

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In wellness, it is recommended to build traditional healing centres focused on addictions and violence, with programming that incorporates traditional knowledge, medicine, support and healing for the whole family, and that also incorporates spiritual healing, including for families, with the use of elders' knowledge.

Other recommendations were: to reclaim cultural traditions and identity through teaching and celebrating; to address and eliminate racism; to encourage and support aboriginal women to take on decision-making and political roles; to use the wisdom of elders as teachers; and to respect youth.

I hope the government will follow up on this report called "Strong Women, Strong Communities" from the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summit and the national summit so that we can make great progress in this area.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.
(Motion agreed to)

* * *

● (1310)

PETITIONS

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I have the pleasure of presenting a petition signed by over 1,500 constituents from my riding of Etobicoke Centre, as well as individuals from the greater Toronto area.

The petitioners express grave concern about the Canadian connections of "Dr. Horror" and the illegal harvesting of kidneys from 500 poor labourers in New Delhi, India, as well as the harvesting of organs of Falun Gong prisoners of conscience languishing in Chinese prisons, as documented by the independent Matas-Kilgour investigation.

In an effort to put a stop to the harvesting and trafficking of human organs and body parts, the petitioners urge the House of Commons to pass Bill C-500, which makes it illegal to obtain organs or body parts from unwilling donors or as part of a financial transaction and would also establish a certification program and registration process to ensure that organs are legally donated and that no money transactions occurred for the procurement of an organ for Canadians, either in Canada or abroad.

KOMAGATA MARU INCIDENT

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by literally thousands of Canadians. The petition was organized by the Professor Mohan Singh Memorial Foundation of Canada. Its volunteers gathered signatures at the Gadri Babiyian Da Mela in Surrey.

The petitioners draw attention to the tragedy of the *Komagata Maru*, a vessel carrying 376 passengers of Indian origin but also British subjects that arrived in Vancouver harbour on May 23, 1914. Canadian immigration officials refused to allow the passengers to disembark. After a two month detention, the Canadian navy forced the ship out of Canadian waters under the threat of guns.

The petitioners contend that the *Komagata Maru* incident is illustrative of racist policies. The petitioners are calling upon the government to formally recognize the tragedy and to make an official heartfelt apology to redress it.

[Translation]

BILL 101

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition signed by several hundred Quebecers who are calling on the federal government to comply with Bill 101 within Quebec, especially in workplaces.

Even though this Parliament yesterday rejected the Bloc Québécois bill designed to achieve this goal, it is clear that petitions will continue to pour in. Perhaps the sheer number of petitions will eventually bring my colleagues in the other parties on side.

[English]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition today signed by many residents of British Columbia and Ontario who are concerned about the role of the Minister of Canadian Heritage in promoting and defending Canadian cultural and artistic freedom. They also believe that there should be no ability for the government, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, any office of government or government official to make subjective judgments concerning artistic content that limit the freedom of expression.

The petitioners call on Parliament to staunchly defend Canadian artistic and cultural expression, to rescind any provisions of Bill C-10 which allow the government to censor film and video production in Canada, and to ensure that the government has in place subjective and transparent guidelines that respect freedom of expression when delivering any program intended to support film and video production in Canada.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURN

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 234 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Text]

Question No. 234—**Hon. Roy Cullen:**

With regard to the \$300 million commitment Canada made in 2003, in conjunction with the international community, as an effort to assist Iraq in its reconstruction: (a) to date, how much of the \$300 million has been allocated for Iraqi reconstruction assistance; (b) what percentage of the money allocated thus far has been directed to areas largely occupied by minorities in Iraq; (c) what percentage has been directed to the ChaldoAssyrian population in the Nineveh Plains; (d) what action is the Minister taking to assist in the development of an effective security infrastructure in the Nineveh Plains; (e) since 2003, what amount of development assistance has been directed by the government to 'grassroots' non-governmental organizations in the Nineveh Plains; (f) what amount was directed to the Assyrian Aid Society and the Babylon Charitable Society towards assistance to the minorities in the Nineveh Plains; (g) since 2003, what action has the government taken to promote regional democratic development and local administration in the Nineveh Plains; and (h) what action will the government consider to stop any ethno-religious discrimination and abuses of the indigenous ChaldoAssyrian minority?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[Translation]

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

GASOLINE PRICES

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I request that an emergency debate be held on the sharp increase in the price of petroleum products.

Gasoline prices have increased by 30% since the beginning of the year and are still rising steadily. In the Montreal area, the average price has gone from \$1.08 in January to over \$1.40 today. The price of crude oil is also exploding. In the week of May 2, the price per barrel was between \$113 U.S. and \$119 U.S. As of May 14, it is over \$120 U.S. This is a serious situation that warrants a debate.

We are approaching a long weekend, and we know that for the past five years, gasoline prices have always gone up on these long weekends.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that there is currently no other procedural way I can use to request a debate on this important issue.

We want as many members as possible to be able to take part in this important debate. Consequently, we will reiterate our request for an emergency debate on May 26.

● (1315)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I want to thank the hon. member for Trois-Rivières for speaking and for reiterating her request during the week following the break.

[English]

FAMILY HOMES ON RESERVES AND MATRIMONIAL INTERESTS OR RIGHTS ACT

The House resumed from May 14 consideration of the motion that Bill C-47, An Act respecting family homes situated on First Nation reserves and matrimonial interests or rights in or to structures and lands situated on those reserves, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-47. In the debate on this bill yesterday, there were a number of very good points raised by the member for Nunavut.

This bill is an act respecting family homes situated on first nation reserves and matrimonial interests or rights in or to structures and lands situated on those reserves.

The debate has brought a lot of very important dimensions to the crisis that exists on first nations reserves. This legislation is necessary because there is no legislation now to which people can turn. These are the representations of the member for Nunavut, who has been one of the most stellar champions of aboriginal affairs, of first nations peoples, Métis and the Inuit. During her speech, she referred to a couple of stakeholder representations, which I want to review simply to provide a context as to why I have risen to speak.

The Native Women's Association of Canada expressed its views in a press release criticizing this legislation. It expressed its frustration with what it refers to as the government's unilateral action on the bill. The discussion has to do with legislative initiatives and unlegislated initiatives. It is the unlegislated initiatives part that is the source of some of the concern expressed by the Native Women's Association of Canada.

Bev Jacobs, the president of the NWAC, stated in her press release of March 4, 2008:

There is nothing in the legislation that addresses the systemic issues of violence many women face that lead to the dissolution of marriages nor is there any money available for implementation. In the end, we end up with a more worthless piece of paper.

That is a very strong statement.

We just dealt with a report from the Standing Committee on the Status of Women relating to some of the issues, particularly with regard to the violence against many women and also some of the other areas, such as housing, poverty, governance, access to justice and general violence. It is very important to ensure that Canadians understand and our first nations also understand that we are sensitive to this. I have not seen that in regard to the representations of the government. As I listen to the questions asked by government members on Bill C-47, the government seems to be fairly dismissive. The attitude of the government is that we should just pass the bill, that it is a good bill and the government does not have to do anything else.

The government must listen to the stakeholders, those who are seeking some relief in dealing with a serious crisis within the first nations communities.

Government Orders

Also, there is a very significant letter dated April 8, 2008 from the office of the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Phil Fontaine. When I read it, I was somewhat concerned about the allegations that were made in the letter. The position generally is that this bill is flawed in both process and substance and that while its assessment of the bill is not finalized, the Assembly of First Nations will want to make further representations. This letter is extremely important. It was very helpful to me in understanding the view of the stakeholders, and it does include the preliminary analysis of the Assembly of First Nations.

● (1320)

Even in the text of the letter, with regard to Bill C-47, Mr. Fontaine said:

While it was a positive and practical step forward to engage in dialogue with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the Native Women's Association of Canada in the development of this legislation, the approach falls far short of First Nations' direction that the Crown should fully engage with First Nations in developing policy and legislation that affects First Nations.

The substantive foundation of the concerns that they have has to do with the consultation process. I recall that in her speech to the House, the member for Nunavut commented on that aspect. She said:

—if we want to see real solutions in our aboriginal communities, there has to be real partnership and collaboration, and that they not be token gestures.

The concern is if there is a perception of tokenism, of consultations which are going through the motions but which are not really sincere, it is a recipe for disagreement and maybe discontent. Parliament has a serious responsibility to consult with stakeholders regardless of which piece of legislation with which we are dealing. When we make laws, we are affecting people in one way or another and those people need to be heard.

According to the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, it appears that has been a problem not only with regard to Bill C-47, but generally with regard to many of the issues that have come before Parliament.

Mr. Fontaine went on to say:

Furthermore, the fact that direction provided through this dialogue does not appear reflected in the tabled Bill, leaves us to conclude that the dialogue was of limited value in promoting and implementing a reconciliation approach regarding First Nations aboriginal and treaty rights and Crown sovereignty.

I take this as a very serious alert for parliamentarians and for the government with regard to Bill C-47. We have to step up and take this a lot more seriously and determine whether or not there are appropriate steps to address these legitimate concerns that have been raised by Chief Fontaine.

He went on to say:

In regards to the process of engagement, the AFN has clearly stated, on numerous occasions, and in formal correspondence, the position of First Nations in this regard. In addition, the AFN and First Nations through the dialogue process, detailed alternative approaches and measures to address the issues arising in relation to matrimonial real property on reserve. Indeed, the federal government had many, many opportunities to address these matters properly and effectively.

He went on to say:

Unfortunately, the advice and direction of AFN and First Nations has not been heeded and I must point out that the First Nations assessment of the proposed legislation will likely be that it is unconstitutional in law and of no value to First Nations individuals or governments in practice.

When I read that it made me want to know more. I want to hear more. Should the bill go to committee for review, the questions that were raised in the consultation process and which apparently were not heeded by the government in proposing the legislation, need to be considered. We need to remediate that situation. We need to make sure that the stakeholders, regardless of their basis, are heard and that the issues raised are frontally and effectively addressed so that all understand. Regardless of which side one is on on a particular issue, there is always room for due respect for the opinions of others, but that does not seem to have been the case in this regard.

● (1325)

The bill contemplates an approach that will not provide any effective remedies for individuals seeking redress. That was the intent of the bill and is the intent of the bill. It is why the member for Nunavut, when she spoke before the House yesterday, made this argument over and over again. Yet when the parliamentary secretary rose on questions, he was dismissive of her question and made the assertion that the bill should be passed, that we should move forward because there were other things to do.

We have things to do. We have to get Bill C-47 right. The objectives of this place are to have full debate and to properly identify those issues which should be addressed.

The first nations wanted to articulate, as laid out in Chief Fontaine's letter, the principles that should guide the search for solutions and the standard upon which proposed solutions should be evaluated. He went on the list about a dozen. He lists strengthening first nations, families and communities, fairness, respect for traditional values, protection of aboriginal and treaty rights, no abrogation or derogation of first nations' collective rights, protection and preservation of first nations' land for future generations, recognition and implementation of first nations' jurisdiction and community based solutions.

I had the opportunity to be a member of the Standing Committee on Health when we dealt with aboriginal health issues. The committee travelled to a number of reserves to consult with stakeholders and to determine some of the non-legislative areas of which we should also be cognizant.

It was clear to me that there were substantive differences between reserves. Some are in much better shape than others. One thing I noticed was some of the fundamentals, like clean water and a sewage system, were not present.

There were a number of health issues in program areas. I remember I went into a modest community centre on one reserve. In the basement was a large lineup of people and I wanted to know why. I found out that people were lining up to buy cases of cigarettes for resale. However, next to that was the jail. It is hard for Canadians to understand the realities of the lives of first nations and the challenges they face.

Government Orders

As a consequence of that review, we found that the problems which existed on first nations reserves, which exist throughout Canadian society, were multiple times more in terms of severity as well as the occurrence levels, whether it be substance abuse, or domestic violence, or problems with children or social problems, et cetera. These are areas which Canadians demand that Parliament address in an appropriate fashion.

I thank Chief Fontaine for his letter of April 8 and the preliminary analysis. I will not go through this, but it is available and if members do not have a copy, I would be happy to provide it for them.

I want to comment generally on the bill. The Liberal Party supports the bill to go to committee. Like many bills where second reading occurs, we are often approached by stakeholders and constituents who suggest the bill should simply be defeated at second reading. This happened with regard to animal cruelty legislation. It is happening with regard to Bill C-51, which has to do with natural health products.

Canadians and all interested parties should understand that when a bill comes before the House at second reading, we have representations in an informal way from those who are interested parties. We have our own knowledge, some of our own research and some historic research.

• (1330)

What we do not have at second reading is the present assessment and the current input of the experts. We do not have the formal position of the stakeholders on both sides or all sides of the argument. What we do at second reading is debate, in principle, the aspects of the bill and whether there are any major problems.

Members know that when we pass a bill at second reading, we pass it in principle and get it to committee where there can be, as necessary, full consultation and public hearings to allow the stakeholders to come before the committee to articulate very clearly the positions and concerns they have to proposed amendments, et cetera. Some of the best work in Parliament happens at committee, where it is not just a handful or 12 members of Parliament who make the decisions. They are there participating in a consultation process with the necessary expertise, not only from the government and the officials of the department, who will answer the questions of the members and explain the bill in great detail, but also with those stakeholders, which is extremely important.

I am quite sure the bill will pass at second reading. However, I am also quite sure throughout this place there will be a strong representation that we should have very comprehensive public hearings and hear from the stakeholders to identify how we can deal with those matters which may not have been reflected in the bill, even though they may have been raised under preliminary consultation with the principal stakeholders.

There are many stakeholders in regard to the bill. We can never forget that this is a matter of human rights for women and children living on reserves. The whole objective of the bill is so they can have safer and healthier lives and therefore happier lives. Those are fundamental objectives. Who is against that?

How we deliver that will be the issue. Legislating certain things will help for those matters which require a legislative solution

because we need a law to guide it. We cannot achieve the full impact and the benefit of the law without having the non-legislative component and the initiatives, the support and the funding necessary to provide an environment in which those laws can operate in a fair manner.

While we support the intent of the bill, we do not support the unilateral process the government has taken in introducing the legislation. We were instrumental in making critical changes to Bill C-21 to ensure that aboriginal Canadians would have the time and the capacity they needed to deal with changes. We continue to push the government to address issues such as the human rights needs of aboriginal Canadians, education, jobs, poverty, water and health, which are much the same kinds of conclusions that we reached in the health committee I back in 1994, which was when the new Parliament started.

It was an education for me, as an urban Canadian with very little exposure prior to coming to Parliament, about the challenges faced by our first nations and their people, the Métis and the Inuit.

The bill itself establishes a federal matrimonial real property regime, combined with the mechanisms for first nations to develop their own matrimonial real property laws.

By way of background, in 1986 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that when a conjugal relationship broke down on reserve, courts could not apply provincial or territorial family law because reserve lands fell under federal jurisdiction. We can see the need to address that condition.

As a result, aboriginal women living on reserves have not enjoyed the same rights as women living off reserves. That is an important matter to be resolved. They are not entitled to an equal share of matrimonial property at the time of the marriage break down. Matrimonial real property refers to the house and the land that the couple lives on while they are married or in a common law relationship.

The government began preliminary consultations on this matter, but it focused on recommendations made by committees. The next step was to move to the legislation solution. As I had indicated, this is not simply a matter to be addressed by legislative proscriptions. It also requires a non-legislative approach.

• (1335)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member as he articulated his view of what happened with respect to the bill. He used the term “unilateral process”. I remind him and all members of the House that 109 different consultation sessions were held with aboriginal groups, a total of 135 consultation days in 64 different locations across Canada.

He went on to say that 12 members of committee should not be making the decision as we engage in this consultation process. I have three questions for the member.

First, is he aware that his party's critic for Indian affairs stated unequivocally that the Liberals did not consider the committee process part of the consultation process?

Government Orders

Second, would he envision another 109 or more sessions of consultation before committee?

Third, how long is he willing to have this important initiative held up? First nations people have been waiting for this for years. It is my opinion and the opinion of members on this side of the House that we cannot afford to unduly hold up this bill.

I would like an answer to those three questions please.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, it is now clear for all to see that depending on how one wishes to present the facts, another version can be given.

I was not giving my opinion on the consultation process. I was giving the position as articulated by the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations in his letter of April 8. It is his opinion, on behalf of first nations, that the consultation process was hollow. It was not respected.

The member went on to suggest that the critic said that the committee process was not part of the consultation. It is not. That was the representation by the member. The consultation process on legislation to be tabled does not happen at committee. The member may have misspoken. Maybe he is referring to the ongoing dialogue and discussion that happens at committee. We have 12 members of Parliament at committee who will be able to have dialogue with the officials to fully understand the nuances of the legislation, the pitfalls and all the other matters and to hear witnesses and stakeholders.

Even as of April 8, when Chief Fontaine wrote his letter, the committee had only concluded a preliminary analysis. The member said that there were 109 consultation sessions. It is good to have a lot of people involved in a consultation process, but if they have not been given the time to do a full and proper assessment of important proposed legislation, then the consultation is hollow. We had the same thing with regard to the government's clean air bill, Bill 30, in which a copy of the bill, a secret cabinet document, was given to the public stakeholders on which to comment.

The member should know that these are the opinions of the Assembly of First Nations.

• (1340)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a brief comment and a question for my colleague from Mississauga South.

I think he would be the first one to agree with me that the social condition of Canada's first nations is Canada's greatest shame and that is why many people view the time we are spending on this fairly narrow issue of matrimonial real property as somewhat of a red herring if the real problem lies with the Indian Act, a document unworthy of any western democracy.

The Indian Act has been responsible for 130 years of social tragedy, which is the only way to phrase it, and yet we are dealing with a fairly narrow Eurocentric, simplistic notion of matrimonial real property. When there are circumstances of abject poverty, it becomes less relevant and less important for Parliament to be seized with this one issue.

Does the member agree with me that something about this bill shows a lack of sensitivity to the traditional culture and heritage of aboriginal people? I will give him one example to illustrate this.

I took part in the constitutional discussions around the Charlottetown accord, the aboriginal round. We met with a group of aboriginal women elders who did not want us to pass the provisions of the Charlottetown accord as it pertained to aboriginal people, partly because of this Eurocentric lack of recognition. They told us that their culture was a lot older than ours and that they had ways of dealing with things.

One aboriginal woman elder told me that in her community, women were not allowed to run for chief. Many of us at the discussions shook our head and said that was terrible. She went on to say that the men were not allowed to vote. It was clear that in their community, they had, over thousands of years, developed a fairly egalitarian way of ensuring that men were not dominating the culture and tradition of that community. Yes, the women could not run for office but the men were not allowed to vote for the chief.

If we were to take that issue before the Human Rights Commission, some tribunal would be wrestling with that and would probably rule that the thousands of years of culture, tradition and heritage in that community would be invalid, not in keeping with Canadian values and would be interfered with. That is the type of nuance that probably would have come out were there genuine consultation taking place in the crafting of this bill.

I would agree with my colleague that consultation has legal meaning and part of true consultation means accommodating the legitimate concerns that are raised by those being consulted. Consultation is not just telling people what is going to be done to them. Would he agree with that?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the member for Nunavut said that real partnerships were not token, that they involved respect, collaboration, courtesy, compromise, diplomacy and the list goes on. This is not legislative. This is being sincere and open.

I must repeat what Chief Fontaine said in his letter. He said:

Unfortunately, the advice and direction of AFN and First Nations has not been heeded... .

He went on to list them. He said:

Based on the Report of the Ministerial Representative on Matrimonial Real Property Issues on Reserves, and through the AFN's own report, "Matrimonial Real Property on Reserves: Our Land, Our Families, Our Solutions", the issues and remedies required clearly demonstrated the need for a broad and comprehensive approach.

That is not being taken fully in Bill C-47.

I must repeat that the message that has been given by so many people who have addressed this place on Bill C-47 is that, yes, we do need some legislative tools to work with to help bridge the problems but they cannot be totally effective unless we also address the non-legislative matters that are the root causes of many of the problems. This needs to be, as the member for Nunavut referred to, a holistic approach, and that is how we should approach these issues that have been raised by the stakeholders.

Government Orders

This is important legislation in a series of initiatives that must be taken by Parliament, but when we do it we had better do it right and that needs to start before the legislation gets on the table. If the signal goes out that notwithstanding the 109 consultations, they were not heeded and it is reflected in the legislation that they were not heeded, where is the good faith consultation? I do not think it is there.

• (1345)

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, as a final wrap-up, I just want reinforce a point. When the first nations governance act was introduced there was a touring task force, so to speak, but on the idea of consultation, the minister of Indian affairs at that time claimed he had met the test and that he had truly done a consultation. The government at the time would staple a notice on a telephone pole in a certain community telling people that at 7 o'clock in the evening they would be talking about the first nations governance act and then there was a bunch of technical mumbo-jumbo. Maybe three, four or five people would come out. Then the minister would say that they had consulted with that community. That cannot be called true consultation by any definition and I accuse the current government of the same thing.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right. According to Chief Fontaine, if the consultations had taken place, matters would have been dealt with, such as land management, dispute resolution capacity, housing, child welfare, shelters, policing, membership, residency, family violence, et cetera.

Those are not things that came up during the consultations on Bill C-47. Those are matters that have been before Canadians and before the government for many years.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to perhaps pursue the same line and themes that we heard from the member for Mississauga South and some of the questions and comments from my colleague from Winnipeg.

Although Bill C-47 has, as its essence, an idealistic approach, by the same token it is probably fairly naive, but, more important, it does not, as much as my colleague from Kitchener—Waterloo would like me to think. He is missing the point and the bill misses the point in that regard that the alleged consultation process really never occurred.

It does not matter whether I say that the consultation process occurred or whether the member from Mississauga or any other member in the House says that the consultation process occurred. It is whether the first nations, the aboriginal communities in Canada, feel that it was a meaningful consultation process.

As we talked to representatives of the first nations, it was obvious that they did not accept that the process leading up to the drafting and filing of the bill in the House met any kind of meaningful consultation process. They have repeatedly raised specific concerns both with regard to their comments falling on deaf ears, which was stated, I believe, by the president of the AFN, and that they were not involved. They raised a number of other concerns that they believed needed to be addressed before this type of legislation was introduced.

I want to go back to the motivation behind this, which, I would suggest, everyone in the chamber from all parties agrees to. We recognize that the present process for dealing with marital relation-

ship breakdown on the reserves ends with women, in particular, being treated unfairly. We can look at statements from the AFN and from the women's groups within the aboriginal and Métis community that would say the same thing.

However, that is not good enough to then justify this legislation. The legislation has some fundamental flaws, which were pointed out to us by the first nations on the reserves. They told us that the legislation did not address a number of other problems that are attendant in that overall relationship between people living together on the reserve and then the relationship breaking down. They know that much more work needs to be done with regard to interspousal violence and interfamily violence. The bill does nothing to effectively address that.

It is sometimes said that we are speaking on behalf of the male component of the first nations community. I want to be very clear that that is not the case. I am looking at a press release that summarizes the position of the Native Women's Association of Canada. It makes a number of points and I want to go over them, but I want to deal specifically with the problems that it sees and that it feels the bill does not address.

It talks about the problems, and one obviously being the issue of matrimonial real property and who has rights to it on breakup. It goes on to say that the bill does not address at all the intergenerational impacts of colonization, which is a major problem, violence against women and a limited access to justice.

One of the further points the association makes in that regard is that there is nothing in the proposed legislation dealing with the assistance needed to build capacity on the reserves and to deal with those issues. However, I recognize that it is not the nature of this proposed legislation to do that.

• (1350)

This is work that has to be done before we move to legislation. Programming has to be put into place and financial capacity has to be put into place to deal with these.

Let me raise one issue. On the larger reserves in particular, should we be establishing a separate judicial infrastructure, not to deal just with criminal matters as we have done on some of the reserves, but to deal with matrimonial matters? Is that one of the things we should be building? This legislation does not address it at all. It is perhaps necessary that we have that, especially in the larger reserves.

With regard to other social programming infrastructure that is necessary to deal with some of these issues in the situation of marital breakdown, again, there is no addressing of that. When we speak to the representatives of the first nations, we hear that that type of negotiation is not even going on to build that capacity to deal with this kind of a structure.

Statements by Members

I want to be very clear that with respect to the women's groups and the national association, there are parts of this legislation that they could see as being usable even though, as my colleague from Winnipeg mentioned, it is very much Eurocentric in terms of its historical background. There are parts of it that they think may very well be usable within their structure, their tradition and their culture, but not all of it will. They know that. When they are given this holus-bolus and are told, "This is the regime we expect you to follow because that is what we follow in the rest of Canadian society", they immediately say, "We cannot do that. It is not possible to do that". Again, we need to analyze this legislation in much more detail from their perspective. That is what they said.

Even before we get to that, they expect that we will as a society be in a position to ask what they require in the way of building an infrastructure to support their existing culture but to deal with these problems as they have identified them; what can we do to help in that regard? I have to say it was the same problem with another piece of legislation around governance of first nations that we had in late 2003-04 under the previous Liberal administration. The government did not have the necessary consultation and coupled with that, the government came up with solutions that were clearly not acceptable within their culture, within their tradition. We are repeating that same error. Fortunately the filibuster, and I again acknowledge my colleague from Winnipeg, that he helped lead, along with a member from the Bloc, eventually got that legislation withdrawn and we are still working on a proper governance model.

Going at it as we are here with the matrimonial property legislation is so piecemeal to almost amount to being ridiculous.

Again, we understand the motivation. I am not in any way demeaning the reasoning behind this, but the methodology is just totally unacceptable. It should be unacceptable to us if we are going to have any meaningful, respectful relationship with our first nations people. However, it clearly is unacceptable to that sector of our community who come out of the first nations.

Our position as a party is that we have to have this consultation; we have to have programming put into place to build that capacity before we move to this stage.

Let me make one final point. That is with regard to the regime itself. The regime itself accepts the concept of private ownership. Again, in the press release I mentioned earlier from the Native Women's Association of Canada, it specifically addressed that point. That concept of private ownership of band property is alien to them. Their concept is based on collective ownership, which again is alien to the European experience. It is not alien to most of Asia or to most of Africa. It is very much a European concept, if we go back in the history of it. It takes time to adjust.

The first nations have to ask themselves if they are going to move more into the private ownership concept, or do they stay within the collective concept but still deal with the issues of who has possession of the matrimonial home in the situation of a marital break.

• (1355)

Those are the kinds of issues that need to be addressed. They are not addressed in this legislation. They have not been addressed clearly in the consultation, limited as it was, in the run-up to the

legislation being brought before the House. For that and a number of other reasons, we have serious reservations that this legislation should proceed. The work that is going to go on in committee, because obviously the bill is going to go to committee, is very much going to have to take that into account if we have any chance of dealing in a respectful, meaningful way with the first nations.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

KITCHENER RANGERS

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in proud support of the best junior hockey team in Canada, if not the world. Sure, the world may not know it yet, but I look to the future, and let me assure everyone, the future is blue.

The Kitchener Rangers are the hosts of this year's Memorial Cup. Starting tomorrow, four teams will gather in the best city in Canada, and we in Kitchener will host them with pride and with the proper dash of humility.

Because 10 days later, three of those teams will return home with a sense of accomplishment for having represented themselves well, but only one team will have the right to hoist the Memorial Cup, and I think we all know, the Rangers it shall be.

From the glory days of Paul Coffey, Al MacInnis and Scott Stevens to the future of Justin Azevedo, Matt Halischuk or Mike Duco, look out, Canada, the Rangers are coming.

It is time for Canada to recognize in hockey what it has long recognized in politics: it is time to go blue all the way.

Go, Rangers, go.

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GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as each day passes, hundreds of Canadians are losing their jobs.

With the real estate sub-prime mortgage crash in the U.S., a crisis in the auto sector in Ontario and the closing of manufacturing plants, Brampton families are starting to feel the effects at home and at the dinner table. The strengthened job security and economic prosperity that hard-working Canadians and Bramptonians enjoyed under a former Liberal government has truly vanished.

They now have a Conservative government which has absolutely no plan to stimulate the economy, no plan for the crisis in the manufacturing and auto sectors and has provided no help for laid off workers. It is a government in which issues of social justice have fallen off the map. The results are that vulnerable Canadians and seniors are having to make the choice between filling up the gas tank, filling up the fridge, or filing their prescriptions.

Bramptonians deserve a government that will believe in them, that will invest in jobs, in child care, health care, in affordable housing, in the economy, ensuring that they will invest in the future of our country.

Statements by Members

● (1400)

[Translation]

RADIO STATION CPAM

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for five years, radio station CPAM has offered programming based on the needs and the culture of francophone ethnocultural communities in the greater Montreal area. It primarily serves the Haitian community, as well as the Latin American and African communities.

CPAM's vast and varied musical programs have made the station a favourite among Montrealers. It helps these ethnocultural communities truly integrate into Quebec society.

CPAM has managed to attract the interest of people who have come from other countries by focusing on news from their native lands as well as from Canada.

In doing so, CPAM has achieved its primary mission to facilitate a smooth transition into Quebec society for the target communities, to help them live in French and to better reflect Quebec's cultural diversity.

I would like to congratulate CPAM on its fifth anniversary and wish it continued success.

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[English]

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week families in my community were greeted with the all too familiar news of more job layoffs.

When GM informed its employees that the Windsor transmission facility will be closed, it was yet another piece of bad news in what has been a string of dreadful announcements from the auto industry.

We have lost 140,000 manufacturing jobs in Ontario in the last four years. In my community of Windsor, thousands of auto sector jobs have simply disappeared. These statistics, while staggering, fail to adequately illustrate the countless individual stories behind each job loss.

The government casually, indifferently, talks about significant restructuring or sectoral adjustment. That is not what it is about. It is about a very negative personal impact on the lives of thousands of men, women and children in my community. It is the families in my community and other communities throughout Ontario and Canada who have to cope with these negative consequences.

Once again I urge the government to implement an industrial strategy to address the problems facing the automotive sector, and in so doing, help make a positive difference in the lives which are now being simply restructured.

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DAVID THOMPSON BRIGADE

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to one of the greatest Canadians of all time, David Thompson, a man who set out for unknown territory at the young age of 14 as an apprentice with the Hudson's Bay Company.

He set sail from England in 1784, heading west to what is now Canada.

In 1797 he defected to the North West Company to pursue his interests in surveying and mapping. Mr. Thompson mapped out one-sixth of our country, or about four million square miles. He covered territory from Lake Superior to the Pacific.

In 1808 David Thompson travelled from Rocky Mountain House, Alberta to Fort William, now Thunder Bay, Ontario to report the opening of a trans-mountain trade route through the Rocky Mountains.

Although he passed away in near obscurity in 1857, he is now called the greatest land geographer who ever lived.

This week in the town of Devon in my riding, people celebrated the David Thompson Brigade.

This year marks the 200th anniversary of this event and modern day voyageurs will commemorate Mr. Thompson by retracing his journey.

As Canadians, we should be proud of his achievements in how he helped shape our great country.

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COMMUNITY LIVING TORONTO

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 60 years ago, Victoria Glover, the grandmother of an eight year old boy with an intellectual disability, pleaded on the pages of the *Toronto Star* for an alternative to institutionalizing people with intellectual disabilities. That event sparked a watershed moment leading to the establishment of Community Living Toronto, CLT, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary.

CLT supports 6,000 individuals searching for accessible and meaningful ways to live a more normal life in the community. It is the largest association of its kind in North America.

This organization has changed the lives of people with an intellectual disability, giving them a voice and supporting their choice of where they live, study, work and play. Its vision for society is one where people belong and we help each other to achieve our dreams.

I join all colleagues in the House in congratulating Community Living Toronto for 60 years of providing vital support to persons with an intellectual disability and to their families.

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● (1405)

[Translation]

BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc is like a worn-out soap opera that would have been cancelled years ago if not for the Liberal culture of entitlement that inspired the scriptwriters for 13 long years. Ever since the Conservatives came to power, they have been looking for new material.

Statements by Members

According to *La Presse* editorial writer André Pratte, the Bloc leader ran out of reasons that would justify his presence in Ottawa, so he set about stirring up a new crisis that would put his party back on its feet. His tactics are so crude, they are laughable.

The Bloc leader thinks he has the confrontation he needs, but Quebecers will not fall for it. They know the difference between a real crisis and melodrama. They know the difference between sensible demands and a con. It is obvious that by trotting out imaginary scandals and trying to stir up old conflicts, the Bloc is just looking for something to justify its existence.

Whatever the armchair separatists have to say about it, the Quebec nation recognizes that thanks to the Prime Minister's leadership, there are people in Ottawa now who can act in the best interest of Quebecers and Canadians.

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RACHEL ÉMOND-MERCIER

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my constituency assistant, Rachel Émond-Mercier, will be retiring on June 26, 2008. Rachel Émond-Mercier has been an active sovereigntist from the beginning who, for the past four years, has dedicated herself entirely—she always gives 100%—to promoting sovereignty and defending the values and interests of Quebecers, particularly the citizens of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, as a policy advisor.

In Bloc Québécois ridings, she is reputed to be among the best constituency assistants, the men and women who support our party positions every day with such rigour, fervour and dedication, while always being extremely discreet.

Unfortunately for me and the Bloc Québécois, her husband, Pierre Mercier, a retired Hydro-Québec engineer, now wants her for himself. Her grandchildren also want to spend some time with her. She is an enthusiastic grandmother.

I wish Rachel a happy retirement. I would like to thank her in particular, as well as all the other constituency assistants.

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[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been doing some thinking about the economy and the impact the Liberals' irresponsible spending plan of over \$60 billion will have on our country.

The problem is how the leader of the Liberal Party thinks he can pay for this largesse. I figured it out. He is going to take this country's national credit card and max it out.

He is considering a massive tax on gasoline, a massive tax on home heating fuels and a massive tax on electricity bills. Believe it or not, the tax hikes do not end there. He is also going to raise the GST.

Canadians want to know why the tax and spend Liberal leader wants to punish hard-working Canadian families.

This government has taken a different approach. We have cut taxes by almost \$200 billion. We have paid down our debt. Over three-quarters of a million jobs have been created since we formed government.

We are getting the job done for hard-working people in Ontario and this country.

* * *

SPEECH AND HEARING AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, millions of Canadians of all ages are living with the daily challenge of speech, language or hearing problems that significantly affect their work, their school and all aspects of their lives. Greater awareness of where to find help is paramount in ensuring these individuals are able to lead richer, more productive and enjoyable lives.

May is Speech and Hearing Awareness Month and I wish to congratulate a constituent who has earned the prestigious national Promotions Award from the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists.

Andre Lafargue is regional manager of audiology and speech-language pathology at River Valley Health in New Brunswick and is very involved in his professional associations. He has served as president of two provincial associations and is a former president of the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists.

I express congratulations to Andre Lafargue. He is truly deserving of this honour.

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TERRORISM

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liberal Senator Dallaire's testimony before a House of Commons subcommittee two days ago suggested that Canada is no better than al-Qaeda. The Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity gave the senator three opportunities to correct the record. Each time, the Liberal senator doubled down.

Asked if al-Qaeda strapping a suicide belt on a 14 year old girl with Down's syndrome and sending her to be remotely detonated is the moral equivalent to Canada's not making extraordinary political efforts for a transfer of Omar Khadr, the Liberal senator said, "If you want it in black and white, and I'm only too prepared to give it to you, absolutely".

Since then, the Liberal senator has admitted his error and clarified his remarks in a press release. We accept that clarification.

What we do not accept, however, are the Liberal leader's continued attempts to defend his senator's testimony. The Liberal leader said that "on the substance of the issue, General Dallaire is right".

Will the Liberal leader apologize today or will he continue defending comparisons between Canada and al-Qaeda?

Statements by Members

•(1410)

*[Translation]***SPORTS AND SOCIAL ASSOCIATION**

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 12, the members of the Braves du coin sports and social association held their 35th gala to recognize excellence in both sport and volunteerism.

Today I would like to congratulate the gala organizing committee, chaired by Mr. Jean-François Landry, as well as his many volunteers, who made the evening a resounding success. I also would like to congratulate all the winners—young athletes, artists and volunteers—who have distinguished themselves through their passion and dedication.

The Braves du coin have been involved in the Outaouais community since 1962. Under the leadership of Denis Desjardins, 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 the Braves du coin.

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*[English]***CHINA**

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the NDP, I express sorrow and concern regarding the tragic and devastating earthquake in China.

We offer our sincere condolences to the victims and families in Sichuan, Beichuan, Shaanxi, Gansu, Chongqing, Yunnan and Henan and other areas that were affected. The loss of life, the suffering of communities and the grief of individual families are deeply saddening.

We extend our deepest sympathy to those who are suffering losses in China, as well as to the Chinese Canadian community, which is coping with this loss and the unknown whereabouts of family and friends in the wake of this terrible tragedy.

All Canadians share this grief and loss and they hope for recovery and support to rebuild the lives of survivors and their communities. We urge the Canadian government to demonstrate its compassion and support by providing any immediate assistance possible.

Our thoughts and prayers are with China and its people.

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*[Translation]***QFL SOLIDARITY FUND**

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on May 13, the Quebec Federation of Labour celebrated the 25th anniversary of the QFL Solidarity Fund. The theme of the celebration was innovation.

It took the tenacity of then president Louis Laberge to convince the members of his union, and then the government of René Lévesque, of the importance of having a workers' fund and the tax benefits to make it work.

Innovation drove the creation of this fund since the QFL was charting new territory at the time by offering this until then almost non-existent development capital for small and medium-sized businesses.

This was one of the most significant innovations in the business world in the 1980s, a time when Quebec was going through the worst economic recession since the depression in the 1930s.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I wish continued success to the QFL Solidarity Fund, which has greatly contributed to shaping Quebec as we know it today.

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*[English]***GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, responsible government is the basis of our parliamentary system. It is a principle and practice that requires the federal government to be responsible and accountable to Parliament and to answer questions that are of vital interest to the Canadian people.

In recent weeks, however, we have watched ministers sit on their hands even when their own personal reputations are at stake. While we all know that the Conservatives are simply trying to shield their cabinet members from public scrutiny, this practice denies Canadians access to information that each Canadian has a fundamental right to know.

The Prime Minister promised a more open and accountable government but is now telling Canadians that they are not to be trusted with any information, especially on national defence, where the budget is expanding by billions every day.

Canadians are becoming more and more suspicious of the Conservatives. The question is, what else do they have to hide?

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ELECTIONS CANADA

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Elections Act says that all loans for leadership contestants must be repaid within 18 months and failure to do so is a violation of the act.

The Liberal leader is said to have almost a million dollars in outstanding leadership debts, owed to wealthy elites and powerful insiders. If he does not repay these debts by the June 3 deadline, they become illegal donations over the donation limit.

The only escape is if Elections Canada steps in to protect the Liberal leader with preferential treatment and an extension.

Canadians will watch closely. Will the Liberal leader break the law by accepting illegal donations and, if so, will Elections Canada protect the Liberal leader with preferential treatment?

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS**

• (1415)

*[English]***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Government of Canada has a policy on something, it actually writes it down. That was certainly the case with Canada's defence policy in 2005, a detailed 35 page document. It defined how the Canadian Forces would align with overall foreign policy. It was funded with the biggest investment in national defence in 20 years.

On Monday, the Prime Minister swept all of that away in one vacuous speech: no context, no analysis, no details, nothing. Do the Canadian Forces not deserve more respect than such an obvious political stunt?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we announced on Monday a comprehensive long term plan to rebuild the forces, which included the replacement of six major pieces of equipment and an increase in the number of forces. That announcement, and the buildup to it ever since this government was elected, has been very well received by the men and women of the Canadian Forces. They were on the record, receiving it very well and being very glad that the decade of darkness under the previous government was over.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the independent condemnation of the government's so-called defence policy is virtually universal. It took over two years to produce it. It ended up being nothing more than a letter to the editor of 755 words. It was written, obviously, at the rate of one word per day. It cannot give any details and it cannot say whether the cost of the plan is \$30 billion, or \$50 billion or \$96 billion.

How could it take two years to produce a plan with no details and a price tag no one over there can explain?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me explain it to the hon. member since he obviously did not bother to read.

The \$30 billion figure represents the size of the budget of the Department of National Defence at the end of the 20 year period. The \$45 billion to \$50 billion period represents the capital investments in the military that will take place over that period. Those are the two figures that the hon. member should learn.

However, this is no surprise. Whenever this government announces something for the men and women of the forces, the Liberals always attack it. They always complain. Canadians know their attitude and that is why they elected a government to be for the Canadian Forces.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was the Liberal Party that made the biggest investment in national defence in 20 years.

At his news conference on Monday, the Prime Minister made a \$10 billion mistake. The reason is now obvious. No one in the government has a clue what its defence policy actually is or how much it will cost. A speech is not a strategy.

The Prime Minister offered no detailed description of what the forces would do or how. Then the second speech that followed his, by the Minister of National Defence, has somehow mysteriously disappeared. It is unavailable now.

If the government's defence policy actually exists, let it table it now.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will increase the regular force strength to 70,000. We will increase the reserve force strength to 30,000. We will bring in new equipment to replace destroyers, frigates, maritime patrol aircraft, fixed-wing search and rescue aircraft, next generation fighter aircraft and a new family of land combat vehicles and systems.

I expect every step along the way the Liberal Party will oppose rebuilding the Canadian military, but it never hesitated to send them into dangerous combat situations. We will give them the tools they need to do their job.

• (1420)

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we cannot say that they are choking on the truth.

We already knew that the Prime Minister was trying to create a diversion on Monday because his Minister of Foreign Affairs is a disgrace.

And now two days later the Conservative government's so-called defence strategy is a disgrace as well. Even military personnel are saying that the government has mixed up the numbers.

Taxpayers want to know how much this will cost over the next 20 years, and, above all, who is telling the truth? Is it the Prime Minister, who says it is \$30 billion, military officials, who say it is \$50 billion, or the journalists, who are now saying \$96 billion? Who is telling the truth?

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said, the decade of darkness during the Liberal regime is over. This government is acting as the Prime Minister has said.

Let me make it very clear. The budget by the end of 20 years is going to be approximately \$30 billion, but the capital cost acquisition of six major pieces of equipment is going to be around \$45 billion to \$50 billion. I hope the member understands the difference between capital costs and operating costs.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we need to get one thing straight. In 1993, we inherited a \$42 billion deficit and had to clean up the mess they left behind. Starting in 1999, we reinvested in the armed forces and, in 2005, we made the largest one-time investment in the Canadian armed forces. So they have nothing to teach us.

Oral Questions

Instead of hiding the truth, especially their defence plan because he is afraid of the consequences, could the Prime Minister be transparent for once and table his strategy? Because his speech is a disaster.

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very transparent on this issue. The Prime Minister has stated what our defence schedule is going to be. It is very clear, after the decade of darkness of that party, which sent our troops into harm's way without equipment, that this government will have equipment for our soldiers.

Let me make it very clear. The \$30 billion is the size of the budget at the end of 20 years. The \$50 billion is for the capital budget for purchasing equipment. It is as simple as that.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister announced his new military strategy, he was quite vague about how much it would cost. This morning, we learned that the Department of National Defence is forecasting expenditures of about \$96 billion, three times the figure that was announced. To explain this gap, a defence source told *Le Devoir*: "Politically, \$100 billion in new defence spending, even over 20 years, is hard to sell to the public."

Will the Prime Minister stop concealing information and tell us exactly how much his military plans will cost? Is it \$30 billion or \$96 billion?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, I can explain the figures. They are clear. The budget for National Defence will be \$30 billion in 20 years, after the rebuilding of the forces that we have proposed. That is the annual budget. During that period, there will be capital investments of \$45 billion to \$50 billion. These are major investments not only for the military, but for the communities and industries that depend on the Canadian Forces.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister does not even have a foreign policy, yet he is getting ready to spend \$96 billion on a defence policy even though the details and time lines of that policy are not yet known.

Will the Prime Minister promise to table a foreign policy in this House as well as a detailed plan of his military strategy so that we can debate them before he spends billions of dollars on military equipment?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have announced increases in troops and equipment. Everything is clear. I know that the Bloc is opposed to these investments in Canada's military, yet it is asking for economic spinoffs from these investments. We are doing both.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): A source in the defence community claims that when the Canada first strategy was presented, a detailed version of a document breaking down the nearly \$100 billion was ready to go out, but it was apparently shelved because the government thought it was too detailed and controversial.

Is this not just another shameful attempt by this Conservative government to mislead the public?

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence announced the Canada first defence strategy based on three priorities. The first priority is the defence of Canada and Canadians. The second priority is being a full partner in continental defence and playing a leadership role to preserve international stability and security. That is Canada's strategy as laid down. Included in that is long term, dependable financing. I do not understand what more they want.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the more versions there are, the more confused the government gets. That is nothing new, since there is no national defence strategy or foreign affairs strategy. The secretary of state did not even answer my question. And there is more.

Military officials wanted to respond to media questions, but they had to refrain from doing so on direction from the government. On condition of anonymity, one of them said that it is hard to sell \$100 billion in new military spending to the public.

When military officials become more voluble than the government, we know we have a serious problem with excessive control and secrecy. Is this the famous transparency the Conservative government promised us?

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the DND officials briefed members of the media on the government's Canada first defence strategy. Canadians are proud that after a decade of darkness by the Liberals, this government is finally rebuilding our defence capabilities. Canadians care about that.

* * *

[Translation]

ENERGY COSTS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadian families are being hard hit by the increase in energy costs. At the pump, gas prices are at an all time high. At home, the price of natural gas has increased by 20%. At the supermarket, the price at the checkout is going up. On vacation, families have to pay surcharges on the cost of their flights.

Does the Prime Minister know that prices have been skyrocketing since he has been in power? When will he appoint an ombudsman to protect consumers?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, prices are increasing around the world. Such is the reality of the international market. The government tried to protect consumers by reducing taxes, but unfortunately the NDP and the other opposition parties voted against those reductions for taxpayers and consumers.

Perhaps the reason for their opposition is the NDP's action plan posted on its Web site indicating that the real cost of fossil fuels is too low. That is the NDP's real position.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is absolutely crystal clear is the Prime Minister has absolutely no plan. That is what the answer has made clear.

He is not going to do anything about soaring and natural gas rates. He has no strategy, other than giving billions of dollars to the biggest corporations making the most profits and gouging Canadians. He certainly has no vision, despite our efforts to give him the opportunity, to lay out a vision for the new energy economy, for green jobs.

It is time for some effective solutions. We have proposed some, such as an ombudsman to help protect consumers, a home retrofit program across the country, real incentives for clean energy, instead of subsidies to tar sands. Why will he not accept our ideas?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP had on its website, which it took off, an action plan that said that fossil fuel prices were artificially low. This is the real opinion of the NDP members. It is why they back every measure from the Liberals and everybody else to propose carbon taxes and higher gas taxes.

This government has given tax breaks to consumers. We are making investments for the development of alternate energy because we know fossil fuels are going to continue to rise in price over time.

We are acting, whereas all they are doing is making hypocritical criticisms.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Monday my colleague from Yukon raised some very specific questions about search and rescue aircraft and the government's decision to cancel the spending that was provided in the 2004 Liberal budget. The response by the government was frankly embarrassing. Therefore, I would like to give the minister an opportunity to respond.

Why has the Conservative government done nothing to address the critical problems facing our country's aged search and rescue aircraft fleet?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing to have a hypocritical question come from the party on that side which was

responsible for the search and rescue aircraft and did not do anything.

This government has been acting. I can assure the House that we take the safety of our crew very seriously. We do not put them at undue risk. We do not fly unsafe aircraft. It is as simple as that.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is frankly embarrassing is that the Conservative government inherited a \$13 billion surplus and it did not get the job done. The money was there and the previous Liberal government actually put it down on paper, unlike the Conservative government. The old planes are facing mechanical and technical problems. Getting parts is hard because they are not even made any more. In December they ran out of spare propellers.

When is the government going to announce a firm delivery date?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me tell the member quite clearly that despite the decade of darkness, this government has acted.

I want to say this. We kept all our contractual obligations alive. In fact, we spent \$18 million to ensure the safety of our Sea King helicopters and pilots.

As I said, we will continue to spend money where it is needed, as announced in the Canada first defence strategy.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has had a proud history on the international stage led by foreign affairs ministers who were engaged on Canada's behalf. Ministers like Pearson, Sharp, MacDonald, Clark, Axworthy, Manley and Graham all represented Canada competently and successfully.

The current minister's gaffes and security concerns have forced the government to sideline him to minimize the damage. As it appears the Prime Minister no longer has confidence in the foreign affairs minister, will he replace him?

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of our record since we have been in power because we have been an active member of the United Nations. We have helped the victims of Darfur. We have helped the people in Haiti. We are the second largest voluntary donor to the peace mission in Darfur. We are getting things done for Canadians. We are playing our role throughout the world and we will continue to do so.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things accomplished by this minister is to have put Canada on the verge of losing its chance at a seat on the United Nations Security Council.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is trying to reassure us about our national security. He should be a little more specific. Why is he unable to tell us that all the necessary security checks were done regarding the former girlfriend of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and that at no time was national security ever threatened? It is a simple question.

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition members continue to ask silly questions about people's personal lives. We have assured the House there was no issue of national security, but it is consistent with the types of questions we have had from the Liberals in the House all week, all spring, all the past year, while they have avoided votes.

It brings to mind something I saw in a local play the other day. It was a quote from Jo in *Little Women the Musical*, who said, obviously speaking of the Liberals, "The problem with doing nothing is you are never really sure when you are finished".

* * *

[Translation]

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, under security rules announced in November 2006, people working in ports under federal jurisdiction who have access to designated strategic areas must provide the date and place of birth of their spouse and any former spouses within the previous five years for verification.

Can the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities confirm that these rules exist?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if such rules are needed for these workers, then certainly they should apply all the more to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who has access to information that is much more strategic, especially when his new flame has a shady past and insists on attending confidential meetings.

Under the circumstances, how can the government claim that there was no investigation of Ms. Couillard? It certainly seems as though the government has something to hide.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since the leader and the members of the Bloc Québécois have been sitting in Ottawa, we have been able to understand why René Lévesque was opposed to a federal separatist party. Without an agenda and no longer even able to talk about referendums or separation, the eternal leader of the Bloc Québécois has been reduced to common gossip.

The Bloc Québécois leader is certainly not doing anything to enhance the reputation of parliamentarians from Quebec or the members of his party.

Oral Questions

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities was much more intelligent when he was a member of the Quebec National Assembly.

The Rivière-Rouge—Mont-Tremblant International Airport has nearly had to shut down because of this government's intransigence. And yet, in a letter sent on March 17, 2008, Minister Bachand asked this government for special status for the airport. Representatives from the region's economic community came to meet with the ministers in question, and my hon. colleague from Laurentides—Labelle spoke to them in March.

Will the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities grant the Rivière-Rouge—Mont-Tremblant International Airport the special status it is requesting?

[English]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, CBSA provided service at Rivière-Rouge (Mont-Tremblant International) airport based on an agreement with the airport. CBSA is willing to work closely with the airport authority on this important issue and it hopes to find a resolution.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have abandoned the regions of Quebec. A case in point, in recent months, representations have been made to the government concerning the exorbitant customs fees charged to the Rivière-Rouge—Mont-Tremblant International Airport and so far, nothing has been done. It continues to be the only Canadian airport receiving commercial flights that is forced to pay fees to Ottawa to provide customs services.

What is he waiting for to settle this matter once and for all? He should do his job as Minister of Transport.

[English]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while we cannot disclose information about private discussions taking place between CBSA and the airport, discussions are ongoing and pursuant to the conditions in the agreement signed by CBSA with the airport and CBSA does hope to find a resolution to the current issue.

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ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first it was the Auditor General who was told that her words would have to be cleared by the PMO. Now we learn that the RCMP may have been given similar instructions.

My question is for the Minister of Public Safety. I ask the public safety minister, who instructed the RCMP commissioner to implement the Conservative policy of manipulate and muzzle?

Oral Questions

●(1440)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the commissioner of the RCMP made an announcement to create a strategic communication position within the RCMP and that is an internal and an operational matter. This government does not interfere in operational matters of the RCMP.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps it is a sheer coincidence that those orders were given in the wake of the RCMP raid on the Conservative headquarters. I agree the RCMP needs to be reformed, but those kinds of reforms are certainly not the ones that Canadians want to see.

Does the government want more control so that it can silence the RCMP's investigation of the Conservatives' scandals?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the allegation is just crazy. The RCMP operates purely on its own. The RCMP has its own internal operations. This government does not interfere in operational matters of the RCMP.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the Cadman affair, if members of cabinet or the government are being interviewed by the RCMP, Canadians have a right to know.

The parliamentary secretary said this week that he is not “personally aware of any interview”. I am sure not being personally aware of things is a key criteria in his being allowed to speak.

Canadians deserve answers. Will someone who actually knows what is going on, maybe even a minister, stand up and tell us if the RCMP questioned any member of that government?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no Liberal question period farce is ever fully complete without a cameo appearance by the member for Ajax—Pickering. I am always curious about these lines of attack from the Liberals.

I note that the member for Ajax—Pickering states on his website, “A new policy isn't half as good as a scandal, or the whiff of one. I am worried that politics is being boiled down to irrelevance, to splashy headlines”.

I share his concern, but clearly not his insincerity.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we come to expect is trivial answers, personal attacks. The reality is that they use vexatious lawsuits—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. We all know the member has a question to ask and somebody is going to have to answer, and to answer you have to be able to hear the question.

The hon. member for Ajax—Pickering has the floor.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, they use vexatious lawsuits to silence MPs, intimidation to turn national institutions into servants of

Conservative power, a black book of dirty tricks to disrupt parliamentary committees.

The Cadman affair is just an example of a party and a Prime Minister that have no respect for democracy or for democratic institutions.

To a straightforward question, I ask for a straightforward answer. Has anyone in that government been questioned by the RCMP on this matter, yes or no?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear on this issue from the very beginning. With regard to Chuck Cadman and that confidence vote in May 2005, the only offer we made to Chuck Cadman was for him to rejoin the Conservative caucus, present himself as a candidate and get re-elected as a Conservative.

When it comes to what taxpayers deserve, as the member for Ajax—Pickering claims to represent, taxpayers do not deserve members of Parliament like him shooting off their mouths, getting themselves into lawsuits and asking taxpayers to pay their legal bills.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL AID

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the people of China and Burma are suffering terribly in the aftermath of two tragic natural disasters. Canada responded immediately with an initial \$2 million to help the people of Burma when the cyclone hit. The unparalleled devastation in Burma has brought donor countries together to aid the victims of this tragedy.

Could the Minister of International Cooperation update the House on our government's commitment to the victims in Burma and China?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is deeply saddened by the tragic loss of life and devastation resulting from the disasters in Burma and China. We share the concerns of all Canadians for the victims and their families.

Today I am announcing that our government will match the contributions of Canadians to humanitarian organizations working in Burma and China.

Let me assure all Canadians our government will do our share of the international effort and ensure that our help does get to the victims and their families.

* * *

●(1445)

COPYRIGHT

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thanks to Marjorie LeBreton, the Conservative Senate leader, we finally have an insight into Conservative thinking on digital innovation. She says not only does she not understand technologies like Facebook, she thinks they are dangerous.

Are millions of Canadian Internet users a threat? Because that seems to be the latest thinking behind the copyright trial balloon that would impose a three strikes and you are out policy for home Internet users.

Such zero tolerance for innovation might go down like gang-busters with the DMCA lobby, but does the minister think it is really going to fly with educators, innovators and consumers?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said previously, the copyright bill will be introduced when my colleague and I are prepared to introduce it to the House.

I sense a personal concern on the part of the hon. member. I would like to assure him today that his exaggeration, hyperbole and overacting that he has copyrighted will not be prohibited under any legislation the government introduces.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us work through the digital lock he just put on that.

The minister is going to throw out some crumbs to the public, like telling them they are not going to be arrested if they time-shift their TV shows. However, if their kids download a Hannah Montana ditty or they change the locks on their iPhones, they are going to get busted. That is the DMCA.

We need to start separating issues of fair use from counterfeit. We need to bring the WIPO treaty into the House for debate. We need to say that the United States ambassador is not the only one who has a right to decide what Canadian copyright legislation we have.

Why has the minister not brought the WIPO treaty into the House for debate before bringing forward new copyright legislation?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that my hon. friend await the copyright bill and then at that time he can debate DMCA, WIPO, and all the other acronyms that he wishes to bring to the floor of the House of Commons. But the bill will be introduced in due course and will be introduced once the appropriate balance has been struck between consumers and industrial consumers as well.

* * *

FILM INDUSTRY

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are proud of the contributions of their artists nationally and internationally. Yesterday, at the heritage committee, David Cronenberg, one of Canada's world renowned film directors and recipient of the Cannes Film Festival's lifetime achievement award, said that the amendments proposed in Bill C-10 would be a serious blow to Canadian productions and drive filmmakers out of the country.

Why is the minister still refusing to stand up for Canadian artists and remove the amendments from Bill C-10?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is truly a hypocritical question given that this is what was proposed by the Liberal Party when it was in power. This is what was announced in 2002 and again in 2003.

Oral Questions

I would like to table a discussion paper that the former government, namely the Department of Finance and the Department of Canadian Heritage, forwarded to 33 groups in the cultural industry. Why are they raising questions seven years later when, at the time, there was agreement?

[*English*]

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I remind her that we are talking about legislation here and if Canada has the privilege of having two films in competition at the Cannes Film Festival, it is because we on this side have always encouraged our filmmakers.

Mr. Cronenberg said it yesterday, with the new Conservative amendments his acclaimed films would have lost the assurance of tax credits that are necessary for private sector financing.

Why is the heritage minister refusing to recognize that the amendments would damage a thriving Canadian film industry?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the member is refusing to admit that she voted for this bill when it was introduced in the House last fall. She is no longer acknowledging that. The wording is exactly the same as that proposed by the former Liberal government. Our government intends to continue supporting freedom of expression.

* * *

MONT-TREMBLANT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Mont-Tremblant International Airport is on the verge of shutting down because the Minister of Public Safety refuses to do anything about the exorbitant customs charges imposed by the Canada Border Services Agency. This airport is one of the only ones that has to pay for all customs services. This situation is unfair and unacceptable. The region has had its share of problems, particularly due to the forestry crisis.

When will the government stop going after this region and reverse this bad decision?

• (1450)

[*English*]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is not correct in his assertion, but we will not disclose information about private discussions taking place between the CBSA and this airport. However, discussions are ongoing and pursuant to the conditions in the agreement signed by CBSA and that airport, CBSA hopes to find a resolution they can both agree on.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have spoken with airport officials and he is out to lunch.

Oral Questions

We have been asking the minister about this for months. He could have done something about the problem if he wanted to. The people there are taking matters into their own hands and focusing on tourism, because they see it as a promising alternative to offset the difficulties in the forestry industry. Instead of helping them, the minister is telling them to forget about it. Not only will he not help them, but he will also shut down their airport. That is a slap in the face.

Will the minister finally acknowledge what a mess this is and find an immediate solution for the Mont-Tremblant International Airport?

[English]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already indicated, the matter is a private matter between CBSA and the airport. They are continuing to talk.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: When we talk about knowing what we are talking about, it is that side over there that is continually coming up with all kinds of allegations that are untrue. I know in England they were talking about UFOs yesterday. I think they landed.

* * *

[Translation]

HERITAGE BUILDINGS

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Université de Laval and other backers are waiting on the federal government for the PEPS expansion project. In the meantime, costs have risen by \$3 million to \$4 million as the price of materials has gone up. All of the funding is in place except for the federal government's share.

Will the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities admit that his government's delays are having serious financial impacts on the work? What is he waiting for to make the final announcement so that work can begin?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer to the first question is no. The answer to the second is that we are pursuing our discussions. Discussions with Quebec are moving forward, as are the priorities the Conservative government announced. As everyone knows, when this government makes a promise, it delivers.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this file is way behind schedule. Given the federal government's dithering on the armoury file, we have to wonder if anyone is in charge. When it comes to building reconstruction and use, the various departments involved keep bouncing this around and contradicting each other. The Minister of National Defence even went so far as to blame his contradictions on translation.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage, who is responsible for the Quebec City region and was given some 10 projects, finally make some decisions so that everything can be completed in time for Quebec's 400th anniversary celebration?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, may I remind

the member for Quebec that we are working with National Defence and Parks Canada.

The member has been making a scene about this since the beginning, but she knows that she cannot deliver the goods when it comes to the armoury. Our government committed to examining all of the options for reconstruction, and that is what we are going to do. In the meantime, we will let the experts do the talking.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN COAST GUARD

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans got tangled up in his own net of deceit yesterday with his false claim that the former Liberal government planned to close the Coast Guard College in Sydney.

When CBC asked the college's executive director if the minister's comments were true, she said it was definitely not the plan. That minister needs to correct the record before his nose grows any longer, and he should explain why he has moved three Coast Guard ships out of Nova Scotia in the past year.

• (1455)

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, let me remind the House that when we took over government, the Coast Guard infrastructure was rusting out. Boats that they had were tied up to the wharves with no money for fuel to do surveillance.

The Coast Guard College did not even have an entry class because it did not think that it would exist because of attrition. I inherited a major mess and I inherited it from that member.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the government is following through on the residential schools settlement agreement. We are compensating former students and in just two weeks, the truth and reconciliation commission will be established. However, we still have no date for an apology from the government, the one to which it committed in the throne speech.

I would like to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs to tell the House when that apology will happen?

Mr. Rod Bruinoog (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government continues to move toward our commitment to implement the residential schools agreement. Today, I am pleased to inform the House and, most important, former students that the Prime Minister of Canada will issue a statement of apology on June 11, 2008 in the House of Commons.

Business of the House

This will be a new chapter for Canada that all Canadians can feel proud of. Thousands of former students, including National Chief Phil Fontaine, who also is a former student himself, have been calling for a formal apology for a number of years. Our government shares this view that the apology is a crucial step in the journey toward healing and reconciliation.

* * *

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has finally announced a review of Canada Post's mandate. In the minister's words, the review will "make sure this public institution has the right tools and means to fulfill its mandate in the future", but at the same time, the minister is continuing to ram through Bill C-14, legislation that will take those very tools and means away.

Can the minister explain why he is undermining not only Canada Post but his own review?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-14 was introduced to facilitate the growth of the outbound international mail market in Canada. The government is confident that Canada Post will be able to compete in this area and still meet its universal service obligations. Bill C-14 is still before the House. The legislative process will follow its course during the Canada Post Corporation strategic review.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the reality is Bill C-14 is going to result in either higher postage rates or decreased rural mail delivery and neither is acceptable to Canadians.

The minister is also slashing rural mail services as we stand here today without even consulting communities or CUPW. In the words of *Ottawa Citizen* columnist Randall Denley, "The stupidity of the program is exceeded only by the cost". That is because the Conservatives are spending \$.5 billion to reduce services.

Will the minister immediately impose a moratorium on cancelling rural mail delivery until the workers delivering the mail and the citizens that receive it are properly consulted?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, firmly and with determination, the House agreed to maintain and restore rural mail delivery and that is exactly what the government is going to undertake in the coming weeks and months.

* * *

CANADIAN COAST GUARD

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians deserve to hear the truth from the fisheries minister. Instead of falsely accusing the past government, he should take responsibility for his own actions.

Why is he moving Coast Guard ship after Coast Guard ship out of our province and why is he downgrading the Canadian Coast Guard College in Sydney? Will he at least listen to the Conservative premier of Nova Scotia, reverse this partisan and political decision, and send the *Cap Percé* back to Sydney where it belongs?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's concern, but let me say to him he has absolutely no reason to worry. He can check that out, not with politicians but with the people directly involved, the people who work in the Coast Guard. There was no political involvement here whatsoever.

The Canadian Coast Guard College has over 30 boats that it uses, two similar to the ones that have left and almost the same size. This boat was a spare that was used to do some training. We have many boats. The training is not affected by any stretch of the imagination. That boat is going where it is badly needed, where it can save lives, with no affect at all on the—

● (1500)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean.

* * *

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, much to everyone's surprise, a few days ago the Bloc reversed its position and stated that it will now be voting against Bill C-33, which would impose biofuel content targets of five per cent for gasoline and two per cent for diesel. The Conservative government's strategy, with Bill C-33, is beneficial for the environment, for farmers and for the regions.

I would like the Secretary of State (Agriculture) to explain the government's biofuel strategy. Does he not feel that the Bloc is once again abandoning the farmers and regions of Quebec?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Secretary of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. We have a balanced approach where everyone wins—the environment, farmers and the regions of Quebec.

With Bill C-33 we will impose biofuel targets of five per cent for gasoline and two per cent for diesel. This is a positive measure that is equal to taking one million cars off the road. When we reach our goal, 95% of Canada's current arable land will continue to be used for food production.

The Bloc has done an about-face and is abandoning the environment, farmers and the regions. Once again, we see that the members from the regions in this party are afraid to stand up.

* * *

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in dealing with House business, I would like to raise three things with the government House leader.

First, the House would be interested to know the schedule that he intends to follow for the rest of today and tomorrow and also for the first week that the House returns after the May break.

Privilege

Second, in the course of that time span, the government House leader will need to dedicate two evenings to meetings of the committee of the whole so that we can consider the estimates of the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Finance. I wonder if the government House leader could tell us which of those evenings he intends to designate.

Finally, I would note that during question period both the Prime Minister and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs read in detail specific numbers from specific documents which purported to be the government's new defence policy.

That being the case, both the Prime Minister and the parliamentary secretary are obliged to table the documents from which they were quoting.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in keeping with our theme for this week, which is strengthening democracy and human rights, today we will continue to debate Bill C-47, which is a bill to provide basic rights to on reserve individuals to protect them and their children in the event of a relationship breakdown, which are rights that Canadians off reserve enjoy every day.

• (1505)

[Translation]

We will debate our bill to give effect to the Tsawwassen First Nation Final Agreement, Bill C-34, and Bill C-21, which would extend the protection of the Canadian Human Rights Act to aboriginals living on reserve.

[English]

We will also debate Bill C-29, which is our bill to close the loophole that was used most recently by Liberal leadership candidates to bypass the personal contribution limit provisions of the election financing laws with large personal loans from wealthy, powerful individuals, and Bill C-19, which is our bill to limit the terms of senators to eight years from the current maximum of 45.

Next week will be honouring our monarch week. Members of Parliament will return to their ridings to join constituents in celebrating Queen Victoria, our sovereign with whom Sir John A. Macdonald worked in establishing Confederation, and honouring our contemporary head of state, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

The week the House returns will be sound economic management without a carbon tax week. The highlight of the week will be the return of the budget bill to this House on May 28.

[Translation]

This bill proposes a balanced budget, controlled spending, investments in priority areas and lower taxes, all without forcing Canadian families to pay a tax on carbon, gas and heating. Furthermore, the budget implementation bill proposes much needed changes to the immigration system. These measures will help us ensure the competitiveness of our economy. I would like to assure this House that we are determined to see this bill pass before the House rises for the summer.

[English]

We will start the week by debating, at third reading, Bill C-33, our biofuels bill to require that by 2010 5% of gasoline and by 2012 2% of diesel and home heating oil will be comprised of renewable fuels, with our hope that there will be no carbon tax on them.

[Translation]

We will debate Bill C-55, our bill to implement the free trade agreement with the states of the European Free Trade Association.

This free trade agreement, the first in six years, reflects our desire to find new markets for Canadian products and services.

[English]

We will also debate Bill C-5 dealing with nuclear liability issues for our energy sector; Bill C-7 to modernize our aeronautics sector; Bill C-43 to modernize our customs rules; Bill C-39 to modernize the Canada Grain Act for farmers; Bill C-46 to give farmers more choice in marketing grain; Bill C-14, which allows enterprises choice for communicating with their customers through the mail; and Bill C-32 to modernize our fisheries sector.

The opposition House leader raises the question of two evenings being set aside for committee of the whole. He is quite right. Those two evenings will have to be set aside sometime between now and May 31.

With regard to the notes that were quoted from by the Prime Minister and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, they were their notes and referred of course to announcements that clearly have been made about the need and the imperative of restoring our military's equipment and needs in the way in which the Canadian government is doing so.

The Speaker: There are a couple of points of order and questions of privilege. I am going to start with the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina, who gave notice of a question of privilege. I will hear from her now.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege for which I have given you notice.

I believe that a breach of the rights and privileges of all members has occurred and that this constitutes contempt of Parliament.

For the last number of weeks, the government has run advertisements in newspapers across the country promoting unpopular amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act through Bill C-50, the budget implementation bill.

These advertisements amount to contempt of the House of Commons. These ads have both obstructed and prejudiced the proceedings of the House and its committees with dishonest and misleading information.

Furthermore, the use of public funds to promote legislation that is currently before the Standing Committee on Finance is flagrant interference by the government with the deliberations of members of Parliament and is defined by former Speaker Sauvé as a prima facie case of contempt.

On the first point, the advertisements that appeared in ethnic and mainstream news media, a copy of which I will table here today, are misleading for several reasons.

The headline of the ad reads, “Reducing Canada's Immigration Backlog”. The ad goes on to state that the Government of Canada is proposing measures to cut the wait times of the 925,000 applications in the immigration backlog.

Since the legislative changes will only affect applications submitted after February 27, 2008 and since they will have no impact on the backlog of the 925,000 applicants in the system before that time, this is a clear case of misleading government advertisements.

The word “backlog” is defined as “a quantity of unfinished business or work that has built up over a period of time and must be dealt with before progress can be made”. The definition is clear, but there is nothing in the legislative changes in Bill C-50 that deals with the “unfinished business” of the 925,000 applicants currently waiting to come to Canada.

The ad also states that there is an additional \$109 million to speed up the application process.

What it does not tell the public is that there has been a cut of 49% in the spending of the immigration program at the department between 2006 and 2008. The actual spending in 2006 was \$244.8 million and in 2008 it is \$164.86 million. That is a cut of \$80 million.

On my first point that the ads constitute contempt of Parliament due to their misleading nature, let me quote the definition of “contempt” as outlined in the 20th edition of Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice*, chapter 10, at page 143:

It may be stated generally that any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

It is clear. The government advertisements are both an act and an omission. The government deliberately made misleading comments on the effects of the proposed legislation, and it deliberately omitted other information about the effects of the proposed legislation.

In attempting to shift the public debate through massive spending of public dollars on a partisan position of the government, it impeded the work of members to perform our duties and it is disrespectful of the role of the House of Commons.

Former Speaker Sauvé further ruled on October 17, 1980, which can be found on page 3781 of *Hansard*, that advertisements would constitute contempt of the House if there appeared to be “some evidence that they represent a publication of false, perverted, partial or injurious reports of the proceedings of the House of Commons”.

Privilege

We know through the legislation before the House that the proposed changes have nothing to do with the backlog and that these ads appeared in the public even before the House of Commons finance and citizenship and immigration committees had a chance to study the issue.

Therefore, the intention of these ads is to mislead the public and mislead and disrespect the role of Parliament. These actions of the Conservative government were deliberate and should be considered a contempt of the House.

• (1510)

It is further considered an act of contempt against all hon. members when the government interferes with parliamentary deliberations by the spending of public funds. Madame Sauvé said on October 17, 1980:

—when a person or a government attempts to interfere with our deliberations through spending public money, or otherwise, directly or indirectly...such action would constitute a prima facie case.

The government is clearly interfering in the debate before the House and the Standing Committee on Finance through the spending of public money. According to the 2008 budget estimates, it is spending \$2.4 million in public funds. Already \$1.1 million has been spent, even while Parliament is considering this bill. More spending on advertisements is to come.

The sad truth is that there is a long history of governments attempting to insult the dignity of Parliament with advertising.

In 1989 the Progressive Conservatives placed misleading ads with respect to the GST prior to a vote in Parliament. In 1980 the Liberal government of the day placed ads across Canada promoting constitutional reform before it was approved by Parliament.

Former NDP leader Ed Broadbent said on September 25, 1989:

We believed that advertising that advocated a certain policy before it was approved by the Parliament of Canada...should not be supported by the spending of public funds. We said it in 1980; we repeat it now.

Sadly, I am repeating it again in 2008.

In conclusion, the very tenets of our parliamentary democracy are at risk if actions like these are not reprimanded and stopped.

On October 10, 1989, former Speaker Fraser ruled on similar actions taken by the then Conservative government in its promotion of the GST. He said:

—I want the House to understand very clearly that if your Speaker ever has to consider a situation like this again, the Chair will not be as generous. This is a case which, in my opinion, should never recur. I expect the Department of Finance and other departments to study this ruling carefully and remind everyone within the Public Service that we are a parliamentary democracy, not a so-called executive democracy, nor a so-called administrative democracy.

He went on to call the advertising campaign “ill conceived” and said that “it does a great disservice to the great traditions of this place”. Former Speaker Fraser continued:

If we do not preserve these great traditions, our freedoms are at peril and our conventions become a mockery. I insist, and I believe I am supported by the majority of moderate and responsible members on both sides of the House, that this ad is objectionable and should never be repeated.

Privilege

Mr. Speaker, in your deliberations, I am sure you know that your decisions will affect future actions of the government. We cannot allow the floodgates to open to extreme partisan advertising paid for by the public purse. We must put a stop to this practice here and now.

I thank you for this time, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to your ruling.

• (1515)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to this and the point raised by the member for Scarborough—Agincourt earlier today. While not the same, it is obviously related to the exact same question.

The first point I would like to raise is that the member did not raise the question of privilege at the earliest opportunity. This is one of the requirements for a question of privilege of this type. I refer the Speaker, to Marleau and Montpetit at page 122 where it reads as follows:

A complaint on a matter of privilege must satisfy two conditions before it can be accorded precedence...First, the Speaker must be convinced that a *prima facie* case of breach of privilege has been made and, second, the matter must be raised at the earliest opportunity.

Page 124 states:

The matter of privilege to be raised in the House must have recently arisen and must call for the immediate action of the House. Therefore, Members must satisfy the Speaker that the matter has been raised at the earliest opportunity. When a Member does not fulfil this important requirement, the Speaker has rule that the matter is not a *prima facie* question of privilege.

Mr. Speaker, the advertisements in question began running on April 15. We are now about a month later. We have had, since the advertisements began running, 17 sitting days. I would think that on that basis alone, you should dismiss this question of privilege.

I would further add that in terms of the member raising the question, the member for Trinity—Spadina who just spoke, that she is in fact quoted in the media commenting on the issue in question. Some time ago, after the advertisements began running, there was a story by Andrew Mayeda of the Southam group on April 21, which was four days after it began running. Therefore, that, again, is many weeks ago. Ample opportunity has existed and the member has failed to meet that minimum obligation of raising the issue at the earliest possible opportunity.

I would like to comment on something the member for Scarborough—Agincourt raised this morning. He argued that the money being used for the ads flowed from Bill C-50, the budget implementation bill. Since Bill C-50 has not yet passed into law, he argued, that the government was in contempt.

There is absolutely no basis or evidence for the argument he raised, although that did not stop him from raising it. However, as you are well aware, Mr. Speaker, the money being used for the ads has nothing to do with the passage of C-50. The money was approved in March when the House, with the support of his party, the Liberal Party I might add, adopted interim supply.

With respect to the advertisements themselves, I would invite the Speaker to review the advertisements, which I will be pleased to table in the House. You will note that the ads are very respectful to the House and the legislative process. The authors of the

advertisements took into consideration Speaker Fraser's ruling from 1991, from which the member for Trinity—Spadina quoted from extensively, when they were drafting these advertisements. As you will see, they were careful not to be dismissive in any way of the legislative process, which was the subject matter of the question of privilege that led to Speaker Fraser's ruling.

Let us recall what the core finding of that ruling was and the core message. The core principle of it was that advertising undertaken by the government should not presume or suggest that a decision had been made already when it had not been taken by the House of Commons or by Parliament. It is the taking of a decision by Parliament that represents the privilege that should not be prejudiced. Advertisements that imply or suggest that a decision has already been taken when it has not would be not in order, would be inappropriate and would give rise to a case of privilege. However, if the advertising does respect the fact that Parliament has yet to make a decision, then it will not have in any way prejudiced the privileges of Parliament.

I will, for the benefit of you, Mr. Speaker, and for those in the House, read the content of one of these advertisements, and they are all essentially the same, although in many languages. I will read one that appears in English:

Reducing Canada's Immigration Backlog

Newcomers to Canada have helped build our country from the beginning.

The Government of Canada believes in immigration: we want more newcomers to join us, families to be re-united faster and labour market demands to be met.

Currently, the immigration backlog sits at 925,000 applications. This means that the wait time for an application can be as long as six years.

• (1520)

That's why the Government of Canada is proposing measures to cut the wait.

These important measures, once in effect, include:

More resources: An additional \$109 million to speed up the application process.

Faster Processing Times: The ability to fast-track new applications.

Better Employment Opportunities: Matching skills with our economic needs.

Complete Processing. All applications currently in the backlog will be processed.

Then, the next sentence is critical. It says:

These measures are currently before Parliament.

The advertisement continues:

All of these changes respect the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*.

Canada needs an immigration system that is flexible, fast and fair for everyone—that's why we're reducing the immigration backlog.

It proceeds to provide a number of contact phone numbers and a website to which people could go.

As I have said, the principal question that has to be determined is whether the advertisement in any way apprises, or suggests or presumes that Parliament has already taken a decision, that there is a *fait accompli*.

What things are spoken of in the past tense? There is something spoken of in the past tense and that is newcomers to Canada have helped to build our great country from the beginning. Perhaps the member suggests this is a *fait accompli* that has not happened. We believe it has happened and, therefore, I do not think that gives rise to a concern.

However, as for the substantive policy measures in question, all of them are spoken of as proposed measures, once in effect, and being matters that are currently before Parliament.

As I have said, the advertisement was crafted with that critical decision of Speaker Fraser, relating back to the GST advertisement case, in mind and they respect that principle so as to respect the privileges of every member of this House of Commons.

This is very much in contrast, I might add, to what we saw from the former Liberal government, which went out of its way to dismiss the role of Parliament and parliamentarians. This was highlighted by former prime minister Chrétien's reference to his backbench as terracotta soldiers.

Compare our ad to the former Liberal government's ads, announcements and activities and it will be concluded that it is not side of the House that needs a lecture on respecting the legislative process.

For example, the Liberal minister of international trade, on March 30, 1998, sent out a press release entitled "Marchi Meets With Chinese Leaders in Beijing and Announces Canada-China Interparliamentary Group". At that time, there was no Canada-China interparliamentary group.

The Liberal government appointed the head of the Canadian millennium scholarship foundation before there was legislation setting up the foundation

The Liberal government sent out a news release, on October 23, 1997, announcing that provincial and federal governments had constituted a nominating committee to nominate candidates for the new Canada pension plan investment board. The nominating committee is provided for under subclause 10(2) of Bill C-2, which had not yet been adopted at that time by the House.

On January 21, 1998, the Liberal agriculture minister met in Regina to discuss the rules for the election of directors to the Canadian Wheat Board's board of directors, as proposed in Bill C-4, An Act to Amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act. Substantial amendments to Bill C-4, tabled at report stage by opposition members, had yet to be debated in the House. While the House was still debating how many directors should be farmer elected versus government appointees, the minister was holding meetings as though his bill was already law.

How can we forget what took place in the last Parliament, when the opposition defeated two bills that would reorganize the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. After the defeat of these bills, the Liberal minister responsible said that the government would go ahead and reorganize the departments anyway.

I point out that the Speaker did not consider any of these actions to be an affront to the House. That being the case, and in comparison to the respectful tone of this government's advertisement, I submit it cannot be viewed as dismissive of the legislative process or the role of members of Parliament. We on this side of the House do not think our caucus members are nobodies. We respect the institution and the members who serve it.

The advertisement is very clear in stating that the measures are currently before Parliament, and that is certainly the minimal test.

Privilege

I might add, with regard to some other questions that were raised, much of what the member for Trinity—Spadina raised goes to the debate of the bill itself and the merits of it, some contentions about whether it would succeed in having some of the desired outcomes that were sought. Those are very much matters for debate. They are appropriate for debate, but they are not questions that go to the issue of the privileges of this Parliament, as people can have different views. The government is very confident in its views on this matter.

● (1525)

I might also add, with regard to Speaker Sauvé's 1980 ruling, she stated the following:

The fact that certain members feel they are disadvantaged by not having the same funds to advertise as does the government, which could possibly be a point of debate, as a matter of impropriety or under any other heading, does not constitute a prima facie case of privilege...

I understand she wished there was nobody making the case on the other side of this debate. However, the government reserves the right to make that case and it is doing so actively, but doing so in a fashion that respects the previous rulings in the House, the leading ruling of Speaker Fraser, which is the critical one to which we must have regard.

The advertisements were done in such a fashion, all of them in different languages, that they fully respected Parliament's jurisdiction, its ability to make this decision and communicated fairly to Canadians that the decision was yet to be made and it was something for which they should watch how Parliament determines, by saying that the measures were currently before Parliament and that they were, indeed, that the Government of Canada was proposing.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to rise this morning on the same issue.

I listened very carefully to what my colleague across the way said. He stated that this was proposed legislation, which appeared in 20 or 100 newspapers.

This question was raised in committee and the minister was to verify that all the ads were the same. The question was posed by myself. The minister was also asked to verify that the advertising figures were right.

An advertisement contract came to my attention, where the newspaper was asked to charge three times the going rate. There were all kinds of newspapers, which I can certainly table in the House. However, I have in my hand three contracts, and this goes beyond and above what is happening: the *Nigerian-Canadian News*, a full page ad, \$220; *Urdu Times*, a full page ad, \$600; *Awam*, a full page ad, \$450. This goes beyond the right to advertise. With these numbers, which I will table in the House, and the advertisements that were done, it does not add up.

I know the minister will be before the committee in two weeks, but Mr. Speaker, there is something more here that just does not add up.

The Speaker: I am afraid, in terms of money spent for ads, this is not a procedural matter. That will be entirely a matter for possibly a committee, if that, but it is clearly not procedural.

Speaker's Ruling

The member for Trinity—Spadina has put the procedural matter clearly before the House. The government House leader has responded to that. I am prepared to take the matter under advisement and come back to the House with a ruling. I am looking forward to receiving copies of the ads in question from the government House leader, at which I can then look. I believe the member for Trinity—Spadina has some copies as well.

I will undertake to look at all these things and come back to the House in due course, but I do not think there is any need to respond to this argument because it is not relevant to the procedural matter that is before us.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ALLEGED UNPARLIAMENTARY BEHAVIOUR

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising regarding yesterday's point of order what some hon. members may have interpreted as a gesture they thought to be unparliamentary.

Please know that I did not, nor do I now, have any such intention toward any hon. members. Nonetheless, I apologize to the House for any misinterpretation.

• (1530)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member and we will consider that matter closed.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have a Treasury Board document from 2005, which shows the previous Liberal government planned stable funding for the Coast Guard College in Sydney for that year and succeeding years of more than \$4 million per year.

This demonstrates that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has misled the House. I seek unanimous consent to table the document.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for the hon. member to table this document?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There was a request made, following question period and the Thursday question, by the opposition House leader for the tabling of documents from the Prime Minister.

I indicated that the Prime Minister referred to notes, but those notes indeed involved an extract from a background document on Canada's first defence strategy, "The Four Pillars", which is dated May 12 and goes on at quite some length.

I am quite happy to table that document, in both official languages, at this time so the official opposition House leader will have an opportunity to familiarize himself with the matters he was asking questions on today.

[*Translation*]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised on May 14, 2008, by the hon. Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip concerning the admissibility of the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, which was presented to the House that day.

[*English*]

I would like to thank the hon. Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. I also wish to thank the hon. member for Mississauga South, the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River, and the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of Western Economic Diversification for their interventions.

In his detailed remarks on this matter, the hon. Chief Government Whip argued that the recommendations contained in the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, which seeks to amend the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons, went beyond the mandate of the committee and therefore should be ruled inadmissible. He pointed out that even the chair of the ethics committee had ruled that the matter was beyond the committee's mandate, but that this decision was appealed and overturned by committee members.

In his remarks, the hon. member for Mississauga South acknowledged that the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics was well aware that the matter was outside of its mandate when it adopted its seventh report to recommend amendments to the Conflict of Interest Code. However, the hon. member argued that the committee was justified in doing so because the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which has the responsibility to propose such amendments, was currently unable to discharge its duties in this respect. Furthermore, he stressed the urgency of the subject matter of the report, contending that any delay in addressing those issues might unfairly restrict members' rights and privileges. In summary, he argued that there was no other possibility available to members of the House to deal with this fundamental matter in a timely fashion.

[*Translation*]

In his comments, the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst agreed that this issue needed to be addressed as soon as possible. He also spoke of the well-recognized procedural principle that committees are masters of their own proceedings.

[*English*]

The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River acknowledged that the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics exceeded its mandate in this matter, but suggested that it may have had sufficient procedural jurisdiction to render its report admissible.

Routine Proceedings

As noted by the hon. Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, Standing Order 108(3)(a)(viii), which deals with the mandate of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, states, “the review of and report on all matters relating to the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons”. I may add that pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a)(iii), the mandate to amend the Standing Orders, to which the Conflict of Interest Code is an appendix, also belongs to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

On the other hand, Standing Order 108(3)(h), which outlines the mandate of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, states at subparagraph (iii) that this mandate includes, “the review of and report on the effectiveness, management and operation together with the operational and expenditure plans relating to the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner”, while subparagraph (v) indicates, “in cooperation with other committees, the review of and report on any federal legislation, regulation or Standing Order which impacts upon the access to information or privacy of Canadians or the ethical standards of public office holders”.

• (1535)

[Translation]

Hon. members will recall that the issue of the mandate of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics was raised just a few weeks ago and was dealt with in a ruling that the Chair gave on March 14, 2008. I wish to quote again, as I did in that ruling, from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, at p. 879:

Committees are entitled to report to the House only with respect to matters within their mandate. When reporting to the House, committees must indicate the authority under which the study was done (i.e., the Standing Order or the order of reference). If the committee's report has exceeded or has been outside its order of reference, the Speaker has judged such a report, or the offending section, to be out of order.

[English]

As mentioned by the hon. Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip in his remarks, Mr. Speaker Parent offered clear guidance in the matter before us in his ruling given on page 5583 of the *Debates* of June 20, 1994:

While it is the tradition of this House that committees are masters of their own proceedings, they cannot establish procedures which go beyond the powers conferred upon them by the House.

This is a reality that continues to this day, a reality that cannot be simply set aside because of existing circumstances in another committee, or by invoking the urgent need to address a subject, or by arguing the gravity of that subject.

As hon. members know, and as explained in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at page 857, decisions of committee chairs may be appealed to the committee. However, as hon. members may recall, in my ruling of March 14 last, I raised serious concerns about committees overturning procedurally sound decisions by their chairs and the problems that may arise from such actions. I find it particularly troubling in this instance that the committee chose to proceed as it did with the clear knowledge that what it was doing was beyond the committee's mandate.

Some of the arguments presented in this case suggested that the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics was the only venue possible to deal with this important and urgent matter in an expeditious fashion. In my view, there are other mechanisms available to debate and resolve the matter at hand. Furthermore, as I mentioned on May 14 when this issue was raised, the fact that the procedure and House affairs committee is not functioning at the moment does not permit other committees to usurp its mandate.

I wish to remind hon. members that the Chair can apply the rules of the House only as they are written. The subject matter of the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics is clearly not within the mandate of that committee, as spelled out in Standing Order 108, and therefore, in my view, it is out of order.

For this reason, I rule that the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics be deemed withdrawn and that no subsequent proceedings may be taken in relation thereto. Accordingly, the two notices of motions for concurrence in this report currently on the notice paper standing in the names of the hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe and the hon. member for Halifax West will be withdrawn.

[Translation]

I thank the hon. Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip for having brought this matter to the attention of the Chair.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following two travel motions.

I move:

That, in relation to its study of science and technology in Canada, twelve (12) members of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology be authorized to travel to Winnipeg, Manitoba; Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; and Vancouver British Columbia, from May 25 to 30, 2008 and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

The Speaker: Does the hon. chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

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.

Government Orders

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Also, Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study of economic development challenges in Canada's northern territories, twelve (12) members of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development be authorized to travel to Iqaluit and Pangnirtung, Nunavut, in June 2008 and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on another point of order, further to the normal Thursday question about the upcoming agenda of the House of Commons, I thank the government House leader for the information he provided at an earlier stage today. However, I would like to raise with him one further item of business, about which there has been some discussion among House leaders, and that is the possibility that the House of Commons may be favoured with a visit by a very distinguished foreign dignitary in the week that the House resumes after the May break. That would, potentially at least, be the president of Ukraine.

If that visit comes about, of course the official opposition would be delighted to consent to the president making a speech in the House of Commons, if that fits with his agenda. I want to make that point abundantly clear on behalf of the official opposition.

I also would like to ask the government House leader if he could provide any further information at this stage about the plans for the visit by the president of Ukraine. If that visit comes about, it will be necessary to rearrange the business day that we normally have in the House of Commons and make provision for things to happen at different times in the day than they usually do. That would include the rescheduling of question period in the ordinary course.

I wonder if the government House leader could provide any further detail at this stage about the government's plans with respect to this important visit.

• (1540)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, certainly, the government would not want to cause any embarrassment or undiplomatic incident by making any suggestion in a public forum about what particular visitors to our country might or might not do when that happens. If anything were to occur of that nature, it would of course be addressed in this House and of course my friend is quite familiar with the discussions and negotiations we have had.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FAMILY HOMES ON RESERVES AND MATRIMONIAL INTERESTS OR RIGHTS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-47, An Act respecting family homes situated on First Nation reserves and matrimonial interests or rights in or to structures and lands situated on those reserves, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Consequently, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

TSAWWASSEN FIRST NATION FINAL AGREEMENT ACT

Hon. John Baird (for the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development) moved that Bill C-34, An Act to give effect to the Tsawwassen First Nation Final Agreement and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak today in relation to Bill C-34 which would give effect to the Tsawwassen treaty. It really is a bill to be celebrated.

Archaeological evidence indicates that the Tsawwassen people can trace their roots back thousands of years, demonstrating a rich history in the Vancouver region. Yet, for the last 130 years or more, the lives of their descendants have been dominated by the Indian Act.

This outdated legislation limits their rights. Unfortunately, the first nation and early settlers to the region did not negotiate treaties to clarify their relationship. This created uncertainty about the ownership and management of their lands and natural resources.

In the intervening years, the city and province grew up on and around the lands. Newcomers to the region prospered. But the first nation struggled to remain self-sufficient and keep its culture and language alive.

For the past century Tsawwassen members have not been capitalizing on the economic growth and social development taking place around them.

Government Orders

The legislation before us is a chance to give exceptional new opportunities to the Tsawwassen. It will enable us to achieve a just and reasonable agreement accompanied by full accountability. With this treaty the Tsawwassen First Nation will once again feel at home on its ancestral lands.

After years of hard work at the negotiation table, we have reached a final agreement with the Tsawwassen First Nation and the government of British Columbia to resolve the longstanding issues regarding undefined aboriginal rights and title.

This comprehensive modern day treaty, the first final agreement to be negotiated under the British Columbia treaty process, defines the Tsawwassen First Nation's rights regarding the ownership and management of its lands and resources. It also provides a cash settlement and self-government provisions that give the Tsawwassen law-making authorities over its lands.

Once this final agreement receives Parliament's endorsement, it will give effect for the Tsawwassen people to the constitutional rights of aboriginal people enshrined in section 35 of Canada Act 1982.

These new powers and responsibilities, along with the financial and other resources provided under the treaty, will enable the Tsawwassen people to take control of their affairs and will provide opportunities for them to build a sustainable economy, create jobs and enhance living standards for all their members.

Before I highlight the key elements and many benefits of this legislation, let me first congratulate our important partners who have helped make this possible. I would like to thank Chief Kim Baird, whose vision, perseverance and passion to see justice observed have served her people so well.

I would also like to praise British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell, and B.C. Minister Mike de Jong, as well as former chief commissioner of the B.C. Treaty Commission and now Lieutenant Governor of B.C., Steven Point, for their steadfast commitment to the negotiations which laid the groundwork for this legislation.

Thanks to the dedication and determination of these leaders, and the long years of hard work on the part of the negotiators for all three parties, we have been able to achieve this honourable settlement. The final agreement reinforces that reconciliation between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians is best achieved through negotiation rather than through litigation and conflict.

This is truly a historic agreement. It is the first comprehensive treaty set in a major urban setting in Canada, in this case a booming metropolis of nearly two million people. This is also the first ever treaty in British Columbia's Lower Mainland and the first to be brought into effect under the B.C. treaty process.

By virtue of its location in a large Canadian city, this treaty presents a profound opportunity to demonstrate that aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities can work together to achieve mutually beneficial goals.

We already have a clear illustration of the advantages of this new working relationship. Under the legislation, the Tsawwassen First Nation will become a member of metro Vancouver and a

Tsawwassen representative will sit as a member of the metro Vancouver regional board.

Thanks to this new era of cooperation, the first nation, municipality and board will now all be able to participate in planning processes that directly affect their respective jurisdictions to ensure that they are in the collective best interests of all.

Let me briefly highlight some of the other key components of this final agreement that demonstrates the benefits of modern treaties for first nations and all Canadians.

- (1545)

The first is the infusion of new resource funds with which the Tsawwassen First Nation could build a stronger economy and society. The agreement would provide a capital transfer of \$13.9 million, shared by provincial and federal governments over 10 years, less outstanding negotiation loans, to compensate for the surrender of the first nation's rights to mines and minerals under previously surrendered reserve lands. The Tsawwassen would also receive an additional \$2 million for that.

To finance programs and services, it would assume as a result of self-government and to fund ongoing incremental implementation and governance activities, the first nation would receive \$2.8 million per year for five years. As part of this agreement, the Tsawwassen First Nation must contribute to the funding of programs and services from its own sources of revenue as its financial successes grow through own-source revenue.

There would be further funding to support startup and transition costs. This money would help to cover such things as operational expenses for ongoing costs for parks, migratory birds and treaty management, and for the preservation of the Tsawwassen First Nation culture, heritage and language.

- (1550)

To provide for a land base, the first nation would receive roughly 724 hectares of treaty settlement land. This includes approximately 290 hectares of former reserve land and 372 hectares of former provincial crown land. The latter allotment involves a transfer of land from the provincial agricultural land reserve. In addition, British Columbia will issue two water lot leases to take care of the water lots.

The Tsawwassen First Nation would also own outright an additional 62 hectares of other land comprised of the Boundary Bay and Fraser River parcels. However, this land will remain under the jurisdiction of the Corporation of Delta. It should be noted that the Highway 17 corridor and Deltaport Way are not part of Tsawwassen lands and will remain provincial land.

To sustain their heritage, Tsawwassen members would have the right to harvest wildlife and migratory birds for food, social and ceremonial purposes within their territory. Given the limited wildlife harvest opportunities and the likelihood of even fewer in the future, the federal and British Columbia governments will provide the first nation with \$50,000 to establish a wildlife fund.

Government Orders

The Tsawwassen people would have the right to harvest fish and aquatic plants for food, social and ceremonial purposes, and this is of particular importance to them. This is always subject to conservation, public health and public safety considerations. These activities will be confined to designated areas known as the Tsawwassen fishing area and the Tsawwassen intertidal bivalve fishing area.

In addition, the final agreement provides treaty allocations for domestic purposes of several species of salmon based on annual abundance. The catch limits will be determined by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans every year. A separate harvest agreement provides for fishing licenses to be issued for a specified commercial catch for several salmon species in the Fraser River as well as up to five commercial crab licences.

Hon. members may be aware of a recent decision from the Supreme Court of British Columbia wherein the court ruled that the Lax Kw'Alaams First Nation did not have an aboriginal right to harvest fish for commercial purposes.

The Tsawwassen treaty does not provide any commercial fishing rights. Any commercial licences issued to Tsawwassen are outside the treaty under its harvest agreement and will be under the same rules as all other commercial fishers in the fishing area are subject to.

When the commercial fleet is subject to closure on the Fraser, so are the Tsawwassen's commercial vessels. I would like to also add that the Tsawwassen commercial fishing capacity will be provided by licenses being retired from the existing fleet and does not increase the present commercial pressure when stocks are available.

As much as this legislation is about reconciling the past, it is equally about building a brighter future. Once the bill is implemented, the Tsawwassen First Nation will become self-governing, able to assert its independence, and will have additional tools and resources that provide opportunities to become self-sufficient.

The first nation will make its own decisions on matters related to the preservation of its culture, the exercise of its treaty rights, and the operation of its government. These are keys to increased prosperity.

Economic development and social progress depend on first nations taking the lead in determining their destiny, identifying and implementing solutions to their challenges, and seizing opportunities that benefit their members and our country as a whole.

The legislation requires that the Tsawwassen First Nation have a constitution that provides for a government that is democratically and financially accountable to its citizens. Each member of the Tsawwassen legislature will be elected to their position from within the community of members. This democratic aboriginal government will be recognized as a local government, compatible with other local governments in Canada.

Bill C-34 would also ensure that residents on Tsawwassen lands who are not members will be able to participate in the decision making process. These residents will have an input on any activities that significantly affect them, including tax matters, through Tsawwassen institutions such as school or health boards.

•(1555)

Non-members will be able to vote in and stand for election as a member or select a representative of a Tsawwassen institution. They will have the same rights of appeal as community members. Negotiators for the parties are continuing an ongoing dialogue with the non-member resident leaseholders to ensure the orderly transition after the effective date for all matters pertaining to registration of leasehold interests and representation on Tsawwassen First Nation institutions which make decisions which significantly affect those interests. Tsawwassen First Nation has assured its non-member leaseholders that they are a valued asset and has committed to work with them in their mutual interest.

This balanced approach speaks volumes about the give and take involved in these negotiations to ensure the needs and interests of all parties are met under this legislation.

Over the past six years, negotiators participated in over 70 consultations and at least 28 public information events. Extensive consultations were held with Delta and Lower Mainland regional governments, third parties and community interest groups covering a wide range of subjects. As the negotiations unfolded, all sides got something, and gave up something in return. The result is a final settlement that deserves our support and which ultimately benefits everyone.

One of the greatest benefits of this agreement is the certainty it creates, which sets the stage for increased prosperity for the Tsawwassen people and their metro Vancouver neighbours. Now that it is clear how the first nation and surrounding communities will coexist, there will be an incentive for investors to explore opportunities for economic growth in partnership with the Tsawwassen First Nation.

Taken together with new governance tools and financial resources provided under this act, the first nation will be able to improve the education and health of its people, build houses, create jobs and encourage members who have left the reserve to come back to build a better future together. That is in the best interests of all parties to this agreement. Everyone is stronger when each and every member of society is able to achieve his or her potential and contribute his or her talents to his or her community and our country.

Government Orders

Ultimately, the Tsawwassen treaty is fair to all Canadians. It brings certainty and finality with respect to the Tsawwassen's rights and title. It provides new tools and resources that will increase economic opportunity for the first nation and the entire region. It establishes new government to government relationships that respect the rights and responsibilities of all jurisdictions. It clearly demonstrates the Government of Canada's commitment to complete the unfinished business of settling treaties with first nations in British Columbia.

Much more than jurisdictional considerations, legal definitions or sums on a balance sheet, this final agreement is fundamentally about building a new relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people. It is a relationship built on mutual respect, understanding and the protection of the rights of all citizens, a strong and equitable relationship that will result in a better future for all of us.

I trust I can count on my colleagues' support to pass this worthy legislation. As we do, we will duplicate the success of this treaty and demonstrate that progress is not only possible but inevitable when we work for a common cause.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the parliamentary secretary for his words. He spoke quite eloquently about this issue.

The Tsawwassen First Nation final agreement really is about respect for our native people. It is about equality. It is about fairness. It is about the new relationships we want to have with first nations people. This agreement, I believe being the first one in an urban area, is important. It is a process that was started some years ago but has finally come to a conclusion. I quite agree with my hon. colleague that this agreement is something that needs to have the full support of this House because of what it means for all of us in this country and in terms of our relationship with our first nations people.

The member spoke quite well about the issue that is facing first nations people, but also what this treaty really means for our native population. Perhaps he could take this opportunity to elaborate further. Does he think there is something else that we could do in order to expedite this legislation? It is important that we get it right. It has taken a long time. I am glad that it has come to fruition.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, this negotiated treaty settlement with the Tsawwassen First Nation is something that came after a number of years where our government, the British Columbia government and the first nation had to compromise on a number of fronts as the context for this is in an urban area.

This agreement does all the things that need to be accomplished in order to assist the Tsawwassen First Nation, but also to achieve some certainty in this area of British Columbia where no treaties are signed.

It is essential that we begin this process. It is a long road to hoe in light of the fact that the entire province of British Columbia is not covered by treaties, unlike the province I come from where there are a number of treaties that were settled many years ago, due to the foresight of aboriginal leaders and our forefathers and foremothers in that part of our country.

I am glad today to be speaking to this bill. I hope it receives the support of other members in this House.

● (1600)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when my turn comes to speak, the New Democrats will be supporting this very important bill.

The question I have for the parliamentary secretary is around overlapping territories. I know how difficult it is to negotiate a treaty. In the case of this particular treaty, there certainly were overlapping territories, largely fishing grounds, but there were other overlapping territories as well, in particular, the Cowichan people, the Penelakut and the Sencoten, which is a coalition of four groups from the Saanich Peninsula.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could specifically comment on the process that was used in looking at these overlapping claims. In many cases people want to avoid getting into litigation. It certainly was an issue that was identified in the federal Auditor General's report when she examined the B.C. treaty process. In this context, I wonder if he could comment on how the issues around resolving overlapping claims were examined in the context of this particular treaty.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, the member has raised an important point. There is quite a cluster and concentration of a number of first nations communities throughout the Lower Mainland and all through British Columbia with historic regard to where their footprint of land was stated. This is a point of debate in some communities.

However, between the two levels of government and the first nation, a number of experts have been employed to ascertain a proper settlement in relation to this specific treaty. We feel quite confident that this piece of legislation will hold up in court.

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this issue of competing claims, if the parliamentary secretary looks at chapter 2, clause 49, he will see that there are in fact eight treaty claims to the Tsawwassen territory and two non-treaty claims. If there is any infringement on this Tsawwassen traditional territory, the onus is on the government to compensate Tsawwassen. This could be an expensive process and one that could go on for a long time.

The notion somehow is that this treaty addresses concerns of band members, and most people think of people living on the reserve. The fact of the matter is that in Tsawwassen, over half the band members no longer live on the reserve. In fact, they live in California, Washington state, Oregon, Manitoba, Ontario, and elsewhere in British Columbia. For many of those members, and they are basically new members, their only connection to the Tsawwassen Indian band is that they may have had a grandparent who was a member of the Tsawwassen Indian band. They are in fact one or two generations removed from the reserve.

Does the parliamentary secretary think that it is appropriate, given the nature of this treaty, that Canadians would continue to pay the costs that would be recognized by this treaty to people whose connection to the reserve is tenuous at best? Many of them, as I say, do not even live in this country and, as I am told by many band members, have never set foot on the Tsawwassen reserve.

Government Orders

• (1605)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, the member has made a number of interventions on this matter and is advocating for his region and continues to have important insights into all matters that face British Columbia, especially the Lower Mainland.

In relation to individuals who have left the community, it is a point worth mentioning by him, although I do take a different perspective on it. Individuals could make an argument, especially individuals from the Tsawwassen First Nation, that in light of their first nation not having a treaty signed with Canada, it became difficult for their people to maintain their way of life on the land and to maintain residency in the area. That might be the counter-argument they would pose.

I think this also speaks to the challenge that we have as a country in light of the fact that British Columbia does not have any treaties signed.

I mentioned earlier that Manitoba was subject to a number of treaties, in fact, the first treaty, Treaty 1, which entered into a relationship with the first nations that inhabited our territory prior to it becoming Manitoba and entering into Canada. These important steps were made throughout our country, but unfortunately, not in British Columbia. This is in part why we are having to deal with this matter in 2008.

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary a question on the issue the member raised around band membership.

I am not that familiar with B.C. and its treaty making process. Was it up to the band itself to accept membership? Did people come in under Bill C-34? Could they possibly have been on a registry at the federal government level or did they have band membership status? Was it a decision of the band itself?

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, band membership is an important element of practically all first nations throughout our country. There are a number of ways that bands deal with membership. However, most important, the Tsawwassen First Nation, as it is the subject of our discussion today, continues to deal with membership based on decisions as a community. This is the process that many first nations follow. It is a traditional process where the first nation itself can include members as the community chooses.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very excited, as I always am, to speak when a new land claim, after many years, comes to Parliament. It is a very exciting time for the Tsawwassen people, who are part of the Coast Salish people, and the people of Delta, Richmond, the people of Vancouver, British Columbia and Canada when one of our ancient historic grievances is resolved. Many countries in the world have land claims with aboriginal people, but Canada is leading the world in innovative solutions with them, like with this agreement. It is following on some of the others that have had such amazing success and are indeed a model for the world. We can only hope that we can hurry up decisions on the backlog of claims so we do not have to deal, on a daily basis, with the symptoms and the problems that come up because we have not dealt with the overall picture.

Therefore, I am delighted to speak today to Bill C-34, An Act to give effect to the Tsawwassen First Nation Final Agreement and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

This is also very exciting, historically, because it is the first land claim in an urban area south of 60°. The first one in Canada was in Whitehorse, Yukon, of which I am very proud. I remember that day, when I signed the agreement. It was a wonderful time.

For those who do not understand why it is even more challenging in an urban area, land claims involve land and providing land as part of the settlement. If one is in an urban area, most of that land is owned by someone, which makes it very difficult. There is competing overlapping interest. Therefore, it is very exciting when everyone can work together.

As the parliamentary secretary said, there was some give and take, which there would have to be when there are all the overlapping interests. To come out with a glorious solution like this is wonderful for everyone concerned.

Therefore, I commend the minister. I am not sure if his support came on the road to Emmaus, but for whatever reason, I commend him for the tremendous agreement he has brought before Parliament.

I have to though condemn the government for such a large break from first reading on December 6, which I will not bring up again if the government gets it through before an election. We certainly should not jeopardize such a wonderful project that could have come to second reading a lot closer to December 6.

The Tsawwassen people, who are part of the Coast Salish, were living in an area that was traditionally a lot of Richmond, Delta and some of the Gulf Islands. Then another culture came in and impinged on that. It would be much better to have a nice peaceful negotiated agreement as to how everyone could live together. In fact, they have the legal right to that from the royal proclamation, stating that it would be their land until an agreement is made with Canada.

Therefore, this is a very exciting day. They traditionally used in the order of something like 280,000 hectares of land, which is massive. As I said, it is a big chunk of Vancouver, but in this agreement they have certain rights in that area, but the land transferred to them is a tiny amount of 724 hectares, as well as a tiny financial contribution of \$10.4 million.

We have had many debates in this Parliament about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and when it does or does not apply to aboriginal people, that it is not fair when it does not apply and so on. Those people who are concerned about this will be very happy to know that, as in other modern treaties, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms will apply to the people of Tsawwassen.

What is very exciting for some people, and my colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca keeps raising this, is the Indian Act will no longer apply.

Government Orders

It is lovely any time we can have people go back to governing themselves and not under the Indian Act, with the exception of determining who is a status Indian and who gets certain benefits from Canada. As they define their membership, they will have rights. The courts have already decided this, so it is not for us to say.

● (1610)

The members, wherever they are, will have their rights as a member. There are a lot of Canadians living in Lebanon. We saved them by ship one time because of the recent catastrophes. Wherever people go, they do not lose their Canadian citizenship and their rights. Tsawwassen people, if they travel or live somewhere else, will not lose their rights of membership.

The self-government provisions are constitutionally protected as well as the land claim, which is also another huge step forward in the progress. If we get a new government that does not like the idea, it cannot throw the government out. We could not throw out the government of Ontario or the government of Quebec at a moment's notice because some government came in that did not like them. For this reason, it is a constitutionally protected government.

Now that they are a government, they have to be responsible to their citizens. They have to therefore have a constitution and that constitution has to show that it is a democratic constitution, democratically responsible to the citizens and financially responsible to their citizens.

There is always the question of non-Tsawwassen band members living on the land and in the area. Some people would think that they would lose their rights, but that is not the case, just as it was not the case in the Tlicho agreement, which we signed a couple of years ago. Non-member representatives will be on any Tsawwassen First Nation public institution that makes decisions relating to taxation. It cannot be said that there is taxation without representation. If they decide to continue living there, they have that representation.

As has always been an aboriginal right, the Tsawwassen people will be allowed to continue to harvest wildlife and migratory birds for food, social and ceremonial reasons. They can also harvest fish and aquatic plants, which is big for a first nations that is on the ocean.

There are some controls on the fishing, which people would think are reasonable. They can be controlled if conservation becomes a problem, or if there is a problem with public health or safety. It is in a distinct limited area related to their claim. Not only that, unlike some aboriginal rights in harvesting, there are allocations for certain species related to conservation, and that is the chum, the sockeye, the chinook and the pink salmon. These are traditional aboriginal rights under section 35 of harvesting food. I think Canadians pretty well understand that this has been occurring for a long time.

However, there is also a commercial fishing aspect in this claim. It. The parliamentary secretary made it quite clear that there was no section 35 right in the claim related to commercial fishing. It has nothing to do with it. In fact, a court case recently stated that there could not be one. Commercial fishing is not even in the claim itself. It is in a side agreement and it is related to commercial fishing licences. They are given out as other licences expire, so they do not increase the pressure on the fish. In fact, there is even a percentage of

catches of certain species. They are just like any other licences and agreements. It is not an aboriginal right. If the fisheries is open for two days, then they can go out for the two days, just like anyone else. If the fishery is closed for, the year they cannot go out, just like other fishing boats.

● (1615)

I would also like to talk about how the Tsawwassen First Nation fits in with governance. When there are four orders of government in Canada, first nations, federal, provincial, territorial and municipal, people have to work together. There are certain things in common, such as shared service agreements. In this case, Tsawwassen is in the greater Vancouver regional district, which was involved in this negotiated settlement.

The Tsawwassen First Nation will appoint a director in that district. The people in the district will be delighted. The new government will pay a share of the planning in the GVRD. It will pay costs toward air quality initiatives encompassing the whole area, costs for serving 9/11, as well as some costs toward regional parks and governments. People in the whole greater Vancouver regional district, not just the in the tiny land claims spit, will accrue benefits from this new cooperation.

The financial package is roughly \$13.9 million. That is spread over 10 years. It is a very small amount of money and, in fact, the first nation will not receive all of it. It has to pay back close to \$4 million, the amount it used to negotiate the claim.

I now want to go on to some of the financial provisions of the agreement so people understand the major, salient points in that respect. Once there is a government, just like the government of Ontario or the government of Yukon, money is needed to run that government. Some of that money comes from taxes and some from other orders of government. That will be no different here.

In order for Tsawwassen to run its government, it will make some revenues on its own, like every other government, but to the extent that it does not, it will get help from other governments, in this case the signatories to the agreement, being the Government of Canada and the Government of British Columbia. It will be provided with a fiscal financing agreement, which will be renegotiated every five years.

It will start out with \$15.8 million and then \$2.8 million per year of ongoing funding. People who have been involved in government, at any level, know it will not be easy to run a government with only \$2.8 million a year, but it is for the types of services it has to provide. As I said, it will have a number of its own source revenues.

This represents a fundamental change in the fiscal relationship between the federal government and the Tsawwassen First Nation. Tsawwassen First Nation will have to raise funds and be accountable to other governments for the funds it gets. In particular, it has to be accountable to its own people for the way it spends the funds and delivers the services.

Government Orders

It will contribute to the funding of agreed upon programs and services from its own source revenues, and I will talk about some of those later. Although this is a very tiny segment of land, it is in a valuable urban centre and there will be some areas where it can make revenues to contribute to the programs. Therefore, it will not have to be totally funded by the government of British Columbia and the Government of Canada.

Something else that a lot of people would not be aware of is that the Indian Act tax exemption for Tsawwassen citizens will be phased out after eight years for transactions like sales. Right now they are tax exempt when they buy things. All that will be phased out and they will pay taxes like everyone else after eight years. Other types of taxes will be phased out for 12 years.

The Tsawwassen government, like is the case in other land claims agreements signed recently, will have the ability to levy direct taxes on its members within Tsawwassen lands. The percentages will be levied by other levels of government.

• (1620)

The interests of the broader community are fairly represented. Over the past decade there have been consultations. This has been a decade in the making. We do not create these things without all sorts of consultations. Over the past decade there have been consultations on a wide range of subjects with local and regional governments, third parties and community interests. Since 2002 over 20 public meetings have been held, including public information open houses and open round tables in the communities.

If people are worrying about the harvest agreements I talked about earlier for harvesting fish and wildlife, I would note that these are not exclusive. Other first nations and the general public may hunt and fish there as they do now on provincial Crown land.

This agreement was heartily endorsed. It is exciting in the sense that there is a much greater buy-in, so they must have done a great communication job with people and explained the understanding, because it is of course very difficult to change at any time, and to make a major change like this is a huge challenge.

There was a huge majority. Something in the order of 80% of the people voted in favour of this agreement. There is always a higher threshold than just the simple vote. Looking at the polls right now in Canada, there is not a party in the House that could form a government with more than 30% or so. To have 80% approve of this deal is very exciting and bodes well for the future.

Of course there will be evolving relationships. With a new government, there are all sorts of challenges, but there are even more opportunities as they become these major contributors to the economy, to governance in the GVRD, to working with and helping their neighbours and to providing opportunities in economic development in the area.

What is so exciting about this is that I come from an area where this has occurred. Land claims in Yukon have been some of the first and most innovative in the country and 11 of our 14 first nations have signed such agreements. It is a success story. The difference is like night and day when people once again are in charge of their own destiny.

They successfully governed themselves for thousands of years and had their own system and cultures. Now they can return, in a modern environment, to being responsible for their own government, with decision-making in their own hands, and to dealing with social problems in social and political systems they design themselves.

The systems may not match ours, but they do not have to match ours to be successful. They will have systems where they are accountable, but to themselves, systems that they design themselves, just like governments around the world from the smallest villages and towns to the great nations of the world.

In my riding where this has occurred, it is like night and day. I remember going around 20 years ago to small band offices. I might not even have found an employee there. There may have been a secretary. That office was there basically just to get calls from officials from Indian Affairs who would tell people what to do.

Now they have full scale professional bureaucracies delivering programs to themselves, dealing with the healing their people need and having to listen every day to the people as the local politicians. It must be one of the hardest jobs in the world being an aboriginal politician, because every day they have people coming into the first nations offices telling them what they would like changed.

It is just a remarkable building of capacity, with remarkable contributions, whether it is in the economy or other areas. One of our success stories owns half of the biggest airline.

This is just a great success story. I want to congratulate the negotiators in the federal government, the Tsawwassen and the B.C. government, the people of Tsawwassen and the Coast Salish people, the federal government and everyone else who brought this great day to this state.

• (1625)

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to some of the issues that my friend across the way was raising. Some of them are rather troubling in their inaccuracies. Let me just briefly touch on them.

The member suggested that after the conclusion of the treaty, band members would be paying taxes just like everyone else. That is not the case. I, along with everybody else in this room, pay taxes to the federal government, the provincial governments and municipalities. When this treaty is completed, band members and others, non-band members who live on the reserve, will be paying federal income tax, but they will be paying it to the band, not to the federal government. GST will be going to the band, as will half of the PST.

On the fisheries file, this fisheries is not split up in any kind of even fashion or even a realistic fashion. If the allocation that is given to the Tsawwassen is replicated on the Fraser River, it will require 180% of the existing total allowable catch. There will not even be enough fish for other band members, let alone anybody else, and that is based on a government study that was done by the former Liberal government back in 1993.

Government Orders

The member suggested that the charter applies. I would suggest that he read the treaty. The final agreement states:

The Final Agreement will be a treaty and a land claims agreement within the meaning of sections 25 and 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982....

In other words, the kinds of rights that the rest of us enjoy will not be forthcoming if one is a resident or doing business on that reserve.

The issue that I really want to ask about is this one. In my comments for the parliamentary secretary, I mentioned where these folks live. When we talk about the Tsawwassen Band members, we are talking about a total band membership of 350 people. Only 160 of those 350 live on the reserve. As I said, the rest of them are spread throughout the United States and Canada.

I want to know if Parliament should accord in perpetuity untold millions of dollars in special rights and privileges to persons who are not Canadian citizens, who have no appreciable connection with the Tsawwassen reserve or its long-time residents, and whose children and their children will in future generations have even less of a connection to the reserve. Why should we be doing that?

• (1630)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his great interest. I know he has a huge interest in this file and has studied it, and it is of course very important to the people who live in his area, but unfortunately none of the items he raises are a concern. I will explain.

In the first point he raised, we are both right. In my point, the people have to pay taxes. They are paying income taxes and PST and all of that, just like every other Canadian. If the federal government decides to provide that as own-source revenues to the first nation instead of other money they would have to provide the first nation, that is totally up to the federal government. That happens all the time.

I do not know the exact figures, but in the Yukon government funding, about \$700 million of the approximately \$900 million is provided as a transfer payment by the federal government. What the people do with those taxes is totally up to them, but the important thing is that they are on a level playing field with all Canadians.

Related to the fishery, as I said, the umbrella is conservation. Conservation overrules these fisheries, both the personal fishery of individuals and also, of course, as it always does, the commercial fishery. Sometimes a commercial fishery is closed completely. In that case, these licences, which are like everyone else's licences—and there are not any more of them because they were from people who were selling or retiring them—will be there.

The third point was about the charter. The charter applies, as I have already said, and it is right in the agreement. If the members come up with a situation, they can do a charter challenge. Unfortunately they will not be able to get the court challenges program to help them, because the government cancelled that program, but it does not mean that they cannot go and do a challenge. The government has a lot of lawyers. It would not put in things that could be challenged easily. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms will apply to everyone in their area.

The member has asked four questions and I have to briefly answer the last one. In regard to where people are living, there are millions of Canadians living all over the world. They do not lose their Canadian status. They do not lose their Canadian pensions. They do not lose their Canadian rights. It is the same for the couple of hundred people who may not at this time be living on the Tsawwassen reserve.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the very good comments on this treaty by the member for Yukon. I have a question about implementation. With the Yukon First Nations, implementation has sometimes been a problem because of the failure of the federal government to actually uphold its end of the agreement.

I believe that the implementation provisions and the dispute resolution provisions in this agreement are quite different from those in the Yukon agreement. Perhaps that will alleviate some of the problems we have seen with the Yukon First Nations in regard to the federal government's failure to move forward. I wonder if the member could talk about the things he thinks are important in terms of implementation and that make sure it moves forward in an expeditious way.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question. I will try to be brief because I know there are others who want to ask questions and I would like to give them a chance.

As the member said, the Auditor General has pointed out that a number of claims in the north have not been implemented appropriately and a lot of work needs to be done. There still does. Actually, the biggest issue in my riding is making sure that the fiscal amount is available and that we have had a re-evaluation. I encourage the government to do that. I think it is working on that.

What I would say, though, is that signing the claim is not the end of the journey but the beginning of the journey. Whatever the legal provisions are for implementation, if we do not have governments and people on all sides who agree and believe in the spirit of it and will work to make it work, to make ongoing amendments, to provide the resources to make the system work, it will never work.

The good faith that has taken so long to get something like this together in B.C. has to be a great precursor for that. I know the member will be watching, as I will, in regard to this claim and the other claims that are signed, because the people who have signed claims in Canada are a comparatively small minority group out of the 640 first nations, and they sometimes get left out. They think that once a deal is signed, it is goodbye. They think it is done, and it is not.

We will keep watching and will be trying to make sure that these are all implemented in good faith, with the resources and any changes needed to make them into evolving great new governments.

• (1635)

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member would describe for us how the non-members who are still living on Tsawwassen lands would have their rights protected under the treaty. If there is time, perhaps he could shed a little light on what economic benefits will come from this first nation final agreement.

Government Orders

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, this is always a worry, but we have had some great examples so far, such as the Tlicho First Nation and the Westbank First Nation. The government has taken care of it in this agreement as well. People who are not first nation members but are there now will have rights. They will have abilities. They will have a lot of input. They can stay comfortably part of that society and not have to move out.

If there are any public boards or any public organizations such as a school board, for example, of course they are going to be concerned about it. Maybe they are Chinese and they are concerned about the culture for their children. They are going to have seats allocated. They are going to be able to vote to be on those boards. For any public institutions that have an effect on taxation, they are going to be able to have a representative there. It may not be a majority, but they will have representation, so there will not be taxation without representation.

As people know, the delta around the ferry terminal there is a wonderful area, with all sorts of potential for shipping and economic development, so the government once again will be creating great revenues for itself, both to run itself and to help other people in that greater Vancouver area.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois to Bill C-34, An Act to give effect to the Tsawwassen First Nation Final Agreement and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. The Bloc Québécois is in favour of the bill to give effect to this agreement.

We are basing our support on three fundamental principles. First, our party has always embraced the idea of the right to self-government for aboriginal peoples, and this agreement makes that right a reality. If only for this reason, we should support the principle underlying this entire agreement.

Second, a majority of the Tsawwassen—70%—voted in favour of this agreement in a referendum. It would be inappropriate for sovereignists to oppose this.

Third, the agreement is a fine example of self-government.

More generally, the Bloc Québécois is concerned about aboriginal claims for self-government. It acknowledges the aboriginal peoples as distinct peoples with a right to their own cultures, languages, customs and traditions, and a right to decide for themselves what path to take in developing their own identity.

Bill C-34 is the last stepping stone in giving effect to the tripartite agreement between the Tsawwassen, the Government of British Columbia and the Government of Canada.

In view of the nature of the bill giving effect to the final agreement, it seems to us that the role of Parliament is to debate and accept or reject this bill. There is no need for us to amend this bill. It was duly endorsed by the three parties who negotiated it. To amend it would be to patronize it, and that we refuse to support.

We would point out that the Bloc Québécois endorsed the essence of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Erasmus-Dussault commission. It set out aboriginal

self-government as a level of government with jurisdiction over matters of good government and public well-being. In addition, the report as a whole was based on recognition of aboriginal peoples as autonomous nations occupying a unique place in Canada.

The Bloc Québécois traditionally stands behind aboriginal peoples in their quest for justice and the recognition of their rights. The Bloc Québécois recognizes Quebec's 11 aboriginal nations for what they are: nations. The Bloc Québécois recognizes the aboriginal peoples as distinct peoples who have a right to their cultures, their languages, their customs and their traditions, and a right to decide for themselves what path to take in developing their own identity.

In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples—the Erasmus-Dussault commission—released a comprehensive report that proposed far-reaching changes over a period of 20 years leading to self-government for aboriginal peoples by respecting their customs, cultures, languages and ancestral institutions. Since then, the Bloc Québécois has pressured the federal government to act on the recommendations made in the Erasmus-Dussault report.

The Bloc Québécois believes that aboriginal peoples must have the tools to develop their own identity, namely the right to self-government and the recognition of their rights.

The Bloc Québécois has for many years recognized aboriginal peoples' right to self-determination. As far back as 1993, the manifesto of the Forum paritaire québécois-autochtone recognized the right to self-determination as the basis for relations between Quebecers and aboriginal peoples. In fact, we have recognized this right since the Bloc Québécois was founded.

The Bloc Québécois is of the opinion that there is no universal instrument that protects the rights of indigenous peoples, who continue to be among the poorest and most marginalized people in the world.

Our party understands that the draft declaration represents a compromise between member states and indigenous peoples, but it is an acceptable compromise, and we feel it should be supported. Quebec already has a number of positive agreements with first nations and has everything to gain from the signing of the declaration.

Our party believes that the aboriginal communities in Quebec must have adequate housing, decent public infrastructure and the human and material resources they need to improve social and health conditions.

The Bloc Québécois believes that Ottawa must shoulder its responsibilities and respond to the "10,000 possibilities" project, which is aimed at creating 10,000 jobs, encouraging 10,000 dropouts to return to school and building 10,000 housing units. The project was unveiled by the first nations of Quebec at the forum in Mashteuiatsh.

The Bloc Québécois is also proud to be working with the first nations of Quebec to organize the first day of awareness of the first nations of Quebec, which will take place in the House of Commons on December 10.

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The Bloc Québécois believes that, in order to develop harmonious relations with Quebec's aboriginal peoples, we must first listen to them and understand them by taking an interest in their reality, their differences and the challenges they face.

• (1640)

This bill would give effect to the Tsawwassen First Nation final agreement. Once ratified, the treaty will provide a comprehensive and final settlement of the ancestral rights, including title, of the Tsawwassen First Nation. It defines the Tsawwassen First Nation's rights under section 35. It specifies the geographic area where those rights apply and the limitations on those rights set by agreement by Canada, British Columbia and the Tsawwassen First Nation.

The treaty can be amended after it has been ratified, but the three parties—Canada, British Columbia and the Tsawwassen First Nation—must agree on any amendments. Once the treaty is ratified, it cannot be amended unilaterally. “This treaty, the first in the Lower Mainland, abolishes the Indian Act through self-government, not assimilation,” said Chief Kim Baird. “It gives us the tools to build a healthy community and the opportunity to participate fully in the Canadian economy.”

Obviously, because 70% of the community ratified the agreement, we must accept it as presented to the House of Commons, without amendment. Why? It serves as an example for other aboriginal nations, including other nations in Quebec. It is the first modern, urban treaty.

Thus, it is important to the aboriginal communities listening. This agreement is estimated to be worth \$120 million, including land worth \$66.7 million, \$16 million in compensation, and other royalties worth \$37 million. The agreement gives them 724 hectares of land. They will have municipal-style self-government, with the ability to levy taxes. The Indian Act will no longer apply to this first nation, except when it comes to designating Indian status.

Tsawwassen First Nation members are Coast Salish people who belong to the Hun'qum'i'num linguistic group. In their language, Tsawwassen means “the land facing the sea.” Historically, they have travelled and fished the waterways of the southern Strait of Georgia and the lower Fraser River. Tsawwassen First Nation has approximately 358 members, about half of whom live on reserve in an area situated on the southern side of the Lower Mainland, between the BC Ferry Terminal and the Deltaport Container Terminal and Roberts Bank Coal Port. The community straddles Highway 17, along the Georgia Strait shore.

The Tsawwassen have a long history that dates back to 2,260 B.C. The occupation of the land has been demonstrated by carbon-14 tests. It has taken some time to regain the autonomy they had back then. This treaty has a lot of history behind it.

In 1791, the Spanish and the British explored the coast. Epidemics killed between 80% and 90% of the Coast Salish population. In 1851, the Tsawwassen territory was split in two when the border was established with the United States. Point Roberts is now in the state of Washington. The first contact with the Catholic church took place when the Saint Charles mission was established in 1860.

In 1871, the reserve was created and by 1874 the reserve had an area of 490 acres. In 1906, a delegation of Salish chiefs travelled to

England to claim their ancestral lands. In 1958, the nation's longhouse was torn down to make way for the ferry terminal and the highway. At the same time, the reserve was again cut in two.

In 1993, a formal claim was filed with the province. In 1995, construction of the longhouse began almost 40 years after the first one was destroyed. In 2003, the Tsawwassen First Nation, British Columbia and Canada reached an agreement in principle, which was signed in 2004. On July 25, 2007, 70% of the nation's members voted in favour of the agreement. Debate in the British Columbia legislature began on October 15, 2007. On December 6, 2007, the agreement was signed in Ottawa.

• (1645)

Given that the Tsawwassen nation dates back to 2260 B.C., it has been waiting a long time for self-government.

The general idea of the Tsawwassen First Nation final agreement is to eliminate the uncertainty that has surrounded the ancestral rights of this aboriginal nation to land that it claims as its traditional territory and which covers 279,600 hectares, including the waters of the southern Strait of Georgia.

This agreement will give the Tsawwassen First Nation modern governance tools enabling it to establish solid and viable relations with the federal, provincial and municipal governments and to support an atmosphere of certainty and economic prosperity for the entire Lower Mainland region.

The final agreement covers approximately 724 hectares of treaty settlement land including approximately 290 hectares of the former Indian reserve and 372 hectares of provincial Crown land. Tsawwassen First Nation will also own in fee simple an additional 62 hectares of waterfront land comprised of the Boundary Bay and Fraser River parcels. This land will remain under the jurisdiction of the municipality of Delta, known as the Corporation of Delta.

Tsawwassen First Nation will have the right of refusal for 80 years after the treaty takes effect to purchase approximately 278 hectares of lands north of Tsawwassen lands—known as the Brunswick Point lands—if the people currently leasing these lands choose not to buy them or decide to sell them later.

If Tsawwassen First Nation purchases land within the Brunswick Point lands within 50 years after the effective date of the treaty, these lands may be added to its “treaty settlement lands”.

Following this 50-year period, Tsawwassen First Nation can add land within its territory to its treaty settlement lands, but the federal, provincial and municipal governments must consent to the addition.

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Federal and provincial laws, as well as Tsawwassen laws, will apply to Tsawwassen lands. However, the provincial agricultural land reserve designation continues not to apply to the former Indian reserve lands and will apply to about half of the additional former provincial Crown land that will become Tsawwassen lands. The agricultural land reserve designation will apply to the Boundary Bay and Fraser River parcels.

This agreement also has a financial component. It is important that our viewers understand this.

First of all, it includes a capital transfer of approximately \$13.9 million over 10 years, less any outstanding negotiation-related loans.

There will also be funding of \$15.8 million to support all one-time start-up and transition costs, as well as \$2.8 million in funding for programs and services and the incremental implementation of governance activities.

In addition, Canada will pay \$2.0 million in consideration of the release by Tsawwassen First Nation of the rights to the mines and minerals under previously-surrendered reserve lands. Furthermore, \$100,000 will be paid for forest resources to compensate for the fact that Tsawwassen First Nation will have no access to economic forestry activities in their territory.

As for wildlife, migratory birds and forest resources, this agreement guarantees the right to harvest wildlife and migratory birds for food, social and ceremonial purposes within specified areas, subject to conservation, public health and public safety.

The federal and provincial ministers will retain authority, within their respective jurisdictions, to manage wildlife and migratory birds and their habitats.

Tsawwassen First Nation will manage the designation and documentation of Tsawwassen First Nation hunters.

With respect to fish, under the treaty, Tsawwassen First Nation will have the right to harvest fish and aquatic plants for food, social and ceremonial purposes, subject to conservation, public health and public safety.

The final agreement provides for Tsawwassen First Nation's treaty allocations of salmon for food, social and ceremonial purposes.

• (1650)

[*English*]

The following quotas would be established under food, social and ceremonial fisheries: 12,000 sockeye, 625 chinook, 500 coho, up to 2,000 chums, and other advantages.

[*Translation*]

A harvest agreement, separate from the final agreement, provides for economic access to salmon for the Tsawwassen First Nation.

With respect to culture and heritage, Tsawwassen First Nation can make laws to preserve, promote and develop culture and language, conserve and protect heritage resources on its lands, and deal with archaeological materials, sites and ancient human remains.

With respect to governance, with the exception of determining Indian status, after a transition period the Indian Act will no longer apply to Tsawwassen First Nation, its land or members. Instead, constitutionally protected self-government provisions will enable Tsawwassen First Nation to make its own decisions on matters related to the preservation of its culture, the exercise of its treaty rights and the operation of its government.

The final agreement requires Tsawwassen First Nation to have a constitution that provides for government that is democratically and financially accountable to its members.

Tsawwassen First Nation will consult with non-members who are resident on Tsawwassen Lands about decisions that directly and significantly affect them. Tsawwassen First Nation will provide those non-members an opportunity to participate in decision-making processes that significantly affect them.

There will be non-member representation on any government or public institution that makes decisions relating to matters that directly and significantly affect non-members, including taxation. The non-member representative will be selected by non-members and have the ability to participate in discussions and to vote on matters that directly and significantly affect non-members.

As far as taxation is concerned, the government of the Tsawwassen First Nation will have the ability to levy direct taxes on its members within treaty settlement lands, known as Tsawwassen lands.

The tax exemptions for transaction taxes and other taxes under section 87 of the Indian Act will be phased out after 8 and 12 years respectively.

British Columbia will share with Tsawwassen First Nation 50% of provincial income tax and sales tax revenue collected from Tsawwassen First Nation members. British Columbia will share with Tsawwassen First Nation 100% of real property tax collected from anyone residing on Tsawwassen Lands.

In terms of local government relations, the Tsawwassen First Nation will become a member of the Greater Vancouver Regional District and appoint a director to sit on the GVRD board. The Tsawwassen First Nation will pay for core mandatory services, such as air quality, strategic planning, 911, regional parks and general government services.

Tsawwassen First Nation and the Greater Vancouver Water District may enter into a local water services agreement and Tsawwassen First Nation may enter into service agreements with other local governments.

The agreement gives the Tsawwassen the tools to achieve financial independence. The agreement also gives them more power to protect their lifestyle, stimulate economic growth and improve the welfare of their community.

It is for all these reasons that the Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-34. Our support sends a message to all of Quebec's aboriginal communities that may want to achieve self-government. They can always count on the Bloc Québécois's support.

What is happening with the Tsawwassen nation is easy to understand. Its land, which is now defined and belongs to them, will be governed as a municipality. It will be able to levy taxes and have a seat on regional organizations.

For example, a community in Quebec that wants to be part of a similar agreement could be considered as a municipality, which would allow it to sit on the board of the regional county municipality.

I am thinking of the Papineau regional county municipality in particular, where I was reeve for a number of years—some might say too many years. If by chance a reserve located in that region had had a style of governance like the one suggested in this agreement, then the reserve would have had a representative at the table of elected members, the council of mayors of the Papineau RCM. The representative could have taken part in the debates and benefited from the available programs to which this community could have belonged. That is just an example, of course.

The Bloc Québécois fully supports this agreement. Again, we will not accept any amendment since this agreement was accepted without change by 70% of the community. We therefore expect there to be no change and for Bill C-34 to incorporate this agreement exactly as it was adopted by the people and representatives of the Tsawwassen community.

This example could be used by other aboriginal communities we support.

• (1655)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, Saint-Hubert Airport; the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, Aboriginal Affairs; the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Post-secondary Education.

[English]

Questions and comments. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the intervention by the member from the Bloc Québécois. As he has just stated once again, his party will be supporting this agreement and, of course, honouring the community's ratification vote.

This agreement is going to provide considerable economic enhancement to the Tsawwassen First Nation by allowing it to take part in the opportunities in the region. It will also allow us to move forward as a country by settling some of these outstanding treaties.

I would like to ask the member whether or not he believes that this process has been helpful for the Tsawwassen agreement as he has

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read this document? Does he feel that this first step is going to provide further agreements in British Columbia.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I hope so. However, we must recognize that this is an agreement covering land in an urban setting. We hope that the same objectives will be attained with the same determination and the same effort in rural areas. Territories are much larger, of course, in regions outside urban centres.

However, it does set an example for other communities, including the 11 aboriginal communities in Quebec. We hope they will be able to analyze the agreement and choose to participate in or to initiate discussions on this type of agreement. We hope that this agreement will lead to others for aboriginal nations in Quebec and also in the rest of Canada.

I hope that the government will realize that this agreement applies to land in an urban area and that the discussions, pitfalls and problems in rural areas will be different. Nevertheless, it is a step in the right direction.

I repeat that we must ratify this agreement as submitted and without amendment. We will do so. It bodes well for the future.

• (1700)

[English]

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the member's comments. He did have his facts straight. The interpretation of them may not have been as good, but at least the facts were straight.

The member mentioned that 67% of the folks there voted in favour of the treaty. I just want to remind him that out of 350 members, only 160 actually live on the reserve. The vote was largely carried by people who live elsewhere in Canada and in the United States.

The other point I want to make is in regard to the issue of land. The member mentioned land value and there are a couple of points I would like to make about that.

That land was essentially a salt marsh until farmers went in and diked it, and started to cultivate it. That land was not of much use to anybody. I know that the member was quoting the government when he said that the value of the land was about \$67 million. That is a long way off the real value of the land.

We are talking about 1,700 acres, I believe, that are being transferred to the Tsawwassen. When the government first acknowledged the treaty, it gave the treaty a total value of \$70 million. At that time I went to the real estate authorities to check the value of farmland for half of that 1,700 acres. I put an industrial value on the other land that is going to be transferred into the port. I lowballed the value of both the industrial land and the farmland and came up with the figure of \$250 million for the land alone.

There is a strong NDP supporter back home who sat in the Barrett government in the seventies and has been a Richmond councillor for over 30 years. In fact, the community of Steveston is named after his family. He said “[The member for Delta—Richmond East] has got it all wrong”. He said the real value of that land is at least \$500 million.

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We have been somewhat misled. We somehow think that this is going to turn out great for everybody. But remember, I said 500 acres are going to be industrialized. A rail line from the port is going in to that land. There is going to be container storage to service the port and warehousing.

The key question here is: Would that member want to live adjacent to that kind of industrial area? If anyone anywhere else in North America or the western world is living that close to an industrial area that is servicing a port, they are living in a slum. A minority number of Tsawwassen band members are going to be living next to an industrial area in an area that anywhere else in the western world would be called a slum. Is the member in favour of that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I should point out to my colleague that there was in fact an agreement arrived at through negotiations with the provincial government, in this case British Columbia.

It was voted on by the community. Obviously, I hope that the main concern was for the people living in the community as opposed to those, as he said, who were in the United States. The Government of Canada took part in the negotiations, and I hope it acted in good faith.

As for the value, it depends on what the land will be used for. If we leave it to developers, it could be worth \$500 million. The nation probably wants to use the land for another purpose, and so the value could change. For example, agricultural land in Quebec is worth less than land in an industrial area. However, we have to be able to protect land and have a vision for the future. I hope that this is what guided the British Columbia government, the aboriginal representatives and the Government of Canada.

Everyone accepted this agreement. Who am I to challenge the value or anything else? As I explained, the nation voted and almost 70% of the citizens were in favour. That is enough for us. Who are we to question this agreement, which is now accepted by these citizens who form an independent nation, who have their own independent government, and who want to be in charge of their own development? I have confidence in them. I realized that they have been wanting this outcome for years, and all the better if they have it in 2008. I will not be the one to stand in the way. On the contrary, I want to make it easier for this agreement to be implemented. They have waited far too long for this.

• (1705)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Simcoe North for a short question.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is aware that the Tsawwassen First Nation has been really without a substantive land base for many years. This is because treaties, of course, in B.C. have not been signed. Is this not in fact a good first step in moving us in the right direction?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, yes, because, once again, more than 70% of the nation was in favour of it, and the province

agreed. So, in my opinion, the federal government should ratify this agreement. It is a step in the right direction. I hope that this will be used as an example for other aboriginal nations, including those in Quebec.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to speak to Bill C-34, An Act to give effect to the Tsawwassen First Nation Final Agreement and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. New Democrats will be supporting this very important piece of legislation.

This piece of legislation is the culmination of many years of negotiation. As other members of the House have pointed out, this is not the end of the road. I would say it is actually the beginning of the road.

This agreement will provide some economic certainty to the Tsawwassen people and to the surrounding community. It will promote autonomy for Tsawwassen. It will also provide compensation.

As we well know, this final agreement covers everything from the use of the land through to parks, migratory birds, taxation, eligibility, enrolment, dispute resolution, and so on. It is a comprehensive agreement.

I would offer congratulations to Chief Kim Baird and the Tsawwassen people for their patience, courage, wisdom and their ability to continue to stay at a very difficult process. It is important that we recognize the historical context around these kinds of agreements.

British Columbia has a very long and sad history in not moving forward on agreements. The Tsawwassen First Nation has a history of determined people. It is a lengthy history, and I am not going to go through every step of it, but it goes back to 10000 BC where there is evidence of aboriginal civilizations in North America. There were hundreds of thousands of people living in North America at that time.

I am going to skip ahead several thousand years to 1865. At that time the Tsawwassen chief wrote a letter to the colonial lands department asking for land to be set aside for the people of Tsawwassen First Nation.

Other members of the House talked about it being unfortunate that the Tsawwassen First Nation had not signed an agreement. There was certainly no lack of effort on the first nation's part. We can see the history going back to 1865 asking for an agreement. In 1866 there was new legislation that prohibited land pre-emption by Indians. The size of the reserves were actually reduced, allowing only 10 acres per Indian family on new reserves, and that was further eroded over the years. In 1871 Indian people were not allowed to fish commercially. In 1872 the right to vote in B.C. elections was withdrawn from Indians. In 1894 federal regulations restricted Indian fishing devices, and permission was required to fish food. Of course throughout this sorry time many of the cultural practices were taken away, including the potlatch.

This brings me to 1920 when Arthur Meighen as superintendent-general of Indian affairs introduced and Parliament passed a bill authorizing land cut-offs without Indian consent. Simultaneously, officials conducted a wave of potlatch arrests and some chiefs were convicted and jailed.

In 1927 the Indian Act prohibited raising money or hiring lawyers to pursue land claims. This stayed in place until 1951. When people talk about the fact that there was a failure to sign land claim agreements it was very difficult to do it when people actually were not allowed to hire lawyers to pursue their agreement.

In 1956 the Tsawwassen bluff lands were sold to a developer. In 1959 the George Massey tunnel was opened. Some of this will not be familiar to people who are not from British Columbia, but these are significant events in British Columbia.

In 1960 construction on the Tsawwassen ferry causeway began. The Tsawwassen First Nation's traditional long house was torn down to make way for Highway 17. In 1976 there was an agreement between Delta and Indian and Northern Affairs to provide the Tsawwassen First Nation water for domestic purposes only. The Tsawwassen First Nations pay for it by the metre, which is twice the cost of what Delta residents pay.

Finally in 1993 the Tsawwassen First Nation filed its statement of intent with the B.C. Treaty Commission meaning that the Tsawwassen First Nation was ready to negotiate a treaty.

We can see that over a lengthy period of time, right after right was taken away from the Tsawwassen First Nation. I want to bring it into the present day so we can see what this erosion of rights and access to the economic benefits and the resources of the land has resulted in.

This is a quote from the Tsawwassen First Nation about who they are:

Our population is young and growing fast. We number 328 today; 168 live on our reserve. About 60 per cent of TFN people are under 25 years old, compared with neighbouring Delta, where 36 per cent are under 25 years old.

On our reserve, the average family income is \$20,065, compared to Delta, at \$67,844. Sadly, about 40 per cent of our people are on welfare or some other form of social assistance. Our unemployment rate is 38 per cent, compared with neighbouring Delta at 7.4 per cent. Our high school graduation rate is 47 per cent; Delta's is 77 per cent.

• (1710)

Members can see the sad state that this continuous erosion of access to the benefits of a very rich and bountiful land resulted in the kind of poverty that we see on Tsawwassen and many other reserves in British Columbia and throughout Canada.

I want to turn for a minute to the speech that Chief Kim Baird made in the provincial legislature, which is titled "Making History, Tsawwassen First Nation, First Urban Treaty in Modern-Day British Columbia". I am going to quote from a couple of different parts in her speech because Chief Kim Baird's words are very powerful. They are the words that should be read into the record in this House because they are the words that come from the people.

She was addressing the legislature. The rules are quite different in the provincial legislature. She was able to be in the legislature and address the members of that House. It is unfortunate that our rules

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here do not allow that. That is why it is important that I read some of her words into the record. She said:

For the Tsawwassen people, this is a time of great hope and optimism—a challenging, yet exciting time. It is a time for revival and renewal. It is a time when we will take back our rightful place as a community, equal to others, through our treaty.

I say "take back our rightful place" because we have a long and proud history that predates the birth of this province. For thousands of years, we used and occupied a large territory that was abundant in fish, shellfish, wildlife and other resources

I do not have time to read the entire speech so I am going to skip through it. Further on, she talked about some of the challenges her people had to face before they got to this historic moment of signing the treaty. She said:

We can't underestimate the impact European contact has had on our communities. Over the past century our lives were much diminished by newcomers who first took our labour for furs and fish, but then later took our lands and resources, and considered us a nuisance when our labour was no longer desired. Residential schools forever changed the face of our communities due to the apprehension of our children and discouragement of our culture and language. These impacts will face us for many more generations and as a mother of two small children, I cannot tell you how distressed I feel when I think of what happened to our ancestors.

One of the things that she talked about in this speech is the language. In these agreements there is a provision for when the Tsawwassen people want to have documents in the Hun'qum'i'num language. That is a very positive step because that is one effort in terms of revitalizing and keeping the language healthy. She went on to say:

...tools of land title and other rights of newcomers were mapped over our territories—effectively erasing our presence and marginalizing us to the fringes of our territory, and broader society.

She went on to say:

Critics choose to ignore Tsawwassen's history of being victims of industrial and urban development to the benefit of everyone but us. The naysayers do not seem to care that they are calling for the continued exclusion of Tsawwassen from opportunities everyone else has enjoyed.

In her conclusion, she said:

Our treaty is the right fit for our nation. More land, cash and resources provide us the opportunity to create a healthy and viable community, free from the constraints of the Indian Act. We now have the tools to operate as a self-governing nation, for the first time in 131 years since the first Indian Act was introduced.

The Tsawwassen treaty, clause by clause, emphasizes self-reliance, personal responsibility and modern education. It allows us to pursue meaningful employment from the resources of our own territory for our own people. Or in other words, a quality of life comparable to other British Columbians.

Surely, that is a goal we would wish for our own children and grandchildren, and it is certainly a goal that should be honoured for the Tsawwassen people.

This agreement has not been without challenges. The leader of the opposition in British Columbia, Carole James, addressed part of that in her speech in the legislature. I want to quote from her speech because this is an important context, as well. She said:

Another challenging issue that we hear a great deal about is the issue of overlap. All B.C. first nations have competing claims to lands in their traditional territories. One first nation might have used a river valley for one purpose; another may have used it for entirely different ends. One may have hunted it; one may have fished its waters. To successfully conclude treaties, both nations' interests must be addressed.

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● (1715)

There's nothing new in any of this. All treaties deal with this issue, as did the Yukon land claims settlement, as did the Nisga'a. In fact, the Tsawwassen treaty section on overlapping claims is the same as the text of the Nisga'a agreement. It's interesting to look at the history of other areas that have dealt with first nations claims. In the Yukon, first nations had to resolve their overlapping claims before signing treaties.

In British Columbia that hasn't been resolved, and here's an area where I think improvement could be looked at. This is a situation in which the B.C. Treaty Commission could actually play a much larger role.

When the Treaty Commission was established in 1992, many hoped that it would extend its facilitation activity into the area of mediation. Many governments resisted. However, I think the issue of overlap and overlap areas is a perfect subject for active mediation by the Treaty Commission.

In this particular treaty there are some challenges, and I would say that there are some unresolved issues. In my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan, the Cowichan people, Coast Salish people have had thousands of years of traditional use of some of this territory, the Penelakut people who have been relocated to Kuper Island, the Sencoten, the group from the Saanich Peninsula; there are overlaps with different uses. There certainly does need to be more work done in order to adequately resolve these issues.

In fact, the Auditor General herself pointed that out. In chapter 7 of her 2006 report, on the B.C. treaty process, she talked about the overlaps, but there were a number of other issues that were identified in this report that are very important to talk about in the context of treaties.

The Tsawwassen agreement is a celebration for the Tsawwassen people, but there are many other nations in British Columbia that are not remotely close to this step. In particular, before I talk about the Auditor General's report, I want to talk about the unity protocol.

There are 60 bands that have signed a unity protocol in British Columbia because of the lack of progress on treaties. I am going to quote from a press release of August 2, 2007 from the *Globe and Mail* regarding what they want:

Specifically, they want governments to end their insistence that all treaties must include the ceding of further aboriginal rights and land claims, an agreement to pay government taxes and a switch of native land ownership to the provincial system of fee simple.

They go on to talk about the fact that this lengthy period of treaty negotiation is resulting in lands being developed from underneath first nations while these negotiations go on and on.

The unity protocol itself highlights six key issues and the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group's Robert Morales has played a key role in this. The Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group covers the nations from my riding. It includes certainty, constitutional status of treaty lands, governance, co-management throughout traditional territories, fiscal relations, taxation and fisheries.

These are critical issues. Chief Kim Baird said that the Tsawwassen treaty cannot be used as a template, as a cookie cutter for other nations. Other nations have the right to their own self-determination and the right to negotiate their own treaties.

In that context, the Auditor General identified a couple of key problems. One of them was the differing views. She said:

Successful negotiations require that the participants share a common vision of their relationship and of the future. Our two audits found that the participants have differing views on the nature of the treaties being negotiated. For example, the two

governments base their participation in the treaty process on their own policies, and do not recognize the Aboriginal rights and title claimed by First Nations. Many First Nations base their participation in the process on the assertion that they have Aboriginal rights under Canada's Constitution and that these rights should be acknowledged before negotiations begin.

Many times the parties to the negotiations are starting from a place that is very far apart. It is little wonder that there is such little progress.

In the same report the Auditor General talked about what was found:

While some treaties are expected to be signed in the near future, most negotiations are either inactive or are making limited progress. Moreover, about 40 percent of First Nations (Indian Act bands) are not participating in the treaty process, and there is a growing number of activities outside the process that are being used to deal with questions related to Aboriginal rights and title.

Although the policy process has been able to respond to some issues raised during negotiations, several other issues remain to be addressed. For example, due to changes in the legal environment, dealing with overlapping claims may make concluding treaties even more complex.

● (1720)

In this kind of context what we see is a long process that is extremely expensive, that has first nations borrowing against their final settlements. What is happening is that they are racking up a debt of thousands and thousands of dollars in order to get to a treaty, and they are really caught in a bind because if they should withdraw from that treaty process, the money that they borrowed becomes due and payable. Therefore, they are forced to stay within a treaty process that may not be working for them and they really do not have any other option.

For nations that have chosen not to get involved in the treaty process, they have a couple of options. They can do nothing and continue to see their lands developed from underneath them and continue not to have access to the resources, and not to develop their economies, or they can litigate, which is hugely expensive and can take years. Often, by the time a decision comes out, again they are in the same situation of having their lands developed from underneath them, or they can enter this treaty process. Either way, it does appear that they are caught between a rock and a hard place.

In conclusion, I believe that it is important that we do celebrate the Tsawwassen people getting the treaty that they have negotiated and voted for. I believe it is important that we celebrate the fact that they will have some self-determination, that they will have access to resources, that we can expect to see their economy grow, and that we can expect to see their children graduate from high school.

It is a long term plan. I believe that band members will be engaged in that process, from everything I have seen, but we need to encourage this government and the provincial government in British Columbia to come to the table in a meaningful way and settle treaties that are going to work for the nation that is involved.

Government Orders

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan standing up in this regard. She has sat on the aboriginal affairs committee for a number of years, including the short tenure that I have been there over the last two years. Those two years have been very strong and progressive ones, I believe, for aboriginal people, as we have accomplished many great things at our committee.

I look forward to our committee being able to have the opportunity to go through this important agreement for the Tsawwassen First Nation. I would like to ask her a question in relation to the overall treaty process in British Columbia.

Clearly, this is a process that, unfortunately, had a number of years go by with little accomplishment. However, more recently, we are seeing some progress. I would like to ask her whether she feels that this Tsawwassen final agreement will be representative of potential further agreements being negotiated?

• (1725)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I would like to be able to say that the Tsawwassen agreement will mean that other agreements will follow along. Unfortunately, I do not think that is true. Chief Kim Baird herself said that the treaty that was negotiated on behalf of her people was right for her people. It was the right fit. It was the right treaty, in the right place, at the right time.

As I said regarding the unity protocol and the 60 bands that have signed on to the unity protocol, there are many bands in British Columbia that are simply not in that same place.

In fact, with the unity protocol, what they are asking the federal and provincial governments to do is come and work with them at a common table, so that the 60 bands that have signed on to this protocol can be dealt with and some ground rules can be set around negotiations so that they are not being one-upped.

I would encourage the government, with the success on this particular treaty, to go back to the bands that have signed on to the unity protocol and work with them, so that perhaps we can see success in some of these other very complicated treaty areas.

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan to elaborate on a point that she made. She talked about the long process that was engaged in to get to this point, that the Tsawwassen First Nation entered into the tripartite B.C. Treaty Commission process in 1993 to negotiate a treaty. Would the hon. member elaborate on this historical piece in which this community has been long seeking a land base of its own?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, as the member for Churchill is very well aware and has spoken about quite passionately, the road to treaties is a long and onerous one. Once treaties are in place, often the honour of the Crown is not very honourable. The terms and conditions of treaties are often disregarded and first nations land is stolen out from under them.

In the case of Tsawwassen, as I said, although it got into the tripartite process in 1993, it had actually been trying to get a settlement since 1865. There have been generations of people working toward a fair, just and reasonable settlement.

The whole 1993 process resulted because of the lack of movement in British Columbia. Sadly, for many years it was the British Columbia government itself that refused to come to the table, but finally when the New Democrats became government in British Columbia, that process moved and they developed the B.C. Treaty Commission process. That was the initial impetus to see some movement in treaties in British Columbia.

I am sure the House is well aware that there are a number of other treaties that we hope to see come through the House over the next while.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments. The hon. member for Delta—Richmond East for a short question.

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the previous member mentioned a land base. I should remind her that the existing land base for the Tsawwassen is roughly 600 acres. The band actually sold off about 70 acres on its own volition in 1950 and after that it developed a stake in properties on long term leases. A land base has not been an issue.

I appreciate the earnestness of the member's comments and it is okay to justify the need for a treaty, but the issue today is to evaluate this particular treaty that is before us. It is a large document. There are over 460 pages in two volumes and there are seven side agreements. She said very little about that. There are a number of issues that I am curious about. Let me ask her two questions.

One has to do with the issue of competing claims. In clause 49, chapter 2, it provides:

If Canada or British Columbia enters into a treaty or a land claims agreement...and that treaty or land claims agreement adversely affects the Section 35 Rights of Tsawwassen First Nation...Canada or British Columbia,...will provide...additional or replacement rights or other appropriate remedies;—

Does she have any idea of the expense and foofaraw that is going to be involved with that kind of an open-ended process? The other question is, does she think—

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. I am very sorry, but the hon. member does not have time for another question. I had been very precise that I wanted a short question. The clock has now run out. I will pretend that I am not seeing the clock and ask the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan to give a short reply.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the issue around competing claims is an enormous one that the B.C. Treaty Commission and the Auditor General have identified as a problem. In the agreement there is a provision where there are overlapping claims. I wish I had a crystal ball to forecast what expenses would be, but there is a provision to deal with it in here and we will have to let this agreement play itself out.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

Private Members' Business

When the House returns to the study of Bill C-34, there will be three minutes left for the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan and I would hope that the Speaker at that time would recognize again the hon. member for Delta—Richmond East so that he could ask his second question.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

KOMAGATA MARU INCIDENT

The House resumed from April 2 consideration of the motion.

Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Motion M-469 introduced by my Liberal colleague, which calls on the Conservative government to officially apologize to the Indo-Canadian community and to the individuals impacted in the 1914 *Komagata Maru* incident, in which passengers were prevented from landing in Canada.

Although some progress has been made, most notably the acknowledgement of this incident by the Prime Minister, the federal government still has not made an official apology. Canada should therefore apologize officially in order to close this sad chapter in Canadian history. In so doing, Canada would recognize the important contribution Indians have made to society in Canada and Quebec. In addition to official recognition, Canada could consider other means of acknowledging this incident, such as a commemorative monument or a museum, because of the tragic outcome.

The federal government has officially apologized for the head tax imposed on Chinese immigrants. Since the *Komagata Maru* incident is similar, we believe that the government can take the same approach.

Considered in the light of our modern values, the Canadian government's actions in 1914 were reprehensible. For that reason, the Bloc Québécois believes that an apology is warranted. However, other equally tragic events require official apologies. I will mention these events at the end of my speech, but I am thinking in particular of the native residential schools and the 1918 suppression of anti-conscription demonstrators. The Bloc Québécois has always called on the government to officially apologize for these two events.

Let us place this particular event in its historical context. First, in 1908, Canada passed a law that seriously restricted immigration from certain parts of the world. The Canadian government had ordered that immigrants who did not come to Canada by continuous journey—meaning that they did not come directly to Canada from their country of origin—were prohibited from immigrating to Canada. The law also prohibited Asian immigrants from entering Canada unless they were carrying at least \$200.

Before the *Komagata Maru*, there was an incident with the *Panama Maru* on October 17, 1913. This Japanese ship, with 56 Indians aboard, docked in British Columbia. Seventeen of the Indians were already Canadian residents, but the other 39 Indians were detained in a Canadian immigration hall. This case was brought before the Supreme Court of British Columbia, and a decision was rendered on October 27, 1913. The judgment declared the orders in

council relating to the requirement for the possession of \$200 invalid because they did not conform to the precise wording of the Immigration Act. The 39 Indian passengers were released from the immigration hall and allowed entry into Canada.

Following this incident, the federal government ensured that the orders in council conformed to the Immigration Act. The government was then able to limit immigration from Asian countries. In short, the government found a legal way to uphold the orders in council on continuous journey and the requirement for the possession of \$200 on arrival.

This was the context in which the *Komagata Maru* incident took place. On May 23, 1914, the passenger ship *Komagata Maru* arrived in Canadian waters on the British Columbia coast. It was carrying approximately 376 immigrants of Indian origin. Of these 376 immigrants, 340 were Sikh, 12 were Hindu, and 24 were Muslim. The *Komagata Maru* did not make a continuous journey to Canada. It was chartered out of Hong Kong and stopped in Shanghai, Moji, and Yokohama. Because it did not make a continuous journey to Canada, it was in violation of the existing Immigration Act. Twenty-two of the passengers were considered to be Canadian residents and were allowed to disembark. The remaining passengers had to remain on the ship.

The Conservative government at the time cited legal grounds to deny permission to land to the remainder of the passengers: they had not come by continuous journey from India; they did not possess the specified minimum amount of money—\$200; and they were subject to recent immigration regulations prohibiting the landing of labourers at Pacific ports of entry. Although the Conservative government prohibited them from entering Canada, it did not deport them.

• (1735)

In other words, the status of migrant was not defined. A few weeks later, the case of a single passenger was chosen to serve as a test case for all other passengers on board. Ultimately, on July 6, 1914, five judges of the British Columbia Court of Appeal unanimously found that the immigration regulations were legal and valid and, in effect, maintained an earlier deportation order.

After this decision, and after almost three weeks to negotiate the ship's departure, the *Komagata Maru* was escorted into international waters by a Canadian warship on July 23, 1914.

In September of that year, the vessel delivered the passengers to Budge Budge, near Calcutta, India, where British officials intended to transport the passengers to the Punjab. The passengers did not want to go to the Punjab region, and a riot ensued; 29 passengers were shot by British soldiers, and 20 of these passengers died. That is what is so tragic about this story.

In the past 50 years, the Indian community has been very active in Canada. In 1951, there were about 2,000 people of Indian origin in Canada. Now, there are some 750,000. According to the 2001 census, there were more than 34,000 people of Indian origin in Quebec, most of them—94%—in the greater Montreal area.

Private Members' Business

This event is important to the Indian community in Canada. Members of the community now feel that the incident showed that they were second-class Commonwealth citizens. In some families, the story has been passed down from generation to generation, while others heard about it once they came to live in Canada.

Indo-Canadians believe that with an official apology, Canada could right a historic wrong and emphasize the importance of their community's contribution to Canada and Quebec. An official apology would be one way to proclaim that such incidents must never happen again. Things have certainly improved. The Canadian government created the community historical recognition program on June 22, 2006, but neither the Prime Minister nor the government has apologized for this incident. Although an apology has a merely symbolic value, it would be greatly appreciated by the Indian community in Canada.

There have been other times when the government offered an apology, as in the case of the Chinese, for example, as I mentioned earlier. The federal government recently offered a formal apology to the Chinese community for the head tax, because at the beginning of the last century, Chinese immigrants were employed in western Canada, to a large extent in mining, but especially in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. These immigrants were not necessarily voluntary immigrants, but were cheap labour brought over from Asia. The government apologized for this situation. Thus, we do have a precedent for situations like this. The government could offer an apology to the Indo-Canadian community.

Other apologies are also in order, and the Bloc Québécois recognizes that the government should apologize for the *Komagata Maru* incident. That is why we support Motion M-469, which seeks to offer a formal apology to the immigrants who tried to enter Canada.

We are delighted to see this willingness to address the worst examples of human rights violations in Canadian history, and to clean up Canada's shameful past.

There are other examples of incidents for which Canada should apologize. In 1918, under a Conservative government, the same government responsible for the *Komagata Maru* incident, some Canadian soldiers opened fire on a crowd that was protesting conscription. Four people were killed and many were injured. After reviewing the events, the coroner's inquest concluded that the individuals shot by the soldiers on this occasion were innocent victims in no way involved in the riot. It is therefore the government's duty to pay fair and reasonable compensation to the victims' families, but this has yet to be done.

To commemorate this tragic event, a work of art was erected at the very location where these tragic events took place in Quebec City's lower town.

Another example is residential schools. As everyone knows, nearly 150,000 aboriginals suffered through the hell of residential schools.

• (1740)

Many victims have sadly already passed away but an estimated 87,000 survivors are left. It would also be nice if the House of Commons—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member. I did warn him about the time.

[English]

The hon. member for Vaughan.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday, April 2, my colleague, the member for Brampton—Springdale, tabled a motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should officially apologize to the Indo-Canadian community and to the individuals impacted in the 1914 *Komagata Maru* incident, in which passengers were prevented from landing in Canada.

Over the years, immigrants in our society have consistently been faced with many challenges and struggles that they have had to overcome. As elected representatives, it is critical that we acknowledge the hardships and obstacles that immigrants have encountered in their journey of hope for a brighter future in Canada.

Today I would like to speak about the great injustice that took place within our own nation in the year 1914. It is time that the government recognize and apologize for the incident of the *Komagata Maru*.

On May 23, 1914, the *Komagata Maru*, a passenger ship, arrived in Vancouver at the Burrard Inlet with 376 passengers from India. On board were 340 Sikhs, 12 Hindus and 24 Muslims. Many of them had fought alongside the British in wars and gave their lives to the Commonwealth. They were British citizens coming to a Commonwealth country, yet upon their arrival, they were shocked to learn that they would be denied the opportunity to disembark and enter Canada. The grounds for their rejection were part of the exclusionary, discriminatory and racist laws passed in the 1900s and designed to select immigrants based on race and country of origin.

When the passenger ship arrived in Vancouver, passengers of the *Komagata Maru* were not permitted to leave the ship. According to the legislation of the day, to be admitted into Canada, immigrants were required to have \$200 and arrive by continuous journey from their country of birth. It was no secret that the regulation, although it did not have any mention of race or nationality, was intended to target individuals immigrating from India or China.

As a result, the passengers of the *Komagata Maru* were forced to spend two months under very poor conditions. They experienced famine, starvation and many of them fell victim to disease. At that time, the Indo-Canadian community, in particular those from the Khalsa Diwan Society, struggled to assist them by negotiating on their behalf their stay in Canada.

Sadly, despite determined efforts and struggles, at the end of the two months only 24 of the 376 passengers were given permission to stay in Canada. The rest were ordered deported. On July 23, 1914, supporters and friends of the passengers on the *Komagata Maru* watched the great injustice occur as the Canadian navy used a ship for aggression for the first time. The Canadian government of the day brought in the cruiser HMCS *Rainbow*. It aimed its guns at the *Komagata Maru* and escorted it out of Canadian waters.

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After this terrible journey that began on April 4, 1914, and that ended on September 29, 1914, the *Komagata Maru* returned to Calcutta, India. Upon its return, the passengers experienced further anguish and distress. Some of them were arrested and others were killed.

Here we are 94 years later and the tragedy of the *Komagata Maru* remains an open and dark chapter in our nation's history.

As other members of the House have rightly indicated, the Canadian government must apologize to both the Indo-Canadian community and any other individuals who were affected by this tragic event, which has brought much sadness to many and left a black mark in our nation's history.

• (1745)

Despite all the efforts, including those of the Indo-Canadian community, other municipal, provincial and federal politicians, a formal apology has yet to be expressed.

It is important that we are reminded of the injustices of the past, injustices like the *Komagata Maru* incident, the time from 1885 to 1923, when there was a head tax for the Chinese, the period of 1923 to 1945, where strict immigration rules prohibited the Jews from entering our country or the internment of Italian Canadians. These moments are not proud moments in the history of our nation, and it is important that we recognize that fact.

We acknowledge that this issue is being raised nearly a century after its occurrence, but it must be addressed. We need to communicate compassion, understanding and hope to all those who still, 90 years later, are touched by this tragedy.

As a nation, we must refrain from the politics of exclusion, discrimination or racism. We must do now what should have been done years ago. We need to apologize for the *Komagata Maru* incident.

The community and all those affected by this tragedy patiently await a formal apology from the government. The painful memories still live on in their minds and in their hearts. Their healing process must now begin. While it should never be forgotten, we must close this sad chapter of Canadian history.

Today, I ask that the Prime Minister and the Conservative government express through words and deeds their apology for a wrong of the past. Let us be driven by the sound values of fairness, justice, respect, compassion and understanding. Let us never forget to be vigilant and safeguard the fundamental principles of a democracy and that of an open society, which prides itself on treating people with respect and dignity.

Today I would urge all the members sitting on this side and the other side to support the motion put forth by the member for Brampton—Springdale, who has for many years championed this important cause with persistence and determination.

Canada is recognized by many as a country of opportunity, of fairness, of hope, of justice. Canada's national wealth, prosperity, cultural, social riches have been fueled by the imagination, work and ingenuity of new Canadians. We are a nation in which, despite events like the *Komagata Maru*, individuals from the Indo-Canadian

community have been able to succeed, to achieve, to prosper, to contribute to the building of a better and brighter future of our nation.

As responsible and committed individuals, we must accept our errors. We must acknowledge the challenges and the struggles of others, and we must humbly apologize.

• (1750)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on the motion by the member for Brampton—Springdale:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should officially apologize to the Indo-Canadian community and to the individuals impacted in the 1914 *Komagata Maru* incident, in which passengers were prevented from landing in Canada.

New Democrats will be supporting the motion because we believe it is the right thing to do and because we believe it is long overdue.

Many folks in this corner of the House would have liked the opportunity to speak to the motion today. I know that I speak for my colleagues from Surrey North, Burnaby—New Westminster, New Westminster—Coquitlam, Vancouver East, and Nanaimo—Cowichan.

All of us have a longstanding interest in this issue, the *Komagata Maru* incident, and have worked on this issue for many years with people from our communities. We have often taken initiatives and we have called for action on this important apology many times over.

It is important that we acknowledge the injustices committed by Canada in the past. We need to remember and we need to apologize as we commit to working to ensure that we never again make the same mistakes. The *Komagata Maru* exists as a dark moment in Canadian history, a dark moment that we vow we should never repeat.

We have heard the story many times and it is a story that we must continue to tell. Back on May 23, 1914, the *Komagata Maru* arrived at English Bay in Vancouver. On board were 376 passengers from India: 340 Sikhs, 12 Hindus and 24 Muslims. The *Komagata Maru* had been chartered for the voyage to Canada. It was actually a coal freighter that had been modified to accommodate passengers.

The purpose of the voyage was political in nature. The intent was to test the colour bar that was part of Canada's immigration policy of the day. The organizer of the trip, Gurdit Singh, was intent on showing the injustice of that policy. All of the people on board were citizens of the British Empire, as were Canadians of that day.

Canada's policy at the time was designed to prevent Asian immigration. The policy stated that those who did not arrive on a continuous journey and who had less than \$200 were denied entry to Canada. It is pretty clear that such a non-stop journey was virtually impossible from India and most of Asia at that time. Also, \$200 was a huge amount of money by the standards of the time.

Debate in the House of Commons made it clear that the intent was explicitly racist. We have heard other speakers comment on it and quote directly from that debate.

It was also clear that the government intended to make it even more difficult to have a continuous voyage from India to Canada. It imposed on Canadian Pacific, its steamship line, to change the patterns of its voyages to make that impossible.

When the *Komagata Maru* arrived and the passengers were forbidden from disembarking, it was held for two months while court challenges were heard. In the end, the law was upheld, although 24 of the passengers were allowed to land.

On July 23, 1914, the *Komagata Maru* was forced to leave Vancouver harbour by the warship HMCS *Rainbow*. It arrived back in Calcutta, India, in September 1914, but the story continues to be one of tragedy. The British colonial authorities would not allow the passengers to disembark. In fact, they wanted to force them onto a special train going directly to Punjab. A riot ensued and 20 of the passengers were killed at that time.

Thus, the tragedy of the *Komagata Maru* was not just a story that happened on this side of the Pacific. It happened back in India as well.

At the time, there were Canadians who were prepared to extend a welcome to the passengers on the *Komagata Maru*. Members of the local Vancouver Sikh community, for instance, supported the legal challenges, held meetings at local gurdwaras and raised significant amounts of money. I think reports are that they raised \$20,000. Again, that was a huge sum of money at the time.

● (1755)

They also collected provisions for the passengers, who were forbidden from disembarking. The *Komagata Maru* situation invoked a very strong sense of unity in the Sikh community in Vancouver at the time, along with widespread involvement.

I must say I am thankful that such compassion existed in the community at the time. I am also thankful that some members of the community were prepared to challenge that unjust law in a very direct way.

It is clear from the accounts of what happened that two things occurred. There were people who were directly involved in seeking justice and overturning an unjust and racist policy. There also were people who were acting out of compassion for those being held on the *Komagata Maru*.

The local media of the day were not so kind. They often whipped up racist sentiments against those who were on the *Komagata Maru* and they sensationalized the situation. The sentiments the media evoked inflamed less than honourable actions and statements by others in the community.

Most of us here in the House of Commons, and in fact most Canadians, are descended from immigrants, other than those who are from first nations. Our families came to Canada with high hopes for a better life. That was true of my family when they emigrated some time ago from Germany, Ireland and Scotland, but also more recently when family members came from Hungary.

That is one of the tragedies of the *Komagata Maru* incident: the tragedy of dashing the hopes of those people on board the *Komagata Maru*, who were never able to realize that dream. They were never

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able to make a contribution to the building of Canada and to the success of this country.

That is part of the reason why Canada must apologize to those who were on the *Komagata Maru* and to the Indo Canadian community. As a Canadian, I should offer a personal apology, and I do.

Part of my family lived in Canada at the time. While they lived in eastern Canada, I am sure they did nothing to see the law changed, to challenge the policies or to challenge those attitudes. I think we all have to bear responsibility for the actions of our democratically elected governments. I bear some of that responsibility in the inaction of my ancestors here in Canada.

New Democrats support this motion. We hope the government acts without further delay. However, I also have to say that discussion of this motion comes at a time when we are also discussing new changes to the Canadian immigration act.

Many people in Canada are concerned about the proposals from the government. They are concerned about the additional discretion that would be given to the minister. They are concerned about the change in the immigration law that would allow the requirement of processing of applications to be passed over. I think we have to always maintain our vigilance about the impact of changes to our immigration law.

Canada can be proud of its record on human rights. We are not perfect, and the *Komagata Maru* incident is just one example, but we have learned from our mistakes and we continue to learn from our mistakes. Sadly, we continue to make them with first nations women, temporary foreign workers, racial and ethnic minorities, and people caught up in national security concerns. Transsexual and transgender people still know prejudice and discrimination in Canada and are still denied full human rights and full participation in our society.

We should speak humbly when we call for action on human rights concerns. We should speak strongly and clearly but with humility and grace. We should never back away from seeing justice for those who are oppressed, but we should always do so in the knowledge of our own history and our own failings. We should always acknowledge our failings and pledge that they never be repeated.

Just the other day in the *Globe and Mail*, Gurcharan Singh Gill, who is a descendant of one of the individuals who was on the *Komagata Maru*, Daljit Singh, spoke about his hopes in this whole regard. There is only a handful of people in Canada who are descended from *Komagata Maru* passengers and Mr. Gill is one of them. He said from his home in Surrey, British Columbia, that if the government does it "with a full heart, it is all right".

It is indeed right to offer this apology and it would be right to do it with a full heart.

● (1800)

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Fleetwood—Port Kells to participate in the debate on Motion No. 469.

Private Members' Business

Although the member for Brampton—Springdale is now aggressively working to have her motion passed, during her first term she was part of a Liberal government that refused to apologize for the *Komagata Maru* tragedy. Now, along with a couple of other MPs, including one from the NDP, she seems to have suddenly woken up, and they are racing before one another to take credit after our Prime Minister had already announced in August 2006 that this government would consult with the community on redressing this issue.

The current Prime Minister is the first prime minister to acknowledge the *Komagata Maru* tragedy. For years, Liberal leaders have rejected our calls for justice and fair treatment.

The issue of a *Komagata Maru* apology was first brought to the floor of the House in October 1997 and many times after by then MP Gurmant Grewal. He also tabled a petition in 2002 asking for the government to apologize. The petition was signed by thousands at the Gadri Babiyian Da Mela and organized by Sahib Thind, president of the Professor Mohan Singh Memorial Foundation.

I commend the Conservative government and our Prime Minister, who has been working on redressing *Komagata Maru* since 2006. Last weekend in Surrey, B.C., the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity laid out the policy of our government when he said:

Our government is working toward an official apology for the Komagata Maru incident. [The apology] will flow directly from the Prime Minister's historic recognition of the tragic nature of the Komagata Maru incident, as well as the spirit of the Historical Recognition Programs, whose goal is to ensure that immigration restrictions are properly recognized and commemorated.

This government has already kept its promise and has apologized to the Chinese Canadian community for the discriminatory head tax.

Canada's history is filled with tales of racism. No one is proud of the expulsion of the Acadians, residential schools for aboriginal children, the wartime internment of Japanese Canadians, or the turning away of the *Komagata Maru*.

On May 23, 1914, the *Komagata Maru* arrived in Vancouver harbour with 376 passengers who were British subjects from India. They were not allowed to land on Canadian soil because they did not comply with the continuous journey requirement.

They were marooned on board the ship in the harbour for two months, in virtually a floating prison. The passengers were denied their legal rights and access to justice. They were denied basic necessities like food, water and medicines. This was inhuman treatment. Excessive force was finally used to evict them from Canadian waters.

Then, after the departure, Canadian authorities conspired with the British government of India. Twenty-six returning passengers were shot dead upon return to India. Twenty remained missing and the remaining were jailed and their properties confiscated.

The *Komagata Maru* incident is one of the most poignant moments in Canadian history and illustrates the extreme racism that once existed in Canada. Upon arriving in British Columbia, early East Indians encountered hate, ostracism and negative stereotyping that resulted in discriminatory immigration restrictions, social and economic deprivation, and political disenfranchisement.

Discrimination was legislated, legal and official. Injustices, humiliation, prejudice and exploitation were rampant. The *Komagata Maru* incident was not an error but rather an intended, deliberate action of the divisive, exclusionist and racist policies of the provincial and federal governments of the day.

These policies included: a head tax on Chinese immigrants; keeping families separated; and threats to expel legitimate Canadian Sikh immigrants to the British Honduras. As well, the requirement to possess unusually high amounts of cash as a precondition for the South Asians to arrive in Canada was nothing short of a head tax.

• (1805)

The normal fee for the European immigrants was \$50, and they were offered free land and travel subsidies to immigrate to Canada, while south Asians were required to have \$200. Denying the right to vote stopped south Asians from serving on juries, school boards or in the military. They were denied access to provincial and federal jobs including informal denial of access to public facilities, housing, education, and professional jobs such as law, pharmacy positions and medicine as well as other high-status employment.

In 1913, 36 British subjects who came from India in a Japanese ship, the *Panama Maru*, were refused admission by the immigration department. They challenged the two orders in council. The B.C. Supreme Court's Chief Justice Hunter accepted their contention and held both orders in council ultra vires of the Immigration Act. They won their case in court and their deportation was stopped.

The government, determined not to give in, redrafted the orders to get around the chief justice's opinion and yet another order in council was introduced which made it illegal for artisans or labourers to enter Canada. The total exclusion of Indians was achieved by passing a series of orders in council.

Historical wrongs can never be undone, but they need to be acknowledged, confessed and corrected. There can never be enough compensation or compassion expressed and there is no way, now, that complete justice can be served.

The consensus in the south Asian community is that a sincere official apology is sufficient and it is not demanding any compensation.

Redressing a historical wrong is difficult and controversial, but it is important to do the right thing to heal the wounds, restore community pride, and console the descendants of the victims. It will help in serving as a caution and preventing such incidents, actions and behaviour from happening in the future.

It will help in the healing process and clear the air. The oppressed remain oppressed until redressed.

With redress, future generations and new Canadians will be able to raise their head in pride as their dignity is restored. They will salute their forefathers, provide loyalty, dedication and commitment, and contribute and move forward as equal and patriotic citizens of Canada.

The painful memory of the *Komagata Maru* inspires us all to continue to build on our nation's reputation as a land that embraces tolerance above intolerance, diversity above discrimination, and openness above exclusion.

The *Komagata Maru* tragedy is a reminder of just how far we have come as a society since that incident. We are a stronger and better country than we were 94 years ago. We are better and stronger precisely because of the contribution of all those who have crossed oceans to share this land.

Today, there are more than one million people of Indian descent living in Canada. They have worked hard and prospered, and Canada has prospered because of them. Our society is richer and more inclusive today because of the different waves of new immigrants.

Successive governments have failed to offer redress for the *Komagata Maru* for nearly a century. It is this Conservative government that has stood and addressed this issue. The Prime Minister has acknowledged the *Komagata Maru* incident. He announced that the government would consult with the community to re-address the issue, and he has kept his promise. Last month, at the Vaisakhi celebration hosted by me on Parliament Hill, the Prime Minister commended the contribution of the Sikhs to Canada. He said, "As Canadians we believe we learn from history, but we are not enslaved by it. We put old arguments behind us, in order to focus on the opportunities that lie before us and I especially know that Canadians of Sikh faith will always be leaders in moving our country forward unified, strong and free.

He was absolutely correct.

• (1810)

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a special privilege for me to add my comments to the debate on Motion No. 469. The motion calls for Canada to formally apologize for the *Komagata Maru* incident which took place many years ago.

The proposed apology is of great importance to many of my constituents in Abbotsford. As you know, Mr. Speaker, Abbotsford is home to some 26,000 residents of Indian origin, the majority of them from the province of Punjab in India. Most of them are recent immigrants or are the children and grandchildren of immigrants from India. They are hard-working, creative and entrepreneurial, and place a high value on caring for their extended families.

Canada has a well deserved reputation as being one of the world's most inclusive societies. We value our multicultural fabric and vigorously defend our personal freedoms, democratic traditions, basic human rights and, of course, the rule of law. However, this was not always so.

Today, our government is called upon to acknowledge and apologize for a grievous wrong inflicted on a group of would be immigrants, whose only desire was to build a better life for themselves and their families. I speak, of course, of the *Komagata*

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Maru incident. That tragic event represents one of the few dark chapters in Canada's otherwise illustrious history.

The *Komagata Maru* was a Japanese steamship that, in 1914, sailed from Hong Kong to Vancouver carrying 376 passengers from the Punjab in India. When the ship arrived in Canada, only 24 of the passengers were allowed to disembark. The remainder, although they were all British subjects, were not allowed to land because of Canada's racist exclusion laws and rules intended to keep Asians from entering Canada.

Although the decision to turn away this group of immigrants may have been technically legal at the time, in hindsight, most of us would agree that the decision was discriminatory. It was common knowledge that these exclusion laws were only applied to Indian immigrants.

However, that is not the end of the story. The refusal by Canadian authorities to allow the passengers of that ship to land had tragic consequences for the passengers. In fact, 20 of the passengers were killed and 9 injured during a riot that followed the ship's return to India.

Despite this tragic affair, what is remarkable is that hundreds of thousands of people from the Indian subcontinent have continued to make Canada their adoptive home. Today, Canada's Indo-Canadian community has grown to about three-quarters of a million people. They have been instrumental in helping us build a vibrant economy and an immensely tolerant society. They have become an important part of the multicultural mosaic that we as Canadians are so proud of today.

It has been said that those who ignore the lessons of history are bound to repeat them. Let this not be the experience of our great country. It is for that reason that I am pleased to say that our government is taking action to address this stain upon our national history. Last week, the hon. Jason Kenney, Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. The hon. member for Abbotsford, as gentle as he is, should not refer to other members of the House by name, except by their titles.

Mr. Ed Fast: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that correction.

The Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity announced that our government would issue a formal apology to at long last address a regrettable act that happened nearly 100 years ago.

This notice to deliver a formal apology represents the product of an ongoing process of dialogue with the Indo-Canadian community. In 2006 at the Gadri Babiyian Da Mela festival in Surrey, B.C. the Prime Minister acknowledged the lasting contribution that Indo-Canadians have made to our national prosperity and cultural diversity.

In that speech the Prime Minister acknowledged the *Komagata Maru* incident. He announced that our Conservative government would consult with the Indo-Canadian community on the best way to commemorate the sad chapter in our history. Shortly thereafter my colleague, the member Kootenay—Columbia, led public and private consultations on the infamous *Komagata Maru* incident.

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These consultations included a total of 41 meetings with community leaders and organizations representing a broad cross-section of the Indo-Canadian community: professionals, community and business leaders, journalists and academics. Even descendants of passengers from the *Komagata Maru* were involved in the discussions.

The result was a strong call for the recognition of the hardships associated with the *Komagata Maru* incident. There was also a healthy discussion on the subject of what an appropriate official statement from the government might include. Most importantly, this process of dialogue led to one thing that has been lacking for almost 100 years: action to right a historical wrong.

At this point I need to ask a hard question: why did it take so long for us to get to where we are today?

The previous Liberal government had 13 long years to provide a meaningful response to the *Komagata Maru* incident, yet did absolutely nothing but raise false hopes and expectations, and disappoint the Indo-Canadian community. The hard truth is that on this vital issue of historical injustice the former Liberal government had the chance to do the right thing and simply did not get the job done.

I know that this could be said about many issues on which the previous government dithered, delayed and did nothing, yet on an issue of historical injustice, one would expect an expedited response. None was forthcoming from previous Liberal governments.

● (1815)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. It is with regret that I must interrupt the hon. member for Abbotsford. The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer is rising on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like you to pay particular attention to the comments made by the member opposite and verify their relevance in a debate that should not be politicized in such a crass manner, as in the case of the comments I believe I heard.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Abbotsford has three minutes left and I am sure he will get back to the point. I hope he will be accorded the same courtesy that other members were accorded, and who were not interrupted while they were speaking. The hon. member for Abbotsford has the floor.

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, this was certainly on the point. We are talking about a historical wrong and we are talking about Canada's historical record in not acting on this injustice.

The previous Liberal government did absolutely nothing to address this wrong. Our Conservative government is actually getting it done and the member on the Liberal side knows that. I would appreciate him refraining from interfering in the comments that I am making.

The Chinese Canadian community knows what it is like to watch the issue of a head tax fester while Liberal governments promised action and delivered absolutely nothing. In fact, previous Liberal governments even made the outrageous claim that they could not

issue formal apologies for fear of the federal government attracting possible legal liability. What a cop-out.

Let me just briefly read one quote. This is from the current Liberal member of Parliament for Richmond, British Columbia, who was the secretary of state at the time. This is a quote from the *National Post*: "He says an apology and compensation are never going to happen, at least as long as the Liberals are in power". Shame on them.

It was a Conservative government that finally provided meaningful redress to Japanese Canadians and to the Chinese on the Chinese head tax. It was a Conservative member of Parliament who pushed for a bill on behalf of Ukrainian Canadians to recognize the holodomor genocide, and it is our Conservative government that has taken the bull by the horns and is doing what should have been done many years ago. We are delivering a formal apology to the Indo-Canadian community for Canada's actions in turning away the Indian passengers of the *Komagata Maru*. I am proud to be part of such a government.

To summarize, I believe our Conservative government has shown true leadership in bringing this issue to a conclusion when previous governments were unable or unwilling to do so. It is my hope that the *Komagata Maru* tragedy will remain a reminder to Canadians of the fragile and tenuous nature of the rights and freedoms we enjoy, and so often take for granted. May we as a country be ever so vigilant to defend those values no matter what the cost.

● (1820)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. There being no one rising, I will now cede the floor to the mover of the motion, the hon. member for Brampton—Springdale, for her right of reply.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Indo-Canadian community, on behalf of immigrants and so many Canadians, who are seeking justice for a dark chapter in our nation's history.

Our great nation, Canada, is a symbol of hope for so many nations throughout the world. We are a nation which champions equality, opportunity, acceptance and respect. These are our hallmarks.

However, the journey for this success has not been easy. It is for this reason that I stand before the House today to once again ask for the government to apologize to the Indo-Canadian community and others impacted by the 1914 *Komagata Maru* injustice.

The *Komagata Maru* tragedy occurred at a time when our nation had immigration policies that were exclusionary, discriminatory and racist, policies that served to divide our nation and played on our nation's fears.

It is these policies that resulted in the Chinese having a head tax imposed, 900 Jewish people being denied entry into Canada and the internment of over 700 men from the Italian community in the second world war. It is these injustices that will forever serve as a reminder of the struggle and the challenges that so many immigrants have encountered in their hope for a better future in Canada.

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We fast forward to 2008 and realize that it is many of these Canadians from immigrant communities who have succeeded, who have achieved and who have prospered and contributed to building a better Canada.

Some people, including many MPs in the Conservative government, have actually questioned the need for an apology, 94 years after the *Komagata Maru* injustice. For them I say, an apology will never erase the mistakes of the past, neither will it remove the memories, the scars and the pain of those who have suffered. However, it is an opportunity for us as a nation, for Canadians to correct a wrong, to reflect and to learn from our mistakes.

An apology is not about scoring political points. It is about closing a dark chapter in our nation's history and marking a new era for our nation.

An apology will be an opportunity to educate the young children of our nation of the sacrifices, the struggles and the challenges in our journey to being a symbol of hope for so many others.

An apology will send a message to every child, to every man, to every woman and to every senior in our country that it does not matter if they are rich or if they are poor, if they are black or white, Italian, Indian or Chinese, but if they have a dream in our nation and they work hard, they too can make it a reality.

This is one of those issues that is above partisanship. Six weeks ago when I brought forward the motion, the government was opposed to the motion. Today, I hope, regardless of our political stripe, that as parliamentarians we will do the right thing when the motion comes to a vote, that we will unite and we will do the right thing for the children and for Canadians, that we will ensure that the government actually apologizes.

It is an issues of justice, of fairness, of equality, of compassion and of understanding. We, as a nation, have been built on the hard work, the vision and the passion of immigrants. Giving an apology takes reflection, it takes courage and it takes strength. We as a nation have that in us to do the right thing.

An apology will send a very strong message that we will never go back to the politics of discrimination, of racism and of exclusion, but that we will work together as all Canadians to have the faith, to have the belief and the confidence that we will continue to build a country which is a symbol of hope.

It is time to put closure for this dark chapter. It is time to begin the process of healing with three simple words: We are sorry.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Brown: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I request that we see the clock as 6:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

SAINT-HUBERT AIRPORT

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to take part in this adjournment debate following a question that I asked on February 4 about the development of the Saint-Hubert airport. This was an important project for the South Shore, one that would create many high-level jobs.

The plan, as of April 2007, was to redevelop the current landing strip in order to allow Pratt & Whitney to continue its flight testing with a new higher-performance engine and therefore new heavier planes.

Last year Pratt & Whitney Canada was at a crossroads: either the company would move its flight testing to Plattsburgh, where all the airport facilities already existed to accommodate its activities—runway length, hangar, etc.; or it would concentrate its flight testing in Saint-Hubert, where it would be nonetheless essential to proceed with major improvements—restoration, widening and lengthening of the main runway, upgrading the tarmac and building a hangar and terminal.

This first project died on the order paper, as we say here, due to a lack of financial help from the federal Conservative government. Pratt & Whitney Canada therefore decided to move some of their activities to Mirabel, depriving the South Shore of a project that would have created hundreds of high-level and very high-quality jobs.

Is Pratt & Whitney Canada to blame? Certainly not. Is DASH-L, the Saint-Hubert airport development agency and a non-profit organization, to blame? Certainly not. The Conservatives are to blame for this mess. The Conservative federal government is at fault.

The Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec is mostly to blame. He does not have the power to defend his budgets and he is incapable of standing up for good projects. He has not yet understood—there are many things he does not understand—that he must adapt his programs and budgets based on the projects submitted to him and not the other way around, that is, expect the projects to fit into his budgets. He asked that a major project such as the Saint-Hubert airport be scaled back to fit a budget of only \$30 million, as is the case presently.

Does the minister intend to publicly announce his plans as soon as possible and stop his schemes to minimize the scope of the project, which was initially quite extensive?

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The role of the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec is to help diversify regional economic activity. He has an annual budget of some \$200 million. It is true that, initially, funding of \$70 million had been requested; however, the revised amount is \$30 million, which is within his budget.

Nevertheless, we clearly see the Conservatives' inability to increase the budget for Quebec. This same minister lost \$100 million along the way in his budgets. In my opinion, he does not have the power at the cabinet table to defend his budgets and promote his projects. He is unable and powerless to do anything, like almost all federal MPs elected in Quebec, who are sent to Ottawa to be integrated into a big group, in this case the Conservative Party, which draws its support from Alberta. Hence, Quebec projects are the least of the Conservatives' concerns.

When ministers are weak, we have situations such as the Saint-Hubert airport. It does not work. The minister even sent his political staffer—

• (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of my colleague, the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, I would like to give a more detailed answer to the question recently raised by the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

In the past, the member has expressed concerns about Economic Development Canada helping pay for the costs of developing the airport area in Saint-Hubert, and in particular the restoration of the primary runway at the Saint-Hubert airport. It is public knowledge that the total cost of this project as it stands now, which I understand is not final, is \$86 million.

The Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec already made it clear that since his department has a budget of around \$200 million, the project costs estimated by airport authorities are well beyond the means of our agency.

Of course, as a responsible government that takes a role in economic development, we believe in intervening when there is a specific problem in a region or community.

The agency believes that the development of the Saint-Hubert airport area is still an asset to regional economic development. It demonstrated this in the past by funding three projects: a business plan for the construction and use of a terminal, a master development plan for the airport area and a set of specifications for the management and development of the airport, for a total amount in the area of \$300,000.

That is also why, considering the importance of the issue, Canada Economic Development agreed to act as a facilitator for the key players in this file. It is a matter of looking at the various options available to us. This role does not exclude financial contributions from Canada Economic Development, along with other partners.

The agency encourages the local authorities in their requests to the Government of Quebec and the Department of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, through the airports capital assistance program and the building Canada fund.

As a final point, it must be noted that any other requests will have to be thoroughly analyzed by Canada Economic Development.

I also want to take this opportunity to respond to the allegations the member made. She incorrectly stated that projects have to fit the budget and programs of Canada Economic Development. My colleague, the minister responsible for the agency, set up advisory committees all across Quebec to advise him about regional economic development initiatives and support measures for small business.

After holding consultations, the minister developed a strategic plan that includes a number of measures, which the agency has begun to make public.

With regard to the issue that concerns the member, Canada Economic Development can be part of the solution, but it cannot be the whole solution. The mission of Canada Economic Development focuses on regional economic development and support for small business. We cannot put all our eggs in one basket. Other regions of Quebec have major problems as well and need assistance from Canada Economic Development.

We are confident that there will be positive developments in the weeks to come.

• (1835)

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member who just spoke is behind the times. The latest version of what DASH-L is asking the government for is roughly \$30 million. They have indeed applied to other governments and other bodies.

We are not putting all our eggs in one basket. It is up to this federal government to take its responsibilities in its jurisdictions. The current application is for \$30 million.

I am surprised at the idea of an advisory committee. In Saint-Hubert, we saw the Conservative candidate for the riding of Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, who was still a political staffer at the time for the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec. He boasted about how he would resolve the problem in a snap. He organized an event to which he charged \$1,000 a head and invited regional leaders. Two weeks later, the same Conservative candidate organized a meeting—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec with his reply.

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Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert has often expressed her concern about Economic Development Canada's participation in financing costs associated with the development of the Saint-Hubert airport area, particularly with repairs to the main runway of the Saint-Hubert airport.

The project is expected to cost about \$86 million. The Economic Development Agency of Canada has a budget of about \$200 million, and the minister believes that the amount requested by the airport authority is very high.

Economic Development Canada has agreed to facilitate negotiations among the principal parties. This does not rule out the financial participation of Economic Development Canada or other federal department partners.

As with any other request, this one will be subject to thorough analysis according to the Economic Development Agency of Canada's eligibility criteria.

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, February 6, I rose in the House to ask a question about the process around the apology for residential schools. Today there was an announcement that there will be an apology on June 11. However, there are still a number of unanswered questions about the process for this apology.

Just to remind people who may be listening, the residential schools have a long and sorry history in this country. In fact, the first boarding school was actually opened in 1620 and closed in 1680. Then a series of schools opened. In 1979 there were still 15 residential schools open. This has been a long history in this country.

With regard to the apology, there is the case in Australia where the Australian government made a very heartfelt apology to Australia's indigenous peoples. The government talked about it being a time to come together to reconcile and together build a new future for that nation. That was for indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. In that apology the prime minister said, "This new partnership on closing the gap will set concrete targets for the future: within a decade to halve the widening gap in literacy, numeracy and employment outcomes and opportunities for indigenous Australians, within a decade to halve the appalling gap in infant mortality rates between indigenous and non-indigenous children and, within a generation, to close the equally appalling 17 year life gap between indigenous and non-indigenous in overall life expectancy". I do not have time to read the whole apology, but there was a great deal of substance in it.

The Indian Residential School Survivors Society of British Columbia wrote a letter on February 5, 2008 to the Prime Minister outlining some details it thought were important to include in an apology. It talked about how this was grounded. It said:

In 2005 and 2006, IRSSS undertook a series of focus group meetings designed to elicit Survivor input into a possible settlement process.

From the input that it gathered from the survivors, it talked about the need for a formal apology from the Prime Minister of Canada and stated:

...this need has been echoed many times over since that time by survivors and their families in every community we visit. While we recognize that the House of

Commons has unanimously apologized on its own behalf, this was not an official apology from the Government of Canada.

The residential school survivors of B.C. have some specific things they would like to see in that apology from the Prime Minister. One is that the apology should not only be in the House of Commons, but it should include some form of ceremony. They felt that the apology has to be seen as beyond the everyday political process. They think it should include all parties involved in residential schooling. There are a number of other things including it being made in the House of Commons which I believe the government has announced it will do.

I ask the parliamentary secretary, will some of the elements outlined in the request by the survivors be included in the apology? Will the Assembly of First Nations be included in drafting the apology that will come forward on June 11? Will this be a stand-alone apology in the House and not included with apologies to other groups? There has been some suggestion that there are a number of other apologies coming out for other groups.

• (1840)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the questions brought forward by the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

This week we have been very busy on a number of fronts dealing with important issues that face aboriginal people in this country. It has been a very busy week and I know that the member has taken part in much of the debate.

Today during question period I was very pleased to announce that the Prime Minister of Canada will issue a statement of apology on June 11, 2008 in the House of Commons. As I stated at that time, this will be a new chapter for Canada that all Canadians can be proud of.

Thousands of former students have been calling for a formal apology for a number of years. Our government shares the view that the apology is a crucial step in the journey toward healing and reconciliation.

In the 2007 Speech from the Throne, the government committed to making a statement of apology. On June 11, 2008, the Prime Minister will deliver on this commitment. We know that this apology will contribute to the reconciliation and renewed relationships with aboriginal people across Canada.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the announcement that an apology will be forthcoming on June 11. However, the questions that I asked were not answered in the parliamentary secretary's response, so I will ask them again.

Will this be a stand-alone apology in the House and not include apologies that are made to other groups that have been wronged in Canada? This is a significant event for first nations and the significance of it needs to be that very important stand-alone event.

Will some elements of the apology include the things that the survivors of residential schools have asked for? I have talked to many survivors and it is very important to them that the things they have asked for be included in the apology.

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Will the Assembly of First Nations also be included in developing the apology that will come forth on June 11?

Mr. Rod Bruinoog: Mr. Speaker, in relation to her questions, our government is very concerned about delivering an important and meaningful apology. That is why we initiated this process in the throne speech last year. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is about to launch and the Prime Minister has consulted with a number of groups, including the AFN, on this important matter.

We are very hopeful that this apology will be well received by those who were in the schools. This is an ongoing process. The member has referenced a few other elements that have been asked for in terms of culturally appropriate and meaningful admissions of the previous era. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission will also be seeking information on this matter in the months to come.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week I asked a question in the House about the Commonwealth scholarships and the answer I received was, to say the least, unsatisfactory. The reason I asked the question is that the government of Britain has indicated that Canadian students will no longer be eligible for the Commonwealth scholarships. It is cause for concern.

People know the government is an embarrassment in its conduct of foreign affairs. The Prime Minister says on occasion that Canada is back in international affairs. I think what he means is Canada is back of the pack in international affairs.

We have the current Minister of Foreign Affairs embarrassing Canada by calling for the ouster of the governor of Kandahar. At the same time that the chief of defence staff was saying he was doing a great job, we were interfering in the internal affairs of another country.

We have another embarrassment on the issue of capital punishment. The Conservative government is overturning a long held position of the Government of Canada that we would oppose capital punishment for Canadian citizens abroad.

The member for Calgary West once called Nelson Mandela a terrorist, and compared China to Nazi Germany.

We have Canada now apparently backing away from seeking membership in the UN Security Council because it is afraid it will not win the seat.

I could go on and on, but let me highlight the Commonwealth scholarships. These are prestigious scholarships that were set up for the Commonwealth nations by the government of Great Britain. Many great Canadian scholars have been the beneficiary of them, including the current Governor of the Bank of Canada, the Clerk of the Privy Council and many others.

We have had in Canada a great history of international champions: Nobel Peace Prize winner Lester Pearson; Mr. Trudeau; Mr. Clark; Mr. Mulroney and the work he did in South Africa; Jean Chrétien and the work he did for Africa; and the current member for LaSalle—Émard.

This decision by the government of Great Britain was called a slap in the face to Canada by Jennifer Humphries, the vice-president of membership and scholarships at the Canadian Bureau for International Education. It is of great concern. Jim Fox, the president, said, "We're hoping our government will put pressure on the U.K. to reinstate the program".

When I asked the question last week, the answer I got from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development was, "Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of the scholarships". That is unbelievable when we consider the importance that these scholarships have held for Canadian students.

I am pleased to see that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs is here. Canada has been given a slap in the face by our longest and closest ally, Great Britain, which said that Canadians will no longer be eligible for the Commonwealth scholarships.

My question is simple. Will Canada stand up for Canadian students? Will Canada stand up for Canadian inclusion in the Commonwealth scholarships?

• (1845)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is surprised and disappointed by the U.K.'s decision to end funding to Canadian scholars under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. There had been no consultation with Canadian officials prior to the decision being taken, and it is all the more disconcerting given that the decision coincides with the 50th anniversary of the Commonwealth scheme in 2009.

The establishment of the plan was, as members of the House may be interested to know, a Canadian initiative.

The Canada-U.K. relationship is a friendly and long-standing one, one that has resulted in positive benefits for both countries. The relationship has grown even stronger through cooperation in many areas, one of which is academic cooperation.

The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan has played a significant role in developing and fostering these relations as well as grooming Canada's past and current leaders. In fact, previous Commonwealth scholarship recipients, as the member said, include Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of Canada, Edward Greenspon, Editor in Chief of the Globe and Mail, as well as Kevin Lynch, Clerk of the Privy Council. Similarly, British students have benefited from their studies in Canada. The current British contingent of post-doctoral students in Canada under the plan represents a very impressive group of young scientists.

Even before the news hit the media, the government expressed its concerns to U.K. authorities over the decision. Officials of my department contacted the British High Commission in Ottawa to seek clarification and to express our concern with the decision taken. In a letter to U.K. Foreign Secretary David Miliband, Canada's High Commissioner to the U.K., James Wright, expressed our concern over the decision and requested that it be revisited. In delivering this letter, high commission officials also pursued the matter further with U.K. officials. Similar concerns have been raised by members of the British Parliament, and we await the outcome of these discussions.

I would also like to acknowledge the efforts being undertaken by the university communities, both in Canada and the U.K., to express their dissatisfaction and to call for a reversal of the decision. In a recent press release, the umbrella organization for U.K. universities, Universities UK, has called for the program to be restored.

Canada takes this decision very seriously and we will continue to pursue the matter with UK authorities.

• (1850)

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I am encouraged that the Government of Canada is at least now aware of this situation. I asked the question two days after it appeared in the *Globe and Mail* and the parliamentary secretary to the minister responsible for post-

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secondary education knew nothing about it. I appreciate the fact that the government is scrambling, recognizing that it was caught asleep at the wheel on this one.

I ask my colleague in all sincerity: How is it that Canada was shut out? Who was asleep at the wheel? Who neglected their responsibility on the Commonwealth scholarships?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, as I have told the hon. member, Canada takes this decision very seriously. That is why we are making all kinds of representations, and will continue to do that. As I told the member, our high commissioner has informed the U.K. foreign secretary and we have informed the British High Commission in Ottawa as well of the decision.

We will continue to work to ensure that this decision is revisited.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:51 p.m.)

Elections Canada

Mr. Poilievre 5911

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