



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 135 • NUMBER 033 • 1st SESSION • 36th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, November 19, 1997

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, November 19, 1997

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

The Speaker: As is our practice on Wednesday we will now sing *O Canada*, and we will be led by the hon. member for Halifax West.

[*Editor's Note: Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

CANADIAN BUSINESS MAP

Mr. Janko Perić (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadian businesses wishing to compete in the global market often face hurdles in obtaining timely information on financing, laws and natural and human resources in the provinces and municipalities in which they wish to invest.

To address these challenges, the Minister of Industry launched a powerful new business support web site called the Canadian Business Map. The Canadian Business Map provides links to over 3,500 municipal, provincial, national and international government and private sector sites.

The introduction of this new product by Industry Canada shows that this government recognizes the need to support Canadian business in this competitive and information age.

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EQUALITY

Mr. Derrek Konrad (Prince Albert, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, Liberals it seems believe in nothing and therefore can stand for absolutely everything.

Let us take equality. Liberals say that everyone in Canada is equal. Their vision of equality however is summed up in George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm* where he wrote that all animals are

created equal, only some are created more equal than others. This represents the Liberal vision for Canada.

Equality is linked with unity and I suggest that Liberals start thinking about the benefits of true equality.

Yesterday a majority of Canadian premiers added an official aboriginal position to the Calgary declaration on national unity.

Now if the Liberal government believes in equality and national unity, I invite it to take a stand here and ensure that grassroots aboriginals, not just the leadership, have a say in the Calgary declaration.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you: would not true equality be a tremendous unifying principle for such a great country?

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• (1405)

2310 ARMY CADET CORPS

Mr. Carmen Provenzano (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish today to congratulate Sault Ste. Marie's number 2310 Army Cadet Corps on its upcoming 50th anniversary.

Since its establishment in 1948, the corps has given over 5,000 young Saultites a chance to develop leadership skills and improve their physical fitness. It has also taught them civic responsibility and respect for Canada's rich military history.

Past and present instructors at the 2310 can take pride in the fact that they have helped prepare young Saultites for both the challenges and opportunities of adult life.

It is for this reason that former Sault army cadets have met with success in many walks of life. It is also for this reason that the lessons learned by our cadets truly become lifelong lessons.

I therefore invite all former cadets and their families to participate in the corps' 50th—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

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[*Translation*]

ASTER SCIENTIFIC STATION

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to inform you today that the Aster scientific research station in Saint-Louis-

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du-Ha-Ha in the Témiscouata region has received the Michael Smith award. This award goes to Canadian and Quebec organizations that have contributed to advancing, promoting and popularizing science.

The station's director, Guylaine Carrière, received the award at a prize giving ceremony yesterday at the Science World Hot Seat Theatre in Vancouver, British Columbia.

The achievements of the Aster scientific station are many. They include the establishment of the Inforoute Globe-Trotter summer camp in co-operation with the Conseil du loisir scientifique de l'est du Québec and Industry Canada. There is as well the Léonard workshop, which has enabled students in mechanical and electrical engineering at the University of Quebec at Rimouski to come in contact with an impressive range of engineering fields.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, my congratulations to the entire dynamic team of the Aster scientific station in the Témiscouata region.

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[English]

PETER RUDERMAN

Ms. Jean Augustine (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take this opportunity to recognize and congratulate Mr. Peter Ruderman, a constituent of Etobicoke—Lakeshore, for his tremendous volunteer efforts in assisting a state-run medical fund to make a successful and efficient transition to a private fund in Kazakhstan.

As a volunteer with the Canadian Executive Service Organization, Mr. Ruderman shared his expertise on the organization of the Canadian health care system through a series of lectures and discussions with health care professionals.

Mr. Ruderman's work is an example of the spirit of volunteerism. The people of Etobicoke—Lakeshore are proud of his efforts.

Congratulations, Mr. Ruderman.

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[Translation]

KATIMAVIK

Mr. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the goals of Katimavik are simple: to allow young people to develop through community service and to enable them to become aware of their environment by knowing and understanding Canada better.

In other words, Katimavik allows a young person to share the life of a Canadian family in a new community, to live differently, to

work for a non-profit organization and, generally, to improve his or her skills in the other language. A real school of life, I would say.

The student work exchanges we initiated in Brome—Missisquoi two years ago must continue and develop along the same lines.

A number of colleagues in this House want to be part of this student exchange program next summer. I head a committee working on this, and I invite suggestions from all my colleagues.

If Katimavik could become the vehicle of choice for this summertime exchange program, I think young people across Canada now and in the future will be thanking Senator Jacques Hébert.

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[English]

GOLDEN WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to extend on behalf of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition and all of the people of Canada greetings and best wishes to Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness Prince Philip on the occasion of their Golden Wedding Anniversary. They were married 50 years ago tomorrow.

It was the 11th year of the reign of King George VI. Britain was beset by economic problems. Monarchies and democracies in half of Europe had fallen under the hammer of Soviet communism. The empire, which Canada helped to defend through the dark days of the second world war, was coming apart.

At 11.15 on the morning of November 20, 1947, Princess Elizabeth, then 19 years old, set out from Buckingham Palace in the Irish state coach from Westminster Abbey where she was given in marriage by her father, the King, to 25-year old Royal Navy Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten.

The Leader of the Official Opposition, Winston Churchill, described the royal wedding of 1947 as "a flash of colour on the hard road we have to travel".

I join with all Canadians in marking this bright moment in a year marked by tragedy for our royal family. God save the Queen.

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● (1410)

ELGIN REGIMENT

Mr. Gar Knutson (Elgin—Middlesex—London, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand today in recognition of the Elgin regiment. This fine military unit has recently received the official designation as a combat engineering regiment of the 31st Canadian brigade group.

The Elgin regiment dates back to 1866 with the establishment of the 25th Elgin battalion of infantry. The regiment was called out on active service on several occasions and served during World Wars I and II, earning numerous battle honours. As an engineering

regiment, they now typically will participate in cleaning land mines and building bridges as well as many other ways of contributing to our peacekeeping mandate.

History has shown that the members of the Elgin regiment are used to change. Serving first as an infantry battalion and subsequently assuming armoured and reconnaissance status, the Elgin regiment now embarks upon a new chapter in its long and proud history as the 31st combat engineering regiment, the Elgins.

I want to congratulate the members of this regiment and say that I am proud to represent such a committed group of Canadian citizens.

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[Translation]

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the only Quebec MPs who are opposed to the proposal for independent arbitration to settle the matter of GST harmonization in Quebec and the \$2 billion in compensation are the Liberal MPs.

All of the Quebec Liberal MPs in this House have spoken out against the interests of their own constituents, against a non-partisan process to settle the Ottawa-Quebec dispute, against a unanimous request by the members of the socioeconomic summit in Quebec, and against a position expressed by all of the provincial premiers at St. Andrews.

All of the federal Liberal MPs for Quebec, who are again down on all fours, have again shown how justified Quebeckers are in their massive support of the only party devoted to defending their interests in Ottawa: the Bloc Quebecois.

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EGYPT

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like everyone else, I was horrified by the shocking images transmitted by Egyptian television after the carnage involving more than 60 innocent tourists in front of the temple of Hatshepsut in Luxor.

This massacre, for which the group al-Gamaa al-Islamiya has taken credit, demonstrates just how irresponsible its perpetrators are and, in the long run, accomplishes nothing except to push back peace efforts.

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I wish to express our sincere condolences to the relatives of the victims, and to assure the Egyptian people of our support in their fight against terrorism.

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[English]

APEC SUMMIT

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, today marks the beginning of the APEC summit in Vancouver. APEC represents the fastest growing market in the world with a combined GNP of over \$22 trillion.

Many of Canada's trade links to the Asian markets have been established by immigrants residing in B.C. Their efforts have helped B.C. emerge as the eighth tiger of the Pacific.

As host, Canada has the opportunity to showcase Vancouver, North America's third busiest port, which boasts a booming economy and state of the art communication and transportation links. However, if Canada is to truly prosper, this government must take the necessary steps to remain competitive.

This government must lower personal, corporate and payroll taxes which deter investment, growth and job creation. It must break down interprovincial trade barriers which stifle growth and inhibit international competitiveness.

There is no question that Canadians across the country will benefit from increased trade with Asia-Pacific. The question is, will the government be proactive, reduce taxes and prove to the world that Canada is indeed open for business.

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DRUG PRICES

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, skyrocketing drug costs are threatening the future of medicare and putting an impossible burden on Canadians who need medically necessary drugs.

Liberal policies are to blame. Instead of a responsible program, what do we have, a complete flip-flop on Bill C-91 and 20-year patent protection for big brand name drug companies, a whitewash of last spring's review of Bill C-91, the elimination of the drug research bureau and now evidence that Industry Canada edited the Ernst & Young audit of research commitments made by PMAC.

Who is in charge? Why is the big brand name drug company running this country? Today, on behalf of seniors everywhere and Canadians who are concerned about the future of medicare, we call on this government to ensure need, not greed, is the basis of drug pricing policy in Canada.

*Oral Questions***FISHERIES**

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government and the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans have obviously forgotten about the people in Atlantic Canada who want to improve the economy of their local fishing communities.

For the past six months, the Canso Trawlerman's Co-op Limited has been actively pursuing an Enterprise Allocation to put 60 people in Nova Scotia back to work.

Since May of this year, these hard-working individuals in the co-op have made every effort to get the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to meet with them in Canso, one of Atlantic Canada's oldest and most historic fishing communities. Unfortunately, the minister has refused these repeated requests. Co-op members have nevertheless met with the minister's former caucus colleague, who is now the current Premier of Nova Scotia, in efforts to gain support for the co-op's cause.

• (1415)

On behalf of the Canso Trawlerman's Co-op, I urge the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to meet with the co-op members from Canso to listen to their concerns and address these proposals in a direct and positive manner. Time is of the essence. I bring this to the House and I will hand deliver it to the minister today.

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[Translation]

NATIONAL CHILD DAY

Ms. Eleni Bakopanos (Ahuntsic, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the people of Canada will be marking the fifth National Child Day.

This is an opportunity for us all to focus on the important place children hold in our society. It is our responsibility as members of Parliament, and in a number of cases also as parents and grandparents, to ensure that each of our children in Canada does not live in poverty, die of hunger, fall victim to sexual abuse, or be exploited for the purpose of pornography or prostitution.

[English]

The National Crime Prevention Council which our government established during its first mandate has provided us with blueprints for developing and implementing prevention strategies that invest in children and our youth.

[Translation]

I would like to draw particular attention to the exceptional work done by the volunteers and administrators of the NGOs in my riding of Ahuntsic, among them Alternatives Jeunesse, Maison

Buissonnière, and the Centre Mariebourg. Speaking on behalf of all the children of Ahuntsic, my congratulations to them all.

[English]

We have a responsibility as parliamentarians to leave this world a little better. We do not own this world, we are only its keepers for future generations.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

CANADA POST

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, for weeks Canadians have been enduring the threats and counter threats of strikes and lockouts at Canada post. The government says that negotiations will produce a settlement. But last night we got the chief negotiator for Canada post and the negotiators for the union wrestling on the floor in Hull. They are going to be on WWF next.

My question to the Prime Minister is, why does the government not get off the sidelines and legislate a labour dispute settling mechanism for Canada post that works?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parties are discussing and apparently there was a lively meeting yesterday. Those things happen once in a while. But I think it is in the best interests of the workers that there is a system of negotiated settlement, and we do hope there will be one. They have a right to have a union and the right to negotiate.

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, strikes, lockouts, even back to work legislation are traditional instruments of the past and they do not work. None of these are protecting the long term consumer interest and the delivery of the mail.

We are asking the government why it does not use some creative thinking to change the labour dispute settling mechanism, like final offer arbitration. It used that in the dock strike in 1994. It is in the Transportation Act.

My question is, why will the government not legislate final offer arbitration for Canada post?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, mostly because final offer arbitration does not work. The government wants a collective agreement and it wants both sides to sit down.

As the Prime Minister indicated, there was a lively meeting last night. We want them to settle down and come up with a collective agreement that will be better for CUPW, the post office and for the people of Canada.

Oral Questions

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, if final offer arbitration does not work, why is it the mechanism that is included in the Canada Transportation Act to settle disputes between shippers and the railways? Why is it in its own legislation?

My question. If the government does not want to intervene in the bargaining process, why does it not fix the process? Why will the minister not act in the long term public interest and legislate a long term solution to Canada post labour problems?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, collective agreements under the federal jurisdiction have worked over 94% of the time. That is what the government wants, a collective agreement that will be better for the people of Canada. That is what the government supports. We want them back at the table to come up with an agreement that will serve us all well.

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• (1420)

[Translation]

CALGARY DECLARATION

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, on the first sitting day of this Parliament, I asked the Prime Minister if he would be consulting Quebeckers on the Calgary declaration since Lucien Bouchard was not going to. He said maybe.

I asked the same question a few weeks ago and was told that the government was not planning anything in this regard.

When will consultations start in Quebec? Or is the Prime Minister afraid of stepping on Lucien Bouchard's toes?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a process is currently under way to hold consultations in all the other provinces. We are waiting to see what the outcome will be. If it is appropriate to consult Quebeckers afterwards, we will see to it.

But for the time being we think it best to wait and see what the other provinces will decide. Then we will make a decision. We are not saying that we will not hold consultations in Quebec but at the same time we are not saying that we will.

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[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Secretary of State for International Financial Institutions admitted something that ordinary Canadians have always known. He said that the Liberals are "very familiar with the

fact that our income taxes are very high". This is quite an admission from the Liberals.

Now that we all know our taxes are very high, when will the government do the responsible thing and bring in some tax relief?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the 1997 budget the government brought in \$2 billion worth of tax relief. We brought in tax relief for students. We brought in tax relief for the physically disabled. We brought in tax relief for poor families with children.

The real issue before the Canadian people is why the Reform Party opposed that tax relief to Canadians.

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[Translation]

CANADA POST

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister responsible for the Canada Post Corporation said we should be pleased because negotiations had resumed between the two sides. Later in the evening, while the union announced that talks had officially resumed, Canada Post officials were saying that negotiations had broken down. We also know that a rather disgraceful incident took place yesterday.

Can the minister responsible for the Canada Post Corporation tell the House what has happened since yesterday to make things go sour?

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first we deplore the incident that occurred late last night.

This morning, I asked the chairman of Canada Post to provide me with a report, which I received around noon. From now on, the corporation's director of labour relations, Raymond Poirier, will lead the employer's negotiating team.

As for the negotiations, efforts are currently being made to get the process under way again. Just before the incident, yesterday, negotiations were going ahead. I hope they can be resumed this afternoon.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what happened yesterday is that while the union was announcing that negotiations were resuming, management was refusing to answer the telephone, to talk to journalists and to discuss with the union.

Could the minister convey a message to his new negotiator and tell him to stop these delaying tactics, to sit down and to negotiate in good faith for once?

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe the two sides negotiated continuously for over 24 hours.

Oral Questions

Yesterday, in the evening, an incident which we deplore took place. Since this morning, efforts are being made to get the two sides back to the table.

I hope that by the end of the day they can go back to the table and negotiate. The government's objective is to have a negotiated collective agreement.

Mr. Réjean Lefebvre (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for Canada Post.

Since August, the minister responsible for Canada Post has been warning the union that special legislation would be brought in if there was a strike. This week again, the minister said that the union's tough stand would result in the privatization of Canada Post.

Will the minister admit that by promising back to work legislation in the event of a strike, he is guaranteeing the employer's bad faith and making it impossible to bargain in good faith?

• (1425)

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I never promised back to work legislation or privatization, on the contrary.

What I have been saying since last week, since there has been the possibility of a strike or lock-out, is that right now Canada Post is losing in excess of \$10 million daily.

Clearly, if this goes on for several weeks, we will then have a very serious situation on our hands and tough action will be necessary. The government will assume its responsibilities.

Mr. Réjean Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, does the minister not see that his obvious bias in favour of the employer is making him the leading cause of the present breakdown in negotiations?

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am the minister responsible for Canada Post. My responsibility is to make sure that all Canadians receive the best postal service possible.

That is therefore what I am doing and I hope that the opposition parties will be able to work with the government and ask either the union or Canada Post to return to the bargaining table and work out a contract.

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[English]

PHARMACEUTICALS

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Industry.

By the year 2000 Canadians will have paid over \$600 million extra for their prescription drugs, a penalty imposed on Canadians because the government caved in to the multinational drug lobby.

For 18 months the industry minister has kept reports of these extra secret costs while the minister whispers sweet nothings about a national pharmacare program.

Could the industry minister explain why the government always sides with the big multinationals instead of taking care of people who need drugs, the poor and the sick?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the drug patent policy is a controversial one. It was reviewed by a committee of the House of Commons during the past winter.

The purpose of the policy, from our point of view, is quite simple. We will respect our international commitments under the WTO to give 20 year patent protection for intellectual property, not just for drugs but for all intellectual property.

We will try to endeavour to ensure that the moment the patent protection ends mechanisms will be in place to ensure that alternative drugs are there.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the intervention of the government and the minister into the work of the parliamentary committee was a disgrace to democracy.

Canadians are paying heavily with their health and with their pocketbooks for the minister's refusal to overhaul our drug patent laws.

Will the government make it a priority to look after the weakest members of our society instead of siding with the multinationals which contribute to the coffers of the governing party? Or, did the minister take an oath to serve the interests of the multinational drug companies instead of the Canadian people?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised the question is in order, but I think it is important to note that what has the NDP inflamed is really only a very small portion of the total costs of health care in the country, namely the differential that may exist between patented medicines and non-patented medicines.

They obviously have no interest in respecting intellectual property. Nor are they making any arguments based upon the laws that stand, the regulations as they exist. Nor have they made any practical, lawful suggestions to us that we could—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint John.

*Oral Questions***EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

We are aware that the government's own actuary has reported that the EI premiums need not be any higher than \$2, as opposed to the government's rate of \$2.90. We know the government has circulated this report to Canada's business community.

Will the Minister of Human Resources Development share the same information with the House of Commons today? If not, why not?

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not exactly sure to what information the hon. member is referring. If she shared it with me I could give her a more appropriate answer.

This is a very important file for the government as well as for the Conservative Party. We could have a good discussion on this very important issue.

• (1430)

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, I am shocked to hear the minister say he does not know about his actuarial report. Everybody else knows about it. The Canadian business community knows about it.

High payroll taxes kill jobs. The government is refusing to accept this and the advice of its own actuary which shows that EI premiums could be cut significantly.

Will the minister, based on the actuarial report, reduce the EI premiums immediately and table the report? And I have it, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Let us not use any props in the House. If the minister wants to answer the question, he may.

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously I did not know the member was referring to that very public report, if the member was asking for it. I thought the member was referring to a more specific piece of information.

If the member is referring to that report, I can say the government has already reduced the EI premium four times. Her government was about to put it higher once again. That is what it wanted. Thank God we have been around for awhile.

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LABOUR RELATIONS BOARD

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to eating, even the snack pack cannot compete with Ted Weatherill, the chair of the Canada Labour Relations Board. Mr. Weatherill spent \$148,000 on snacks in his first eight years as

chair. Yet the Liberal government is waiting six months in investigation before it will consider his dismissal.

How many more \$733 lunches for two in Paris does the minister need before he cans this half million dollar man?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the auditor general will be reporting to the House on the issue in the next couple of weeks. Until then I have no comments on the issue.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, at the Vancouver APEC summit the government is hosting among others leaders from Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and China. Canadians want the Minister of Foreign Affairs to loudly and publicly raise our concerns about human right abuses with these countries, not behind close doors but loudly and publicly.

While in opposition this minister was talking the talk. Now is the time. Will he walk the walk?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I already reported to the House, last summer specifically we were in Jakarta. We raised all the issues the hon. member is concerned about.

As a result of raising those issues we came to an agreement to establish a human rights dialogue. The first colloquium under that dialogue was held two or three weeks ago for East Timor. The questions concerning prisoners were all raised. For the first time we had a number of NGOs involved.

I think that shows real constructive progress in terms of dealing with human rights with Indonesia.

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[Translation]

MONETARY POLICY

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, although the inflation rate has dropped to 1.5%, the Governor of the Bank of Canada still fears the inflation ghost and has announced that he will increase interest rates. Yet, the mandate of the central bank is clear: it also has to look after employment, not just inflation.

My question is to the Minister of Finance. What is the minister waiting for to call Governor Thiessen to order and force him to fulfil the employment mandate provided for in the Bank of Canada Act?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is well aware that interest rates are really a reflection

Oral Questions

of inflation. It is necessary to reduce expectations. In fact, in the last three weeks, long term rates have gone down.

So the question is based on a false premise. Interest rates are down, and it is because of this government's monetary policy.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what a revelation!

Has the Minister of Finance, who during the 1995 referendum campaign was saying that a sovereign Quebec would be in a losing position because it would have no control over monetary policy, just admitted candidly that even he has no control over monetary policy?

Is the Minister of Finance aware that his lack of monetary policy in the last three years is hurting the unemployed in Quebec?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member is so concerned about the economic situation in Quebec, perhaps he should read the study by the French Ministry of the Economy, which calls for a temporary lifting of the referendum burden.

• (1435)

Perhaps he will listen to the French people who blame the whole referendum question and the political uncertainty in Quebec for Canada's high interest rates.

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[English]

ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Eric Lowther (Calgary Centre, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask another question on Kyoto today because we are still waiting for real answers from the government. Before I ask it, however, I am going to give the government's response, or at least the tired old comments it has made to avoid giving a real answer.

The environment minister will say what is Reform's plan, which is typical of a government that has run out of ideas. Or, the minister will say they are taking this very seriously, which is a nice thought but does not answer the question I am about to ask.

The real question Canadians want to know is will the government raise taxes to pay for the Kyoto agreement.

Hon. Christine Stewart (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the federal government will work with all partners in Canada to implement a plan to deal with the issue seriously, the real issue of climate change. There will be a package of measures on the table and there will be a consensus in the country about what we do.

What will the Reform Party do? Everybody in the country would like to know. Their gases could be reduced.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we still do not know what the government will do in Kyoto, and it is 13 days away.

We know two things, though. The government will sign a binding agreement. It wants to be greener than the U.S. The Prime Minister wants to be greener than the U.S. The minister will not tell us what she will do and what the promises will be.

The first thing we want out of the government is a commitment on how much the CO₂ reductions will be. Next we want tabled in the House what it will cost Canadians.

Hon. Christine Stewart (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before the conference in Kyoto the federal government will make known its targets and timetables.

We will work out an implementation scheme with all of our partners after Kyoto. All Canadians will be engaged in the issue of reducing climate change.

Many of the measures that can be taken will be beneficial to the economy of Canada. They will help all Canadians, not only in their pocketbooks but also in their health.

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[Translation]

DRUG PATENTS

Ms. Hélène Alarie (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this spring the Standing Committee on Industry submitted its report on its examination of Bill C-91 on the protection of drug patents. The government is preparing its response to the report.

My question is for the Minister of Industry. Could he confirm that the government has no intention of shortening the 20 year period drug patents are protected, by amending neither the act nor the regulations, as the committee recommends in its unanimous report?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I said earlier and I confirm that we will honour our international commitments. We will, in other words, honour the 20 year period patents are protected.

Ms. Hélène Alarie (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to hear that, because according to some sources quoted in today's papers, the Minister of Health wanted to change the regulations on drug patents.

Would the Minister of Industry guarantee once again that the term of drug patents will in no way be reduced by amendments to the regulations?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the aim of the regulations was to give 20 years of protection to drug patents and not to extend or lessen the protection. Any changes to the regulations will be to—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. minister. The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Reed Elley (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are very concerned about the devastating effects of alcohol and drug addiction on our native population.

• (1440)

The auditor general again confirms the vastness of this problem. For 10 years Health Canada has known of and done nothing to correct the widespread abuse of easy access to prescription drugs.

Given the inaction by this government, is it really the health minister's policy to pay for and condone the illegal use of prescription drugs within our aboriginal communities?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member should know is what we said three weeks ago when the auditor general's report was tabled, namely that we have been at work in Health Canada for some years putting in place across the land technology to ensure that pharmacists will be able to ascertain that every prescription presented is legitimate and should be filled.

That will be in place by the end of this calendar year. It will save money and, more important, it will save lives.

* * *

TOBACCO SPONSORSHIP

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Wanuskewin, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the government's previous minister of health made two conflicting promises. First in the interest of Canadians' health he promised to ban sponsorship advertising of cigarettes. Then later under pressure from the tobacco lobby he promised to reverse that ban for auto racing events.

Which of these two promises does the current health minister believe to be more in keeping with the obligations of a minister of health?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that this is a government that respects all its commitments.

That includes first of all—

Some hon. members: GST, GST, GST.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health has about 15 seconds.

Hon. Allan Rock: Mr. Speaker, our commitment to public health in reducing the levels of smoking, especially among young people, is well expressed in the Tobacco Act. We are proud of that

legislation. We will soon be spending effort in a co-ordinated way across the country to educate young people about the perils of smoking, to influence them in the choices they make about—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

* * *

[Translation]

MILITARY PROCUREMENT

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Defence.

Yesterday, the minister confirmed that the government still intended to purchase several billion dollars worth of military equipment, such as tanks, submarines and so on.

Since there have already been special debates in this House on significant issues, such as the deployment of troops to Bosnia, Haiti and other places, why does the government stubbornly refuse to hold a special debate on this issue, when several billion dollars are at stake?

[English]

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): These purchases, Mr. Speaker, have been around for some period of time and certainly there has been every opportunity for the opposition to ensure that discussions were held and questions were in fact put on all these issues.

These matters are a point of making sure that we get the kind of equipment, the kind of tools that our Canadian forces need to be able to do their job.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. John O'Reilly (Victoria—Haliburton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a recent newspaper article quotes Lieutenant-General Pike of the British army. He believes that the Canadian military is not capable of engaging as a fighting force.

Can the Minister of National Defence confirm that the Canadian military is indeed capable of any mission that it is asked to perform? Will the Minister of National Defence tell General Pike that his attitude is not suitable to lead a high profile campaign in Bosnia and reaffirm that the Canadian military is second to none in the world? Tell General Pike to take a hike.

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): You bet, Mr. Speaker.

• (1445)

When I was in Bosnia recently, I met with General Ramsay, a British army officer who was in charge of the sector that the Canadian troops are serving in. He had the highest praise for the capability, the professionalism and the performance of the Cana-

Oral Questions

dian troops in Bosnia and their humanitarian work. I think that is more indicative of what the British army thinks.

In terms of Lieutenant-General Pike, it seems he does not think that women can reflect—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Surrey North.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, some months ago, the Minister of Justice tried to score points by expressing an interest in improving the rights of victims. She stated: "We have not done enough to accommodate the interests of victims within the criminal justice system".

On October 7 she mocked a statement from this side of the House concerning a murdered woman by saying "and blah, blah, blah, blah". Now she has suggested an ombudsman for crime victims.

Will this proposed appointee actually be authorized to enforce victims rights or will this just be another case of powerless blah, blah, blah Liberal patronage?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me reassure the hon. member that this government takes very seriously the issue of victims and victims rights. In fact, that is why I intend to discuss this important issue with my provincial counterparts in Montreal a week and a half from now.

* * *

FIREARMS

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the firearms act is being implemented in 1998. Manitoba and three other provinces will not use provincial resources to force law abiding citizens to register their recreational firearms. This leaves the federal RCMP.

How does the solicitor general expect an understaffed, underfunded RCMP to register millions of dastardly duck hunters?

Hon. Andy Scott (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP is fully prepared to do its job with regard to firearms legislation. The regulations are being reviewed now and the RCMP is fully prepared to do its job.

* * *

PORTS

Mr. Peter Mancini (Sydney—Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, by now most of the members of this House and I am sure the Minister of Transport have heard the disturbing news reports of allegations made by Mr. Bruce Brine, the former director of the Halifax ports

police. He has made serious allegations of corruption and fraud by senior officials within the Canada ports police.

My question is for the Minister of Transport. Can the minister tell the House how much the minister knows about these allegations, when he knew and what steps his ministry and Canada Ports Corporation have undertaken to address these most—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transport.

Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been informed by Ports Canada that there have been allegations of wrongdoing involving the police detachment at Halifax. This is now being looked into by the RCMP. Beyond that I have no further information.

Mr. Peter Mancini (Sydney—Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the minister has no further information. On June 17, 1996 Mr. Brine met with senior officials of the Canada Ports Corporation. At that meeting he detailed his allegations of corruption.

Either the minister does not know about these allegations or someone in the corporation saw fit not to tell him. Will the minister assure the House that these allegations of criminal wrongdoing will be thoroughly and impartially investigated and not covered up?

Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot think of a more thorough and impartial investigation than the one being conducted by the RCMP. It will take all these matters into consideration.

* * *

CANADA PENSION PLAN

Mr. Jean Dubé (Madawaska—Restigouche, PC): Mr. Speaker, in 1995 the Department of Finance conducted a study on the impact of the increase in CPP premiums between 1986 and 1995. The department estimated that the increase in CPP premiums would lead to a loss of some 26,000 jobs.

Could the Minister of Finance inform this House how many jobs will be lost this time with a 70% CPP increase in premiums and is there a job impact analysis?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the study demonstrates is that as a result of the confidence that will be engendered in the Canada pension plan and the confidence that workers can have it will be there for them and over the long term this will lay a very strong foundation for increased employment.

Mr. Jean Dubé (Madawaska—Restigouche, PC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian workers had better keep their eyes open on this one.

[Translation]

Until now, the Minister of Finance has shown no interest whatsoever in reducing employment insurance premiums. If these are not reduced, the employment insurance account will have a \$7

billion surplus, a \$7 billion tax on jobs. When Canada pension plan contributions are raised, still more jobs will be jeopardized.

• (1450)

Would the Minister of Finance commit, once and for all, to offset the increases in pension plan contributions by reducing employment insurance premiums?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Human Resources Development has already indicated, we have cut employment insurance contributions every year since we came to power. It must be pointed out that they were raised for three years during the previous government.

At the same time, looking at CPP contributions, I can state that it is true that, along with the provinces, we will be forced to raise them. It is too bad that the previous government did not act in 1984 when there was still time.

* * *

[English]

NUNAVUT

Mrs. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the implementation of the Nunavut government will take place on April 1, 1999, and as part of the land claim agreement the public service is to be staffed by a 50% Inuit workforce.

[Editor's Note: Member spoke in Inuktitut]

[English]

Can the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development tell the House what steps her department is taking to ensure that Inuit are full participants in the public service of Nunavut?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the creation of the new territory of Nunavut is a priority for this government, as it is for the people of the Eastern Arctic. It is our belief that the success of this initiative will be dependent on the degree to which Inuit people are part of the administration of that government. To that end a unified human resource strategy has been signed with all the parties.

I had the benefit of travelling with the hon. member to Iqaluit to announce a \$40 million federal investment to that strategy. To date 800 Inuit people have received training under this program.

I know that in April 1999 we will welcome them to their responsibility.

Oral Questions

ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY

Mr. Jim Pankiw (Saskatoon—Humboldt, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, according to the 1997-1998 supplementary estimates, ACOA will receive an extra \$22 million for government handouts. That is in addition to the pre-existing \$250 million for government handouts.

Last month former Liberal premier Frank McKenna stated that the answer to the Atlantic problem is not more government handouts but tax cuts for business. And the next day the prime minister agreed by saying that the problem cannot be solved by sending money. So why now the extra \$22 million in government handouts?

Has the prime minister simply had a change of heart or is he trying to buy his way back into the hearts of maritimers?

Hon. Fred Mifflin (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure where the hon. member is getting his figures from. What the prime minister said in the Atlantic visions conference was basically that the government supports Atlantic Canada in every way and will do the best it can for its recovery.

With respect to ACOA, I can spout a lot of statistics here but I want to inform the House that in its relatively short existence, ACOA has provided just short of 100,000 jobs, and I think that speaks for itself.

* * *

[Translation]

DAIRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

We know that the Americans are challenging the price of Canadian milk for export. The World Trade Organization was hearing the American complaint this morning. This is a major issue for Quebec and Canadian dairy producers.

Does the minister intend to vigorously defend the dairy producers of Quebec and Canada by taking a clear and firm stand in the face of American claims?

[English]

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yes I will confirm that we will defend the Canadian dairy industry vigorously. The government did that successfully when the United States challenged us in the NAFTA panel. We defended the industry vigorously. We succeeded then and we will defend the industry vigorously today and in the future.

*Oral Questions***CANADA POST**

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House the minister of public Works passionately said that he wanted a negotiated settlement between Canada Post and CUPW. Last night the parties were that close to a collective agreement.

Also last night Eda Irwin, the spokesperson for Canada Post, then revealed to the press that she does not have a mandate to negotiate with this union. What is going on?

• (1455)

For the sake of all Canadians and Canadian business, when will this minister get off his chair and negotiate properly and give Canada Post the mandate it requires to negotiate?

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada Post has a mandate to negotiate and to have a negotiated settlement. As the hon. member said, last night they were so close, and that is true. We hope they can go back to the table and reach a settlement.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Gilles Bernier (Tobique—Mactaquac, PC): Mr. Speaker, we have received dozens of calls from Canadians who depend on government assistance cheques but who have not received them this month. One gentleman said that he did not have enough money to purchase insulin because his EI cheque did not come. Last night a lady from St. John's had to rush her son to the hospital but did not have enough gas to get there.

How does the minister plan to immediately deliver these urgent cheques, or is he hoping that Santa Claus will deliver them?

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have looked very carefully at this situation. Most of the cheques that my department is delivering are going through the post. We made an agreement last night with Canada Post which the postmen have accepted to deliver all delayed cheques today and tomorrow in case there is no agreement. That has been done.

As a responsible government and as a responsible department this is what we have done because of the possibility of a strike. We

have organized 400 sites across the country for distribution in case of such a strike.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Stan Dromisky (Thunder Bay—Atikokan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Despite the efforts of others to dictate Canadian foreign policy, Canada continues to develop a relationship with Cuba.

Can the minister describe the latest developments in this relationship and explain how both countries will benefit?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his timely question. In a series of these bilateral agreements we signed a joint declaration with the Cuban government which includes a series of meetings on human rights issues. We have had very good meetings on women's rights and children's rights. We are working with the Cubans on developing a covenant signing for the United Nations, another agreement on terrorism.

Mr. Speaker, you have received a delegation of Cuban parliamentarians to help shape the legislative system and legislative reforms in that country. It shows real progress in constructive engagement.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, while a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force, I recall a conversation with a Hong Kong veteran. Tom spoke of the brutality and torture he endured at the hands of the Japanese army during enslavement. I find it unconscionable that our government 52 years later has still not insisted that Japan, one of the richest countries in the world, provide proper compensation for this enslavement and forced labour.

Will the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the government act now for our Hong Kong veterans' dignity and arrange proper compensation?

Hon. Fred Mifflin (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member in the sense of the sacrifice the Hong Kong veterans made. Efforts have been made for extra contribution but up to now they have not been successful.

Hong Kong veterans are compensated by the Department of Veterans Affairs in a fair manner. Depending on the circumstances of their involvement in some cases they can get up to almost \$60,000.

[Translation]

DEPARTMENT OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we read today in *La Presse* that the Department of Citizenship and Immigration apparently misled 430 of its Quebec employees by providing documents containing false information about work reorganization.

How can the minister justify the questionable practices, which have no precedent in the illustrious Canadian public service, of her senior officials with respect to Quebec public servants?

• (1500)

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, like many other federal departments, has undergone a profound restructuring of its services on a nation-wide scale, and each of the regions has gone about attaining the objectives of this restructuring in its own way.

That having been said, certain employees dissatisfied with the approach taken by the Montreal office have appealed to the Public Service Commission and we intend to respect its decision.

The Speaker: Dear colleagues, that marks the end of Oral Question Period.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw members' attention to the presence in the gallery of the 1997 recipients of the Governor General's literary awards.

[English]

These awards celebrate the achievements of our writers, illustrators, translators and publishers and our testimony to their talent.

I am going to introduce them by calling out their names. I would appeal to you, my colleagues, to wait until I have finished all their names and then I would like you to receive them on behalf of the people of Canada.

My colleagues, the 1997 Governor General's literary awards recipients are Jane Urquhart, Aude, Ian Ross, Dionne Brand, Pierre Nepveu, Rachel Manley, Roland Viau, Howard Scott, Marie José Thériault, Kit Pearson, Michael Noël and Barbara Reid. These are our literary award recipients.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: My colleagues, following question period, I am going to host our laureates in my chambers. I invite you all to come and meet them at an informal reception.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order that arises out of question period. The

Routine Proceedings

Minister of Industry said in regard to a question asked by my leader that he wondered why the question was in order.

In your wisdom, you did not rule the question out of order. That is only appropriate seeing that the question that my leader asked was exactly the same question that the current Prime Minister asked on April 1, 1993—

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his information.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian group of the Interparliamentary Union which represented Canada at the International Conference on Governance for sustainable growth and equity held at the United Nations headquarters in New York July 28 to July 30, 1997.

* * *

• (1505)

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

The first petition concerns the family. The petitioners would like to bring to the attention of the House that managing the family home and caring for preschool children is an honourable profession which has not been recognized for its value to our society.

They also point out that the Income Tax Act does not take into account the real cost of raising children.

The petitioners therefore pray and call upon Parliament to pursue tax initiatives to assist families who choose to provide care in the home for preschool children.

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition concerns the issue of alcohol consumption and misuse.

The petitioners would like to draw to the attention of the House that the consumption of alcoholic beverages may cause health problems and, specifically, that fetal alcohol syndrome and alcohol related birth defects are 100% preventable by avoiding alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

The petitioners therefore pray and call upon Parliament to require health warning labels to be placed on the containers of all alcoholic beverages.

Routine Proceedings

MARRIAGE

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have several petitions which I wish to present to the House.

The first petition totals 12 pages and contains over 300 names. It has to do with the definition of marriage. It calls upon Parliament not to change the definition of marriage in future legislation.

AGE OF CONSENT

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is 23 pages in length and comes from the lower mainland. It deals with the age of consent.

The petitioners ask that Parliament raise the age of consent from 14 years of age to 16.

HEALTH

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the next petition is made up of 403 pages and contains some 9,000 signatures from people in British Columbia.

The petitioners ask that the government stop giving herbal, alternative medicine people a hard time. They ask that they be allowed to do their work. They have been doing it for thousands of years so the petitioners request they be left alone.

I agree with these petitioners and it is a pleasure to present these petitions on their behalf.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Eric Lowther (Calgary Centre, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by Calgary residents regarding the upcoming Kyoto conference on greenhouse gas emissions.

A local newspaper gathered 6,500 signatures from people who reject any tax that will drastically affect Alberta's energy industry.

The petition which I am now presenting exhibits similar concerns. It calls for a further review of this issue so that effective solutions and a better definition of cost obligations might be accomplished.

The petition urges the government not to sign any agreement until these concerns are addressed.

EAST TIMOR

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition containing 350 names from Quadra Island and the nearby area in my riding.

The petition states that despite the UN resolutions affirming the rights of the East Timorese people to self-determination, the Indonesian military has continued to occupy East Timor, inflicted violence and caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of East Timorese.

The petitioners ask that the government support a UN referendum for an independent East Timor, impose a ban on the sale of

military equipment to Indonesia and end all government funding for the promotion of trade with Indonesia as long as it continues to illegally occupy East Timor.

YUKON WEATHER STATION

Ms. Louise Hardy (Yukon, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present to the House.

The first petition is from residents of the Yukon territory.

Our weather station, the only weather station in all of northern Canada, has been operating for 50 years and is being closed. The weather station is essential for extreme weather warnings, which we need from November through March, for flood warnings and for fire warnings.

Unfortunately, because the minister deemed it not necessary, it is being closed.

The citizens of the Yukon are protesting that decision.

• (1510)

JUSTICE

Ms. Louise Hardy (Yukon, NDP): The other petition has over 1,300 names on it and it is from the people from Alberta as well as the Yukon. We are asking for the abolition of the use of provocation as a defence.

The history comes from the middle ages, where men of equal class were allowed to challenge each other to a duel and use provocation as an excuse. It in no way fits in our society today and it is unfairly and disproportionately used to defend in spousal homicide.

I present this petition on behalf of the residents of the Yukon and Alberta.

RETIREMENT SYSTEM

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I am pleased and proud to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in Winnipeg North Centre and on behalf of other concerned Manitobans.

They petition this government with their concerns regarding current and proposed changes to Canada's retirement system. In specific terms, they petition this government to rescind Bill C-2 because it imposes such serious massive premiums hikes while reducing benefits and because of concerns for the establishment of an investment fund which will mean a loss of dollars in this country and benefit to stockholders and bond dealers.

They also petition that this government call for and put in place a national review of the retirement income system in Canada in order to ensure the adequacy of Canada's retirement system today and tomorrow.

Government Orders

[Translation]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all notices of motion for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: There are 48 motions in amendment standing on the Notice Paper for the report stage of Bill C-4.

Motion No. 3 is the same as an amendment presented in committee. Accordingly, pursuant to Standing Order 76(15) it has not been selected.

The other motions will be grouped for debate as follows: Group No. 1, Motion No. 1 is in the form of a preamble and would normally be ruled out of order. However, Bill C-4 was referred to committee before second reading, pursuant to Standing Order 73(1). Consequently the amendment will be allowed and will be debated and voted on separately.

[Translation]

Group No. 2: Motions No. 2, 31 and 41.

Group No. 4: Motions No. 4 to 19

[English]

Group No. 5: Motions Nos. 20 to 30, 32, 33, 34, 45 and 47.

[Translation]

Group No. 6: Motions No. 35 to 40.

[English]

Group No. 7, Motions Nos. 42, 43, 44, 46 and 48.

The voting patterns for the motions within each group are available at the Table. The Chair will remind the House of each pattern at the time of voting.

I shall now propose Motion No. 1 to the House.

• (1515)

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among all parties and I believe you will find unanimous consent for an order of the House that would deem all amendments that have been found in order to have been read by the Chair and to have been duly moved and seconded and to further provide that, when there is no further debate, the amendments will be deemed to have been put and a recorded division requested.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am seeking unanimous consent from the House to replace Motion No. 5 on the notice paper with a revised version. This motion as it appears on the notice paper is incorrect as a result of a typographical error.

The other parties have been consulted and I believe the Chair will find unanimous consent to replace this motion with the correct version.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the proposal of the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River. Does the House give its consent to the substitution of the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I assume the hon. member will be handing a signed proposal to the Table without it having been read at this time to the House. Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Might I also ask, since the parliamentary secretary's motion appears to cover all motions placed on the notice paper, if it now covers the amended motion submitted by the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River. Is that also agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-4 be amended by adding before line 4 on page 1 the following:

“0.1 The Canadian Wheat Board Act is amended by replacing the enacting phrase with the following:

WHEREAS agriculture is a basic foundation stone of the Canadian economy; and

WHEREAS interprovincial and export trade in grain produced in Canada is an essential element of the agricultural sector of the economy, and

WHEREAS it is necessary to establish an organization to coordinate such trade; and

WHEREAS such an organization will have a very significant effect on the producers of grain and must therefore have the securing of the best financial return to them as its object and first priority and must be accountable to them for its performance.

THEREFORE Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:”

He said: Mr. Speaker, thank you for your personal intervention to guarantee my right to have an independent legal expert from legislative counsel draft my amendments to the bill. I am very disappointed with the unilateral decision to have procedural clerks drafting my amendments to government bills. Lawyers draft the government bills and amendments, and members of the House deserve no less.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for defending my rights and privileges and providing the independent confidential legal advice and services I need to do my job as a legislator in the House.

It is a fundamental privilege of the House to decide on the rules of the House. So far we have been denied the opportunity to debate and vote on the quality and availability of essential legal services for MPs to do their jobs.

We represent a substantial number of people. The amendments we make are very important and deserve the proper consideration and advice.

On behalf of my constituents I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your personal intervention in this instance. It has made it possible for me to better represent the interests of my constituents in the House.

I also express my objection to the referring of bills to committee before second reading. It was my experience that the Liberal majority on the agriculture committee was no more open to amendments than any Liberal dominated committee reviewing a bill after second reading. That is a very serious concern because we need that input. Unless the government allows for proper critique

of its legislation we are wasting our time in the House. I hope that will change.

The government has subverted the original intent of referring a bill to committee before approval in principle and is now using this procedure to skip second reading debate and deny members an opportunity to represent their constituents in the House. The procedure was supposed to open up the democratic process, not shut it down more than it already has.

I have introduced seven amendments to effectively address the deficiencies in the bill. With these amendments I proposed the following improvements to the Canadian Wheat Board Act. I will briefly go through them and hope to have an opportunity at a later time to talk to each one.

● (1520)

I put forth an amendment to add a preamble to the act and an amendment to change the object of the act from orderly marketing to maximizing the financial return to producers and three consequential amendments to that.

I also put forth an amendment to allow producers to voluntarily exclude one or more types of grain they produce from control of the act for a minimum of five years. In addition to this opting out clause my amendment would provide producers with the opportunity to opt back in by giving the board two years notice.

Finally I put forth an amendment to introduce a five year sunset clause which would repeal the act if it does not achieve its stated objective of securing the best financial return to producers. Talking about sunset clauses, that should be in all legislation. If the legislation does not meet its stated objective we should scrap it.

I would also like to speak to the four main proposals put forward in the amendments: adding the preamble, making the first priority of the Canadian Wheat Board Act to secure the best financial return for producers, to provide opting out and opting back in provisions, and to provide a sunset clause.

I hope to speak to each of my amendments as they appear in the appropriate grouping of amendments. First I will speak to the preamble.

I introduced Motion No. 1 to correct a serious oversight. The Canadian Wheat Board Act does not have a preamble. The act current says “an act to provide the constitution and powers for the Canadian Wheat Board”. If any act of parliament needs a preamble it is this one.

For far too long the government has been saying what the Canadian Wheat Board is supposed to be doing but has done a pretty good job of keeping the real facts a secret. The board says one thing and thousands of farmers disagree. Surely the government cannot disagree with the preamble I have introduced in the House today. If it does, I would like on record the points it

Government Orders

disagrees with and the points it would like to see amended. That should be obvious.

Agriculture is the basic foundation stone for the Canadian economy. Interprovincial and export trade of grain is an essential element of our agricultural economy. I do not think anyone can disagree with that, so I hope it will be approved.

It is necessary to organize and co-ordinate such trade. Whoever co-ordinates this trade must have as a first priority the goal of securing the best financial return for producers.

Who in the House can argue against that objective? The minister responsible for the wheat board even said so in the House on October 28, 1997. I quote what the minister said.

The Canadian Wheat Board in every market in the world extracts the very best price it possibly can get for the farmers of Canada.

If that is the case we should put it in writing. The board must be accountable to producers for its performance and we should be willing to say that.

These are far more than just motherhood statements. They set the framework around which the act and the bill must be debated. For the government to pass an act of such importance as giving a government monopoly powers is asking for those powers to be abused.

I respectfully request that all members of the House support the inclusion of a preamble to the Canadian Wheat Board Act. It is a serious oversight not to have it in there. This is the preamble that should be included:

WHEREAS agriculture is a basic foundation stone of the Canadian economy; and

WHEREAS interprovincial and export trade in grain produced in Canada is an essential element of the agricultural sector of the economy, and

WHEREAS it is necessary to establish an organization to co-ordinate such trade; and

WHEREAS such an organization will have a very significant effect on the producers of grain and must therefore have the securing of the best financial return to them as its object and first priority and must be accountable to them for its performance.

The purpose of the amendments I have put forward is to protect all farmers. The government always says that it is listening to the majority of farmers. In a democracy everyone must be protected and their rights must be respected, which is included in the amendments I have put forward. A significant number of producers are represented by people on this side of the House. I appeal to the government to listen to the amendments we are making. They are common sense reasonable amendments and they should be considered.

• (1525)

The attitude has been "Why should we provide proper legislative counsel to the opposition? The government will not listen to our amendments anyway". They are asking why they should provide resources. That attitude has to change. What we do in the

House is fundamental to preparing legislation all Canadians have to live with. We need the best resources and the best legal advice to make legislation what it should be.

Therefore we appeal to the government to give us the resources and to consider the amendments we put forward. They are reasonable amendments that address the concerns of the people we represent.

Mr. Gerry Byrne (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to respond to the motion put forward by the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

This is a very substantial piece of legislation, very important to all Canadian grain producers. It is an important aspect of the governance of that industry. That is why I am very proud to support the legislation. In speaking to Bill C-4 it certainly accomplishes the objectives set out by the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board.

The member for Yorkton—Melville criticized the government for its decision to refer the legislation to committee before second reading. I simply point out to the hon. member and to all members present that it is a very unique and important method of actually getting input from members.

Once adopted at second reading the spirit of the legislation cannot be changed by the House. That is one reason the government saw fit to adopt a method of referring legislation to committee before second reading so that members would have ample opportunity to look into the details of the bill and to provide constructive and positive suggestions for change.

In criticizing this method of referring the legislation to committee before second reading the member has criticized the fact that he now has the opportunity to put forth his amendment. Amending the preamble to any legislation would not be in order after second reading. By actually referring the legislation to committee before second reading the hon. member has the opportunity to put forward his motion to amend.

I just say that as a point of clarification. That is the purpose of that directive.

The hon. member's motion is to provide a change to the preamble of the bill. That is basically what we are here to discuss. The hon. member is providing an amendment to the enactment section of the bill. What must be pointed out is that the original bill, as proposed by the government and approved by committee, provides substantial opportunity for the governance of the Canadian Wheat Board by the producers themselves. Two-thirds of the board of directors would be put in place by the producers and not by the government.

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• (1530)

That is the form of governance I think the democratic process should take. That is the form of governance I think the farmers want and that is exactly what we heard in committee.

They wanted a stronger role for producers, and clearly two-thirds of majority control of the board of directors for the Canadian Wheat Board accomplishes that objective.

The purpose, if I were to anticipate for the member's motion here, would be to add the preamble, to put specific restrictions on the board of directors so that it would be somewhat encumbered in its job and subject to what many would consider to be frivolous lawsuits in the performance of its duties.

The preamble, as put forward, in essence accomplishes exactly what the bill already accomplishes, with one critical difference. It provides specific language, which I am sure opponents to the Canadian Wheat Board would enjoy the opportunity to capitalize on and to create quite a feeding frenzy by the legal community whose members of certain jurisdictions would so aptly want to support as opposed to supporting farmers.

I will rise not in support of this amendment to put a preamble into the bill for the simple reason that I am extremely confident that the bill itself accomplishes the goal of providing the producers the opportunity through the process of annual meetings, through the process of disclosure, through the process of producers themselves maintaining their own majority control over the processes of the Canadian Wheat Board. We are accomplishing exactly what producers want us to accomplish.

That is a very important point and while I see some merit in the spirit of what the member is trying to accomplish, quite frankly and potentially a little naively what the amendment would accomplish is probably a feeding frenzy by the legal community trying to poke holes in the fact that the farmers themselves, the producers, will now take a majority control, a majority position on the wheat board. They are the ones who are most capable with a majority position, a clear two-thirds, 10 out of 15, to guide the report into the future.

I have no hesitation whatsoever in speaking favourably to Bill C-4 in its original intent as passed by the committee of all parliamentarians. It is a very good one.

When we get into these discussions about democracy and about freedom of members to be able to practice their craft in the House of Commons, something that I would simply remind the hon. members opposite of is this. They criticized the fact that the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board chose to put this legislation, with the consent of the House, before committee before second reading so that the members who sat on the committee with me could take a good solid look at the specifics of

the bill and have the opportunity to put forward constructive changes before the bill was tabled and before the bill was adopted at second reading.

What we are really seeing here is that members opposite are criticizing the fact that they had the opportunity to participate in the process. They are also criticizing the producers' opportunity to participate in the process. They want to stifle the ability of the producers who will be sitting on that board of the Canadian Wheat Board. They want to stifle that opportunity for those producers to be able to do their job in the best interest of farmers.

Therefore I do not support the amendment. I suggest to the members opposite that what they really should be focusing on here is to let farmers, the ten members, the majority of members who will be sitting on that board, do their job and let them provide the Canadian Wheat Board with the leadership in concert with the Government of Canada, in concert with all the people of Canada, the best options for all farmers.

• (1535)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, can I not reply to some of the false claims this member made?

The Deputy Speaker: I am sure the hon. member would like to do that, but under the rules of the House, as he knows, on debate on report stage amendments, each member has one 10 minute intervention.

The hon. member will get an opportunity, I am sure, on the next group when we get to it. He could expose whatever disagreement he has with whichever hon. member who has made comments by that time. By then there may be several. He will have a field day in his next 10 minute intervention, I am sure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I speak this afternoon to Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

The Liberal government headed by the Prime Minister, the member for Saint-Maurice, thought that a slight revamping of the more than 60-year-old Canadian Wheat Board, a body viewed with very mixed feelings by grain producers themselves, it might be added, would be a good idea. Discontent in the three western provinces and in the Peace River area was such that producers were on the verge of signing a general petition calling for nothing less than the total abolition of the board.

So, 18 months ago, the minister responsible for the board, a western minister of course, tabled amendments in the form of Bill C-72. We in this House devoted much effort to improving this bill.

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But because of this government's lack of foresight, we are now, to all intents and purposes, back at square one with Bill C-4.

My colleague in the Reform Party, the member for Yorkton—Melville, is suggesting a preamble to Bill C-4 that I feel I must approve. I will tell you why. When a bill seems to be good, there is no need to shy away from saying so. What interests me most in the motion put forward by the hon. member from the Reform Party, is the preamble saying that agriculture plays a vital role in Canada and especially in the three western provinces and the Peace River region. Do you object to that, Mr. Speaker? You agree with me that it is no crime to include that in the preamble to the bill.

The interesting thing is that this organization, the Canadian Wheat Board, has an important effect on grain producers and must, accordingly, have as its object and first priority the securing of the very best financial return for them. The Canadian Wheat Board will have to be accountable to the grain producers for its performance.

Mr. Speaker, can you look me in the eye and say that you object to the Canadian Wheat Board making every effort to obtain the best prices for our grain producers? The Liberal government objects to having this in a preamble to the bill. It makes no bloody sense. Worse yet, they are going to ask the Canadian Wheat Board to account to grain producers for its actions.

• (1540)

The minister responsible is objecting. I fail to see why. Bill C-4 does have good intentions. For instance, there is at least some attempt to democratize the administration of the Canadian Wheat Board, by having 10—not enough in my opinion, but at least this is a first step in the right direction—of the 15 directors elected by universal suffrage by the grain producers. That is a step forward.

In case it has been forgotten, there used to be five commissioners, and all five were appointed by the governor in council. These were generally five patronage appointments, not necessarily five truly competent administrators. When the colour of the government in power was blue, Conservatives were appointed. Now, since it is red, we have just had the announcement of a series of Department of Agriculture appointments, and they are all Liberals. One was a bag man, one the chief organizer, one had worked hard to get his boss, the Prime Minister, elected as leader of his party. You will recall this, Mr. Speaker, since you supported him too and got a little reward for it, since you are now seated in the chair.

Bill C-4 is an attempt to change the Canadian Wheat Board Act for the better—at least I hope it is for the better, and the government is sincere—for the benefit of grain producers. So why fear it?

I have just been listening to the words of the Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board. He said they were afraid they

would have to tie the hands of the directors of the Canadian Wheat Board. Is it a crime to tie their hands and require them to obtain a better price? I do not think so. Given that the board will be dealing with \$6 billion or \$7 billion, even a fraction of 1% will mean a better price. A fraction of 1% of \$7 billion means many many millions of dollars that the board could come up with and put into the pockets of producers.

I invite my colleagues in the government to have another look at the proposed preamble. It is not because it was introduced by the Bloc Quebecois that it is no good. It looks like the Liberals think that if it is not their idea it is not good.

I do not want to have to reread the main part of this preamble, but the part that interests me, once again, is the part that would oblige the Canadian Wheat Board to obtain the best possible return on grain. The board should also be accountable for its performance.

So, a vote against this motion, the first on Bill C-4, indicates a lack of transparency and a fear of working effectively for western grain producers.

[English]

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too am very pleased to be taking part in this historic debate on Bill C-4, the amendments to the Canadian Wheat Board Act, this afternoon. Before I talk about the preamble before us, Motion No. 1, I will respond to the comments made by the parliamentary secretary about how privileged members who serve on the committee should feel for the ability to come to the House and propose amendments since the bill was referred to committee prior to second reading.

• (1545)

I would take more comfort in that if I had not felt as a member of the standing committee that there was a rush to judgment throughout the entire process. I do not recall specifically how many groups appeared before the committee, but they were grouped in threes and fours so that we could get through the bill in a matter of two or three weeks. The amendments were rushed through in one session. It was not a very effective way to consider a bill of this magnitude which will have a long lasting impact on Canadian grain producers.

With respect to the preamble put forward by the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville, he said that it is not motherhood. I think that there is a lot of mom and apple pie in it. However, I also think that there is nothing wrong with us saying that in a preamble, as my colleague from the Bloc Quebecois articulated a few moments ago.

The New Democratic Party and the CCF before it have always been very strong supporters of the Canadian Wheat Board and we continue to be strong supporters of it. What is wrong with insisting that there be a preamble that makes it very clear? The motion

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which is before us does that. It states what the vision and mission of the Canadian Wheat Board is to be.

Those vision and mission statements are very much in vogue these days. We see corporations and other groups doing it. What is wrong with such a statement being in the preamble about what it is that the Canadian Wheat Board is all about? It is a reference point that producers and others can look to when seeking guidance or when they have concerns.

Having said that, New Democrats believe that the wheat board has been a very good marketer for Canadian grain producers over the years. We see absolutely nothing illogical about having this as the preamble and we will be supporting this particular motion when it comes to a vote.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat reluctant to speak on this piece of legislation which has gone through committee and returned to the floor of the House. The reason I am reluctant is because we have been talking about participation in the process, as the hon. member from the governing benches indicated. Quite frankly, I am disappointed in the opportunity we were given to participate in the process.

I am sure most Canadians recognize that this is probably the most important piece of legislation which will affect the western Canadian producer in this session of Parliament.

The minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board had an opportunity to put forward legislation which in fact would take the producers of western Canada into the 21st century, taking into consideration the open global marketplace that we have today. He certainly had an opportunity to put into place legislation which would allow producers in western Canada to take full advantage of the produce they are producing currently at world prices.

The minister said that he was going to listen to all of those people who were prepared to appear before the committee. He wanted to hear their comments. He wanted to make sure their comments were embodied in this legislation. Quite frankly, the process that we went through in committee was, in my estimation, a railroad job.

The legislation was put through committee in record time. We were not allowed to listen to all of the opinions of all of the people who wanted to come forward.

I will give the House two examples. In committee I put forward an amendment to bring the minister back to the committee. The minister said, in his own words, that he wanted to come back to the committee after we had heard the witnesses to be able to hear what positions were being taken by those individuals. I asked the committee to extend the period of time that it was sitting to invite

the minister back and I was turned down on that request. The minister I believe would have come back but the committee did not want to waste the time to hear all of those comments.

• (1550)

I also suggested that there is a parallel organization called the Ontario Wheat Board which has a fully elected board of directors, which has certain freedoms for its own producers that are not allowed in this particular piece of legislation. I would have liked to have heard from those individuals. The Liberal members of the government in committee would not allow us to subpoena or bring those people before the committee to hear how they operate.

As I said earlier, there was obviously an opportunity for the legislation to do what it should have done for the next numbers of years on behalf of our producers. I come from an area which is referred to as the wheat city. This legislation is very important. No one, I do not believe, really wanted to get rid of the Canadian Wheat Board. All we wanted to do in this legislation was to make sure that it is more competitive in today's market and today's world.

As for this preamble, this amendment that is before us, Motion No. 1, I cannot see why any member of this House, including the government, would not support it. As the parliamentary secretary indicated, the government wishes to have the producers in charge of their own marketing corporation.

All this preamble says is that the corporation will be working for the producers. Why not put that in the legislation so that it is there and people and the corporation recognize it is for the producers and not for the Government of Canada, not for the Minister of Agriculture, nor for the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board?

My party will be supporting Motion No. 1. In fact it is somewhat reminiscent of certain other motions that follow behind this. I know we will be dealing with them at another time in other areas.

I would also like to say that the government takes great pride in saying that this new legislation will make the Canadian Wheat Board accountable to producers, will make it transparent and certainly will make it accountable.

Quite frankly, the only way it will be accountable is if it has the full board of directors elected by the producers themselves and not have five of those directors appointed by the federal government.

There is another serious concern and that will be spoken to later in the amendments with respect to the appointment of the chief executive officer, the president. This will take many hours of debate to make sure that the government recognizes that an

appointed CEO is just simply another arm of the federal government and not accountable to the producers themselves.

I am very pleased to be able to stand here and suggest that Motion No. 1 will be supported by my party when it comes to the vote and if indeed the Canadian Wheat Board is accountable to the producers, it should have that said specifically in the body of the legislation. I cannot see why government would not allow this to happen.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, as with the hon. member from the fifth party who just spoke, I am almost reluctant to speak to this bill in light of what has transpired over the previous month.

As the hon. member articulated, this bill has been rushed through from beginning to end. For the government to try to pretend to the viewing public, to the Canadian people and in particular to western Canadian farmers that it has used this process to bypass second reading and to hustle this bill off to committee, and it has used this process in order to try to better the bill, is an absolute fallacy. It is totally ridiculous when people take the time to view what has really transpired over the last while.

• (1555)

The way these amendments have been grouped is very odd. At some point in time I would like to have it explained to me how they came to be grouped the way they are. It is hard to rationalize how they have placed some 48 amendments into the various seven groupings.

Motion No. 1, which is the preamble, totally comprises Group No. 1 and was put forward by my hon. colleague from Yorkton—Melville. Part of the motion states:

Whereas such an organization will have a very significant effect on the producers of grain and must therefore have the securing of the best financial return to them as its object and first priority and must be accountable to them for its performance.

That is the key part of the preamble put forward by my hon. colleague for Yorkton—Melville. It sets the tone for the entire bill. I am very pleased on behalf of the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville to note that we have support for his Motion No. 1 from the other three opposition parties. That is important.

The public recognizes that it is sometimes very difficult to get unanimous support from all four opposition parties in this place. All parties view this as a very important preamble. Although some on the government side would say it is just motherhood and apple pie, it does set the tone for the entire bill.

I will read a letter into the record that came to me from the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association that was sent to the hon. Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board. This letter indicates the level of dissatisfaction with this bill that exists within the farming community: "I append a copy of a news

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clipping listing the organizations which support the inclusion clause in Bill C-4. They are: the National Farmers Union, Family Farm Foundation, Catholic Rural Life Ministry, Concerned Farmers for Saving the Wheat Board and 'several' Saskatchewan Wheat Pool delegates of which there are 123 in total".

It goes on to say: "The coalition against C-4 has the following membership: the Canadian Canola Growers Association, Manitoba Canola Growers Association, Flax Growers of Western Canada, Oat Producers Association of Alberta, Alberta Winter Wheat Producers Commission, Western Barley Growers Association, Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Saskatchewan Canola Growers Association, Alberta Canola Producers Commission, Canadian Oilseed Processors Association, Winnipeg Commodity Exchange, Western Canadian Wheat Growers Associations".

Then it poses the interesting question to the minister: which of these groupings do you feel better represents the interests of western Canadian farmers? If you believe—and it is hard for me to think otherwise—that the second group better represents the views of farmers, could you please explain to me why, against the opposition of these groups, Bill C-4 still contains the inclusion clause?" The letter is signed by Mr. Larry Maguire, President of the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Maguire did not write the letter on behalf of one organization that the government would care to discount by saying that it had always been anti-wheat board and pro-free choice, pro-free marketing. He wrote it on behalf of a coalition of many groups that represent literally tens of thousands of farmers who are concerned not only about the inclusion clause but about a lot of clauses and the very scope of this legislation.

• (1600)

First let me say at the outset that we will be debating seven groups of amendments and many members I am sure will get up seven times to speak to various facets of the legislation.

I hesitate to keep saying this because to a certain extent it angers me as a former grain producer who grew grain for 20 years under the Canadian Wheat Board. Reform is not opposed to the Canadian Wheat Board. I say that because at times it seems that some of our political adversaries like to paint us in that light. Reform is not opposed to the Canadian Wheat Board. We want to see it improved, strengthened and address the real needs of western Canadian grain farmers. Above all, we want the wheat board to be accountable to the farmers. However, we do not see that in this legislation.

I indicated during my 10 minute intervention before this bill was shunted off to committee that first and foremost we want the Canadian Wheat Board to be made voluntary. Until farmers have the ability to opt in or opt out or market their grain through the board or through the private sector, I do not think farmers will

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really be supportive of the existence of the Canadian Wheat Board as we know it now.

There were comments made earlier by my colleague from the New Democratic Party about the groups of witnesses. I think all of us on the opposition side at committee were very disappointed in the process there, where witnesses who had travelled at considerable expense and time to appear before the committee were lumped together and there was not really an adequate chance to listen to them and have an honest open debate and exchange of information. It really puts pay to the argument by the government that the reason why it superseded second reading and put the bill off to committee was to try to better the bill. That simply did not happen.

To show how divisive this bill is, it actually accomplished the near impossible. The minister has accomplished the near impossible. He has managed to alienate almost every single Canadian farmer, every single person who is involved in grain production and transportation in western Canada with this one piece of legislation. To show just how divisive it is, imagine the Canadian Wheat Board advisory committee of 11 farmers itself being split and the majority of those producers calling for the complete withdrawal of the legislation.

I want to read an excerpt from the November 6 front page of the *Western Producer* newspaper quoting the remarks of the chair of the Canadian Wheat Board advisory committee: "Macklin disputed government claims that one of the results of the legislation will be to democratize the wheat board and turn power over to farmers thought the two-thirds of board members they can elect". Then there is direct quote: "We think this new structure will be more subject to political manipulation than the old structure".

I completely agree with that assessment. I think this bill is not going to address the needs. In fact, it is going to continue to sow the seeds of divisiveness in western Canada instead of addressing the real needs out there.

• (1605)

Mr. Wayne Easter (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I must oppose this particular amendment to the preamble.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Wayne Easter: If members will just give me a chance I will explain why. It should be obvious. I cannot see why the other parties have fell for this line by the Reform Party which is just a strategy that over time, through legal challenges to the board, will in fact undermine the board. That is the real strategy here. Let us put it on the table and call a spade a spade.

Before I go too far with the Reform Party opposite, I do want to correct a matter that my friend, the hon. member for Frontenac, said. He talked about the commissioners who have been appointed to the wheat board over a number of years. He was fairly critical of those appointments. I think the record shows that the appointments by various governments of commissioners to the wheat board over time have been excellent in that the wheat board has always been able to return to producers the maximum that is in the market and most times has outdone the open market.

As far as the motion by the member for Yorkton—Melville, what does the preamble really mean? Let us be serious on this. How does it really stand up in law? We know in the past, and it is clearly on the record in many places, that the Reform Party has never been a strong supporter of the Canadian Wheat Board. It gives it lip service but it tries to undermine it at every stead. I believe it was last year when the barley producers were violating the laws of Canada that some of these members opposite were actually supporting those producers in terms of trucking barley across the United States in a law breaking venture.

How can we trust the Reform Party in terms of what it is really trying to do concerning this piece of legislation?

Maybe, as I said a moment ago, there is a subtle strategy at work here by the Reform Party in which it is trying to use a preamble to the bill to set the stage where the Canadian Wheat Board will be challenged legally time and time again. Look at the amendment. It reads "whereas, whereas, whereas". Finally, in the "therefor" we get to it stating the exact same thing as the government is saying in terms of enacting the bill.

One usually uses "whereas" at a political convention for resolutions. We are not doing this for a political convention. This is a superior piece of marketing legislation for a marketing organization that has always stood by the farm community. This is legislation that empowers the Canadian Wheat Board and, through empowering the Canadian Wheat Board, it empowers the grain producers of western Canada to maximize returns in the marketplace with, of course, as we have done in the past, the backing of the Government of Canada in terms of guarantees on borrowing, credit guarantees, initial price guarantees and the authority to be a single desk seller and thereby be able to maximize returns to producers in competition to other players in the international marketplace.

Let us just take a moment in terms of the preamble and compare it to what has happened in the past with the wheat board. I turn to the Canadian Wheat Board 1995-96 annual report "Marketing for the Future". In a corporate profile this is what it said:

The Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) is the marketing agency for western Canadian wheat and barley growers. The CWB markets these grains in the Canadian market to

more than 70 countries around the world with the goal of attaining the best price possible.

That is what it says in its corporate profile now. It does not need to be said in terms of preamble to the legislation. Annual sales revenue ranges from \$4 billion to \$6 billion depending on grain prices and the amount of delivery by farmers.

• (1610)

This makes the Canadian Wheat Board the largest single wheat and barley marketing corporation in the world. Imagine that, marketing on behalf of Canadian producers with that kind of market power and market authority. All proceeds from sales less Canadian Wheat Board marketing costs are passed back to farmers. In that sense western Canadian farmers are the Canadian Wheat Board's only shareholders.

Let me again turn to the comments made earlier by friend from Frontenac when he was critical of those wheat board commissioners. We expect the new board will be able to do similar things.

A performance evaluation, which was also outlined in this wheat board report, indicates how well it has been able to do. That is why we need this kind of legislation, so that it can continue to do those kinds of things for western grain farmers. I quote: "A performance evaluation conducted during the 1995-96 crop year showed Canada ranks highly with its customers in such areas as quality of product, customer service, technical support and dependability of supply".

On the point of the dependability of supply, if we went with some of the resolutions proposed by the Reform, you could not assure yourself, as a marketing agency of supply, because you would never really know what was happening with that supply area. With the kind of authority we have under the wheat board you can depend on that kind of supply and you can market intelligently, not just boom and bust, as the members opposite are basically saying we should do.

Another study conducted by three economists showed that the Canadian Wheat Board's single desk system generates an additional \$265 million per year in wheat revenue for farmers, thereby enhancing Canada's competitiveness. It also showed the Canadian Wheat Board provides a low cost marketing service to farmers.

This shows what the Canadian Wheat Board has been able to do in the past with appointed commissioners. This legislation, although giving farmers more say in terms of the management of the Canadian Wheat Board, sets the stage to ensure it has more say and the kind of authority to continue to market in that way into the foreseeable future.

Another point is how low, because of these efficiencies, the Canadian Wheat Board is able to keep its administration expenses, down to 0.7%. That is remarkable for one of the largest marketers around.

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We cannot support this legislation because I think the Reform Party in this preamble is playing games. I am surprised the NDP and the Bloc and the Tories fell for these kinds of subtleties. Certainly these kinds of decisions are better left to the board of directors to decide what is in the producers' best interest rather than providing a heyday for lawyers bringing law suits that challenge the Canadian Wheat Board decisions as not being in the producers' interests.

That is the real game Reformers are playing. How many lawyers are over there in your camp anyway? I thought you were trying to represent producers here, not the legal community? That is what I thought but obviously that is what you are up against.

Mr. John Reynolds: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, one of the most elemental rules in this House is that we speak in the third person rather than straight across the floor.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): Point well taken. I remind the member to please address his remarks to the Chair.

Mr. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, much more pleasant in any event to address my remarks to the Chair.

In closing I want to say that this piece of legislation is here in the best interests of producers. We have had the hearings. I have said three times that this preamble to the legislation is a very subtle way in which the Reform Party is really trying to undermine the real future of the Canadian Wheat Board.

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Alarie (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will be relatively brief, given that everything is relative in this House.

A number of motions have been tabled during this debate on Bill C-4 and I do not want to anticipate, but I think the best is yet to come.

Beyond party politics, this motion reflects a global view which is, all in all, beneficial to grain producers. The motion asserts the importance of this legislation and takes us to the heart of the matter. Just looking at the reactions this afternoon, the debate on Bill C-4 will definitely be lively.

It was the same thing in committee, which led us to think that it is probably important to include Motion No. 1, which is a preamble to the act. Some may feel it is redundant, but it is better to be safe than sorry.

The number of witnesses heard is evidence of the interest in this legislation. No one in this House is opposed to the Canadian Wheat Board, but the views and the means to achieve our goals are quite different. As for Motion No. 1, which we support, we can only be in favour of trade coordination.

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A coordinated marketing structure for agricultural products, both at the interprovincial and at the international level—in the case of exports—would benefit our producers. I think we all want to see more powers in the hands of grain producers, to make the decision making process more democratic.

I think that any business organization must try to achieve the best performance. And these days, businesses must account for their performance, that is to say, for their management practices. We want grain producers and the agricultural sector as a whole, which is the cornerstone of all our industries, to be as successful as possible.

In this context, I think that, if they were here today, grain producers and all those who came forward would support this motion because, as it stands, Motion No. 1 makes a lot of sense. I would not call this a partisan strategy, far from it; call it an overview of the debate on Bill C-4 and what is important to us.

[*English*]

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We are debating a very serious government bill that will affect certain parts of the country, yet the government is not here to listen.

I do not believe we have a quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): We will count the members and let you know.

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): We now have a quorum.

Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, Ref.): Madam Speaker, it is a real pleasure to rise in the House today to speak on a bill that I have looked at thoroughly.

It is appreciated that after 34 years I farmed and had a wheat board permit book, I can finally say something on the issue.

• (1620)

I was enthused when the hon. member for Malpeque started to talk about the benefits of the Canadian Wheat Board. He must have a relative in Winkler, Manitoba. During the fair this summer I had an office there and people came to talk to me. One gentleman came in and asked me to support the wheat board.

I want to maintain the wheat board. I have always wanted to keep the wheat board but I want to make it accountable and make sure it gets the best prices for the farmer.

He wanted me to make sure the wheat board stayed. I asked him how much wheat board grain he grew and whether he was a big

farmer because I did not know him. He had a quarter section and a good job at Triple E, a mobile home manufacturer. He grew a quarter of wheat board grain, mostly feed barley.

I asked him how many bushels he sold to the wheat board and his answer was zero. He sold no grain to the wheat board. I then asked why he was concerned about keeping the wheat board. It was because he raised hogs and wanted to keep cheap feed prices.

The hon. member for Malpeque went from dairy to beef cattle. I know why he wants to keep the wheat board. He wants to keep cheap feed prices. That is the support the wheat board has.

It is amazing to hear him say that the wheat board is the main gatherer of supplies. It has the supplies it can deliver. Why do we have all our wheat board grain in bins, all the canola, flax and lentils? Everything is gone. It has been sold at good prices. Why do we have wheat board grains in the bins? There is no money for that.

The member also talked about law breakers. The member for Malpeque should explain which laws were broken. All they did was sell their grain for a better price than they could get from the wheat board. Is it criminal to get the best price for their grain?

I can see why members opposite object to the preamble my hon. colleague from Yorkton—Melville proposed. They do not want to sell it for the best price. They are afraid to put that in the preamble because somebody could challenge that statement.

Why did parliament originally pass the wheat board act? In the 1920s and the 1930s it was to provide competition to the grain companies to get a better price for the farmers. Why has a preamble never been included in the wheat board act? Why is it a sin to put that preamble into an act that is supposed to protect the interests of farmers? I would like that explained.

Why would we pass legislation in the House that does not identify what it is all about? Why would we pass legislation if we do not have the guts to include the preamble or to indicate the intent of the bill, what it is supposed to do, and the bylaws in the bill upon which regulations and rules have to be set?

Not everybody is a lawyer. We do not have any on this side. The Liberals have lots of them so they should be able to identify the intent of a bill. If they do not want to identify the intent, why have it? It sounds ridiculous to me.

I was impressed by the hon. member from the Bloc. We have always been classified as separatists; Reform members are separatists. We can work together with our Bloc colleagues and identify good and bad legislation. I appreciate those members in the House who have the guts to say what is right and what is wrong.

Why in the world would we pass legislation to divide the country? If it is not unifying when Reform and Bloc members agree on a bill, I do not know what is unifying. What are we to say about that?

• (1625)

What will hon. members from Ontario answer? Every member of its wheat board is elected. Why should Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan have partially appointed boards? Why are Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan different from Ontario? Why can we not elect all the directors and make them accountable to the farmers? That is what should happen.

If they can give me a solitary reason why they should not be elected when Ontario's board members are elected, I will agree with them. As long as it gives different powers and different regulations to different provinces, it only creates separatism and hostility among certain parts of the country.

We have had enough of that. We have seen for three and a half years in the House the divisiveness that is created when different regions have different powers. Why do we want to create another difference? I would like that explained to me. I cannot see that happening in the bill, the way it is drafted.

I do not know why these people are afraid of identifying the bill for what it is. If the bill does not give farmers the right to sell their grain for the best price, it is not worth the paper it is written on. It will do more harm than good.

I would like the House to support amendments such as the one moved by the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

I also express my appreciation to the hon. member for Brandon—Souris. He did a very good job relating his feelings. He is a member of the opposition who has an interest in farming. He is located in a central community which benefits from the farmers around it. He knows what he is talking about. He is not just talking through his hat.

It has been a pleasure to say a few words. I am sure I will get another chance when some of the other motions are being debated.

I encourage Liberal members to stay in the House and listen to the debate. I see they have disappeared again. We can see from that how much interest they have in the bill. We can see how much they are concerned about what is happening in western Canada. It is a shame there are only four or five members on that side of the House when we are debating a bill of this importance.

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We are debating an important piece of legislation which will affect farmers out west, and again

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members of the government have not shown up in the House. I am calling for a quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): The hon. member for Okanagan—Shuswap has called for quorum. I do not see a quorum so please ring the bells.

And the bells having rung:

• (1630)

Mr. Gerry Byrne (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would simply like to point out that some disparaging remarks have been cast on members of the House. I would like to point out that those disparaging remarks, I think, should be retracted given the fact that the Reform Party—

An hon. member: Do you want to debate that?

Mr. Gerry Byrne: —is in dereliction of their duties for the simple reason that I see a party which has a caucus of over 50 members, but I only see four in front of me.

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Ref.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to debate this important bill in the House today. We have seen quite a bit of activity here talking about the low attendance in the House. I would agree that this is a very important bill for western Canadian farmers and people should be paying attention.

I would like to speak in support of my colleague from Yorkton—Melville and his introduction of a preamble to Bill C-4. The preamble I am interested in is the section where he says:

Whereas such an organization will have a very significant effect on the producers of grain and must therefore have the securing of the best financial return to them as its object and first priority and must be accountable to them for its performance.

Why would we want such a preamble introduced in the bill? I suggest it is because under section 5 of the current bill, there is no accountability to farmers. We did not have it in Bill C-72, it was not in the previous Canadian Wheat Board Act and we do not have it in this bill. This is an effort to try to bring some accountability by the Canadian Wheat Board to its producers.

In the recent M-Jay Farms case, the Canadian Wheat Board argued forcefully and successfully, I may add, that it is not accountable to farmers. It has always taken this position in court.

For example, in 1976 the Riske case, it found in favour of the board and not in favour of accountability to farmers. When the board is talking to farmers, however, it says quite the opposite. The board should not be allowed to speak from both sides of its mouth on this issue. Since the board is accountable to the minister and not farmers, I wish that the minister would stop letting the board misrepresent this position.

Mr. Hehn, Chief Commissioner of the board has said on many occasions, and I will quote: "We look forward to a strong and successful partnership with farmers of western Canada." That is in

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the Canadian Wheat Board annual report of 1994-95. "There can be no partnership without accountability." He also goes on to say on another occasion: "It is your grain and your marketing agency", *Grain Matters*, January-February 1996—"With no accountability, again this is an absolute falsehood."

I quote the Chief Commissioner of the board: "We are looking for ways to be more accountable to farmers." *Grain Matters*, May-June 1996. He said this at the very same time that the board was before the courts arguing just the opposite.

In the grain case of the M-Jay Farms the board was arguing that there is no accountability to farmers by the board. It is only accountable to the ministers, and the courts found exactly that.

He goes on to say: "We are structured to do the job for farmers" the *Edmonton Journal*, October 11, 1996. Had he been totally truthful he would have said: "We are not accountable to farmers and we are in court here today to prove it." And that is exactly what happened.

Furthermore there is nothing in the amendments to Bill C-4 that would make the board accountable to farmers. I refer to the board's section 5 which says, and I will read it. This part has not been changed at all. Section 5 says: "The board is incorporated with the object of marketing in an orderly manner interprovincial and export trade grain grown in Canada." It says nothing about accountability to farmers.

If I read the findings of the court in the M-Jay case, where it ruled against M-Jay Farms, they said: "But the express purpose of the act as set forward in section 5 is not the maximization of profits for producers, but rather the orderly marketing of grain grown in Canada in interprovincial and export trade." Essentially quoting section 5.

• (1635)

They go on in the court case to say "In the view I take of this statute the responsibility is not to any individual producers but rather to the minister under the act". The members on the other side ask us why we are trying to bring accountability into this House, why we would ask for it in the preamble to the act. We are doing it because they would not make changes to section 5. The court has found consistently that under section 5 the Canadian Wheat Board is not responsible to farmers but to the Minister of Agriculture. Nothing has been changed in the act. Section 5 has not been changed and therefore there is no accountability.

An hon. member: Two-thirds of the board are farmers.

Mr. Charlie Penson: Madam Speaker, the member for Malpeque is making some noises from the other side. He is talking about the structure of the board under this current arrangement, but the board is still accountable to the Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board. Two-thirds of the members on the board

are elected and one-third are appointed but the chair of that board is appointed by the Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board.

This government is totally out of touch with the debate in western Canada concerning what is going on and what farmers want. Farmers want a system in which they have a choice in how they market their grain. I know a great many farmers who want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board so they can pool their product, accept an average price and use that vehicle. I also know a great number of farmers who do not want to use that vehicle. They want a dual system. They want to be outside of that monopoly. This bill does not address that at all and I suggest it is doomed for total failure.

There is no accountability in this act. When my colleague from Yorkton—Melville said that the very least we can do in the preamble to the act is to suggest that we must have accountability to farmers rather than to the minister, we were ridiculed by the other side. We were ridiculed by people who do not have constituents under the Canadian Wheat Board jurisdiction. I see a member who grows potatoes in P.E.I. I do not see any move to try to include potatoes under the Canadian Wheat Board Act. I see a lot of lawyers over there from Toronto who are more interested in keeping control over Canadian farmers than they are in serving their needs.

We have a system—

Mr. John Bryden (Wentworth—Burlington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The colleague opposite keeps referring to individuals on this side and suggesting to the Canadian people that there are lawyers and only lawyers on this side who are listening to the debate. I think that is an irrelevant point and he should not be calling attention untruthfully to the composition of the people on this side of the House. I am not a lawyer.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): That is not a point of order. Resuming debate.

Mr. Charlie Penson: Madam Speaker, I see that the truth hurts. It is very interesting that the people in the Liberal Party who want to maintain the status quo of the Canadian Wheat Board have even moved beyond the status quo of the Canadian Wheat Board. They are now trying to have more crops included that farmers are not asking to have included. Those very people are not representing areas that are under the Canadian Wheat Board jurisdiction.

What authority do they have to put a group of farmers in western Canada under a system they do not even have in Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, any areas where there is agriculture? I do not think they should have that moral authority. When we ask very simply that there should at least be some accountability shown in the preamble to the act as in Motion No. 1, even there the Liberals do not have enough dignity to say that they respect farmers in western Canada, that they respect that there should be some

accountability. They even want to deny us that. It is wrong and they will pay the price for it.

* * *

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

CANADA POST

Mr. Jim Gouk (West Kootenay—Okanagan, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As of just after four o'clock this afternoon Ottawa time, the people of Canada do not have a postal service in this country. That is causing major economic problems in this country.

• (1640)

I ask the Chair to seek the unanimous consent of this House to move to an emergency debate on this pressing national emergency after the hour of adjournment of regular business this evening.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): There are some procedures to deal with matters of this kind. However, on the other hand, the hon. member has asked for the unanimous consent of the House. Does he have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): There not being unanimous consent, we will be resuming debate after I read this order.

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 Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough—Criminal Code; the hon. member for Frontenac—Mégantic—B.C. Mines.

Resuming debate.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act and to make consequential amendments to others acts, as reported (with amendment) from the committee; and of Motion No. 1.

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

At this point in the proceedings, we are debating the preamble suggested by Reform Party members. For the party in power, and

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especially for the member for Malpeque, I would like to read the motion tabled by our friends in the Reform Party.

WHEREAS agriculture is a basic foundation stone of the Canadian economy; and

WHEREAS interprovincial and export trade in grain produced in Canada is an essential element of the agricultural sector of the economy; and

WHEREAS it is necessary to establish an organization to coordinate such trade; and

WHEREAS such an organization will have a very significant effect on the producers of grain and must therefore have the securing of the best financial return to them as its object and first priority and must be accountable to them for its performance;

THEREFORE Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:

I was surprised at the speech by the member for Malpeque, who is opposed to such a preamble. This is not the first time a preamble has been discussed. There was talk of a preamble when the notion of distinct society was raised in connection with the Meech Lake accord. There was a preamble in which Quebec was described as a distinct society.

I see the minister from West Island laughing. She lives in my riding. She played an active role in that affair.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: From downtown Montreal.

Mr. Ghislain Lebel: The funny thing is that the preamble had no significance back then. Now, as the member for Malpeque sees it, the preamble explains everything, is highly significant, and could mislead the courts if they were called upon to interpret it.

• (1645)

Just recently, a new proposal was made in western Canada, about the unique character of Quebec, something comparable to the Pacific salmon, and it was said that "maybe that could be added to the preamble if a constitutional amendment is made". Others said "No, it would go at the end". Regardless of whether it comes before or after, I believe that a preamble has to give a general idea of the legislative text.

Of course, the preamble per se is not a section of the act, but a guide. We know that the members of this new Canadian Wheat Board, or some of them, are MPs who lost their seats in the last election, people who will get their reward from the Prime Minister and the party in power for their contribution to democratic debate on June 2. It might not, however, be a bad thing to remind them in a preamble that their primary authority is the farmers, the producers, not the one responsible for appointing them to the board, particularly when an act like this one is intended to last a good length of time, since it is made to be longlasting, hoping that it is the best possible.

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If such is the case, if the government passes this legislation to be in effect for a goodly length of time, hoping to apply it for a long time, it is possible that its buddies who are appointed in this first batch to the Canadian Wheat Board could turn up elsewhere, be promoted to something else. However, its friends or those who could be friends with the others later on have to understand from reading the preamble of the bill governing them that its priority and purpose is to look after the interests of grain producers.

I do not understand why the member for Malpeque always rises here, waving his arms about as if this were a personal issue, as if it were an attack against him personally when we take apart and criticize a bill that he is defending. I do not know why he does not just use a little common sense. There must be common sense in Malpeque too.

The hon. member for Malpeque should drop his habit of leaping up and save his strength for other occasions, of which there are many in political life.

Moreover, I want to say too that the bill does not require the Canadian Wheat Board to be accountable to wheat producers. The bill requires it to be cost effective, but who is going to decide if it is cost effective? It is all very well to say the board will be managed in a way that ensures its cost effectiveness, but who is responsible for ensuring the cost effectiveness of the board? Is it the appointed head of the wheat board, the person who appointed the directors, friends of his political party? Or is it the producers, who may be affected by the sometimes irrational decisions and choices made by the administrators of public funds, decisions that are even less rational because they are not accountable to the people, the producers in this case?

I find the attitude displayed by the member for Malpeque, despite the carryings on of my colleague opposite who is protecting his chum and shares his views on the matter, in so vigorously opposing what we propose to put in the preamble of the bill, is mistaken and leaves that very impression with everyone including the Liberals. A member rose on a point of order saying he had the impression, from the way things were being dealt with, that the members considered him dishonest. That does not come from us. I was seated and had said nothing. If he thinks he is dishonest, it has a lot more to do with his bill.

● (1650)

The time may have come to focus on the bill and suggest that the hon. member for Malpeque stop challenging virtue and peace, order and good governance.

I can understand that the hon. member for Malpeque may want to sell just about anything to anyone; that is his job as parliamentary secretary. He can be made to say anything, that is his job, as he has to protect his minister. But let us try to get across to him what is

really being asked by our colleagues in the Reform Party, with whom I seldom agree, but agree with this time. Good common sense ideas can spring from anywhere. I mentioned Malpeque, but they can also spring from western Canada.

I think that they are absolutely right. Without being partisan about this bill, I think it could be a good bill, a bill that does what it is meant to do and a bill that can have a positive effect. There is no need to get carried away and go on opposing the Reform proposal. As a former political figure in Quebec, the late Maurice Bellemare, used to say "What matters is not the size of the sledgehammer but the swing you put in the handle". He has put quite a bit of swing in demolishing something that stands to reason and is founded in logic and necessity.

I urge all members of this House, especially those who feel as uneasy about this bill as the hon. member who spoke earlier, who feel attacked even though they are innocent—and they all are—, who feel targeted by the bill and threatened by its consideration, to share their feelings with the hon. member for Malpeque, who will inform his minister, who will in turn inform whomsoever he pleases, as long as the end result is that an interesting bill is brought back to us. If justice is not done to grain producers, it should at least appear to be done. That would be better than nothing. We cannot hope for more than that.

[English]

Mr. John Bryden (Wentworth—Burlington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was not expecting to take part in the debate because agriculture is an area of great expertise. I draw your attention to members opposite who have just asked me to sit down. I apparently in the opinion of some members opposite should not speak because I am not directly involved in agriculture.

One of the reasons I am speaking is that I have sat here for about an hour and a half listening to the debate, especially the comments from the opposite side. Among the things that have been said by those opposite is their suggestion that everyone on this side is a lawyer as if somehow that is something reprehensible and a reason for not commenting on legislation.

At the time that comment was made there were quite a number of Liberal MPs on this side of the House, and I have to say none of them were lawyers including myself.

Another thing I found reprehensible in the debate coming from the other side was the suggestion from one member of the Reform Party that because MPs may not be from the west, may not be from the prairies and may not be directly associated with farmers growing wheat, they somehow had no right to participate in a debate on the bill. It is certainly true that I am from central Ontario—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. John Bryden: *Hansard* ill disclose that this comment was made.

• (1655)

I feel very strongly that it is a privilege to speak in the House, on either side of the House, on the opposition side or on the government side. We all have a duty to examine legislation whether or not we have special expertise in the area under debate.

The suggestion that only westerners can debate a wheat board bill plays right into the hands of the separatists who would suggest that the only people who can debate the future of Quebec are people who live in Quebec. I reject that and I think most Canadians reject it.

What I would like to contribute to this debate is what little I can contribute to the debate. I would like to talk about the question of preambles.

As I understand it, Motion No. 1 put forward by the official opposition would establish a preamble to the bill. I am not a lawyer and many members on the other side are not lawyers, but if they would care to pick up the telephone and ask for advice, they would discover that preambles do not count for anything in legislation. Legislation begins where it states “Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts”. The legislation follows that.

I have been campaigning on my side of the House to stop government legislatures, bureaucrats, whoever writes the laws, from writing preambles. Preambles are smokescreens. Preambles are when the clauses in the legislation are not sufficiently exact. The clauses do not say and do what the government is convinced they will do.

We have the opposition suggesting that we should pass legislation which carries on a tradition that really got rolling in the 35th Parliament of smoke and mirrors through preambles.

What does it really mean if there is a preamble which states “whereas agriculture is a basic foundation stone of the Canadian economy?” What does that mean? What will it do for a judge? Does it really matter? Will it affect how the law will be interpreted? I suggest not.

It has no force on judges. My colleagues opposite can check it. In the legal profession they call it the pious hope clause. It has no binding implications for what the judge must do. The judge must read after enacts.

There has been debate about the wording accountable to farmers being in the preamble. This is where I will have to accuse my colleagues opposite of not wanting to have a rational debate.

The phrase accountable to farmers sounds noble. I know it will play very well in western Canada, but we are talking about government legislation. We are talking about setting up a federal

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government body. We are not setting up a provincial body. We are not setting up a farmers union. We are setting up a body that has to be responsible to the federal minister because there is no other way of doing it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. John Bryden: They protest. What they are proposing is unions. That party does not want government in Ottawa. It does not want government in the provinces. It wants some sort of people’s parliament that can only translate into a union. As usual, the Reform Party is on the same side as the Bloc Québécois, wishing to dismantle government institutions in favour of regional institutions. That is an absolute formula for disaster for the country.

Thank heavens you were not going away, Madam Speaker; I was a little worried there.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. John Bryden: Instead of the smoke and mirrors of a false debate, of a phoney debate about a preamble that has no force or about accountability that cannot exist, we are talking about a government board that has producers on it. It is accountable in the traditional way that government bodies are accountable. They are accountable to their elected representatives who are represented in turn by the minister.

• (1700)

He, in his wisdom, has set up a board which does have composition with farmers. That is the real debate. If the members of the opposition really want to do something constructive, then by all means they should have a debate that criticizes clauses in the bill.

It is the clauses in the bill that will be ruled on by the courts which actually govern how the bill will operate. Please, a debate about a preamble that everyone knows is meaningless is not really a serious debate at all.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The hon. member for Vegreville—Lakeland.

Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Lakeland, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, you have spoiled my fun. I was looking forward to correcting you on that. The name of my constituency changed from Vegreville to Lakeland and I am quite proud and delighted with this change.

I am also delighted that I can be here taking part in a debate on a motion like this regarding a change to the preamble, which was brought forth by the member for Yorkton—Melville.

I believe by bringing this amendment to the legislation before the House, he has initiated some very important debate on an extremely important issue. We need that and I am proud to be able to represent the farmers of Lakeland constituency and I believe beyond that to some extent on this extremely important issue.

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Before I get started on my comments, I would just like to make a comment on the comments of the member for Hamilton—Wentworth. One of the comments he made was that a preamble is needed only if the legislation is unclear. He has got that right. This legislation is unclear.

We have asked for clarification. We have suggested clarification. We have put forth perhaps 30 amendments or more to try to clarify this legislation. Had the government done its job and had its members listened to farmers in the process, we would not have to do that. We would have clear legislation.

Unfortunately we do not, therefore we have to debate this preamble. In fact, one of the changes we called for was a change to section 5 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act. Section 5 is the part of the act that deals with who the board exists for. Section 5 says that the wheat board exists for the Government of Canada.

We proposed changes under Bill C-72. Bill C-4 is the reincarnation of Bill C-72. We suggested a change to section 5 so that it would clearly state in that section that the wheat board exists for the benefit of farmers.

This government has entirely refused to accept that change. I am upset by that. Farmers in my constituency are upset by that and this is a change we have to make to this legislation before it is passed. We know it will be passed somewhere down the road.

We will do everything we can of course to see to it that this bill does not pass because it is unacceptable. I want to get right to the group of amendments that we are debating here, which is the preamble. It was presented by the member for Yorkton—Melville.

I hear the member for Malpeque across the floor shouting some comments again. I want the record to show that it was that same member for Malpeque who refused an emergency debate on ending the postal strike just a few minutes ago in this House. I think that is intolerable.

We should not have a postal strike in this country, but I digressed. Let the record show that it was the member for Malpeque who in fact refused that this House allow that debate.

Back to the group of amendments that we are debating. What this group of amendments does is state clearly that the wheat board exists to maximize profits to grain farmers in western Canada. That is what this group of amendments will do and that is important because the current wheat board act does not state that.

In fact, it states clearly that the wheat board exists for the pleasure of the Government of Canada. I want to talk a little about that because there are some very important points to be made. We cannot assume that the wheat board will always do what is in the best interests of farmers.

I will go through a bit of history in the little time I have to demonstrate that very clearly.

• (1705)

I will start before the turn of the century. To market grain for our farmers, we had a series of co-operatives spring up. The Grain Growers was the first co-operative which became the United Grain Growers down the road with several amalgamations. The purpose of the growers was to maximize farmers' profits.

Later we had the prairie pools come in, Saskatchewan and Alberta. The purpose of those organizations was a little different. It was to maximize profits but also to share profits equally amongst members, to pool, to do what the wheat board now does. This was the purpose of the first prairie pools, to pool profits. Something else other than just maximizing the individual profit of a farmer came into the situation.

When we look a little farther down, in the late twenties what happened was the prairie pools were getting into trouble with their pooling. At the same time as holding back grain from market, hoping the prices would rise, the pools also speculated on the Winnipeg commodity exchange. Because of that they got into severe economic difficulty and went to the Government of Canada for a bailout. The bailout was the first version of the Canadian Wheat Board. Even the first version of the Canadian Wheat Board was not a monopoly. Farmers had a choice, which is exactly what we are calling for.

One of the important cornerstones of the pools was for farmers to have a choice. There would be no mandatory pooling in any grain or within the members of the co-operative, no mandatory pooling. That was something carried over to this first wheat board.

It was during the war to help with the war effort. I think it was somewhat justified although some people including people who became very important members of the Liberal cabinet later, like Mitchell Sharp, said that it was debatable whether the monopoly should have been put in place. There certainly was debate about that from Mitchell Sharp. In a book he wrote quite recently he condemned the monopoly of the wheat board staying in place after the war. He was somewhat less judgmental of the board during the war. Even important Liberals in the not too distant past have opposed this monopoly for the board.

Clearly the mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board during the war was not to maximize profits for farmers. The mandate was to get grain for the war effort at affordable prices. That was clearly the mandate.

Until the end of the war most Canadians, even a lot of farmers, were willing to tolerate that. Farmers care about this country. They were willing to do their share to help with the war effort, more than their share. That is so true.

After the war the monopoly was maintained for five years. Canadian farmers lost hundreds of millions of dollars through the maintenance of this monopoly. They had no choice but to market through the monopoly, and again, it was to help the war effort. Yet the burden was not spread amongst all members. After the war farmers paid a dear price for the board not having the express goal of maximizing profits. That was intolerable.

This monopoly was enshrined in the seventies into the wheat board act. Since then we see that there is nothing that states the purpose of the board is to maximize farmers' profit in the act. That is why this preamble is so important. It is not enough. We need it clearly stated in the wheat board act itself that the reason for the wheat board existing is to maximize profits. This legislation does nothing to help that situation.

I would like to close on a comment on what the debate is in western Canada. The debate is not whether we keep the board or not. A vast majority of Canadian western farmers want the board.

• (1710)

However, they do not want the monopoly. They want the freedom to choose whether they market through the board or around the board through their grain company or on their own to a customer, whether the customer be in Canada or somewhere else in the world. That is the debate. Polls have shown that a majority of western Canadian farmers favour giving farmers a choice in marketing grain.

These polls have been tabled at committee and are available. The proof is there. What we must do with this legislation is amend it so that farmers have that choice, a choice which I think is given to people in all other businesses, and the ability to choose whether they want to market through this government institution or in some other way.

I am looking forward to the rest of the debate on the amendments to Bill C-4.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am quite a bit older than you are so you probably do not remember *The Music Man*. I remember in the musical *The Music Man*, the guy came into town and he was going to help the young people in that town. He quickly identified that one of the problems in that town was the pool hall. I remember the song went "We've got trouble right here in River City and it is because of pool. That starts with *p* and that rhymes with *t* and that spells trouble".

Well, Mr. Speaker, we have trouble right here in River City, Ottawa, and the trouble is the power of the government to dictate what Canadians have to do. I would say it starts with power. It starts with *p* that rhymes with *t* and that spells trouble.

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Let me enlarge on what I am saying here. Here we have western farmers who have not been given a choice to even express themselves. We had this phoney ballot over there in the west where instead of giving the farmers an opportunity to check on the ballot a choice which many of them would have chosen, namely a dual marketing system, that was refused to them by these bureaucrats and autocrats here in Ottawa. Shall I call them the dictators here in Ottawa because that is exactly what happened.

Instead, now the government is spinning this support for the wheat board as a continuation of the unaccountable, autocratic system that is there and that is not to the benefit of farmers.

We are talking here about group one, the first amendment, the amendment to put in a preamble. One of those Liberals over there said "Well, the preamble is meaningless". I beg to differ. Whenever a court rules, part of its thinking is how to determine the intention of the legislators. If we declare what that intention is in the preamble it can have great weight in a court of law.

I would like to propose that the reason these Liberals do not want this particular amendment to pass and why they will autocratically with their party discipline overrule the common sense of a few of the Liberals over there who might vote for this is because its members must all vote together. It must force this.

Just as a little aside, something which annoys the dickens out of me is that here we are debating a very important issue and yet the decision on whether or not to vote for this amendment is going to be made by a person who, I venture to guess, will not have heard a word of this debate this afternoon. That is wrong.

We have lawyers, non-farmers and people from Ontario and the east who are not even covered by the wheat board. As a matter of fact, I am led to believe that the marketing system of grain in Ontario is by a fully elected board. If that is good enough for the farmers in Ontario why should we say to the farmers in western Canada "Oh, you don't know how to choose your own president of your board. We had better get the minister to appoint him"?

Do members know what I think? I think if the Liberals were to put a preamble here they would say whereas the Liberal government needs a place where it can appoint some of its friends and buddies and whereas the government needs a home for some of the failed Liberal candidates, therefore we should have a wheat board so that we have a place where we can appoint some of these guys.

• (1715)

Whereas we want to occasionally give these board members some money that is maybe higher than what the poor taxpaying blokes in Saskatchewan and Alberta and Manitoba can afford, they want to give these guys some of the big bucks and the big perks. Let's make sure the books stay closed. Let's make sure that the

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auditor general cannot touch it. Let's make sure that it is totally hidden and it is not accountable.

They would say whereas we want to do that for our buddies, let's make sure the farmers never find out. That is what their preamble would look like. No wonder they are against the preamble, because the preamble that is proposed by our member here is one that would hold them fully accountable. It is a preamble that would say the board exists for the farmers.

They keep saying this board is the best. Let the farmers choose.

I ask you this question, Mr. Speaker. I believe that you have had some business experience. I do not know whether you have had any farm experience, but I happen to have. I grew up on a farm in Saskatchewan. It just so happens that the wheat board covers wheat and barley, but if the quality of that grain is down where it sells for feed, then it does not necessarily have to go through the wheat board. A farmer can purchase or sell the feed grains outside of the wheat board.

This is going to amaze you. It will astound you. The Liberals claim this wheat board is the best thing that ever happened to western farmers, and yet I know of farmers who have taken their high quality grain and voluntarily declared it to be feed quality, the very lowest quality, because selling it as feed they get more for it than if they sold it through the blinking wheat board.

If that wheat board is serving the farmers under conditions like that, then I have a bridge to sell you somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. This is absolutely ridiculous.

The wheat board has to have a purpose for being. Why would there be any objection to having a preamble that says in simple terminology this is the purpose for this wheat board? Why should there be a wheat board without a stated purpose? That is really the debate here and I think the reason that the Liberals are opposed to this is they do not want the farmers to have it explicitly given. The Liberals do not want them to find out the truth about their purpose, motivation and the reason for the existence.

Instead, we need this preamble so that when the farmers of the prairies go to challenge the accountability of this wheat board in court, the judges can look at that preamble and say the purpose of this wheat board is to serve the farmers. The purpose of this wheat board is to maximize their profits, not sell their grain at beneath feed prices, but to get the maximum of profits.

The reason is that farming right now is very competitive. It is difficult to make a living on the farm these days, and I know of what I speak. My brother farms on land which I worked on when I was a kid. He and his boys are farming way more land and they are getting about three or four times the production per acre that we

did when I was a youngster. My brother is having a harder time making ends meet than my dad ever did. Why is that with three or four times the rate of production? It is because the farmers do not have the freedom to take what is rightfully their own and sell it where they want to sell it.

If the wheat board is doing its job, the wheat board will get the business. There is no doubt about it. If I am a farmer and I have some grain to sell, I am going to look at the different places where I can sell it. If I get \$2 a bushel here and \$3 here and \$4 here, unless there are some very strange extenuating circumstances, I will pick the one that gives me the best price, the \$4 per bushel.

Let us say that there is a case where the farmer is offered by the wheat board maybe \$2 a bushel with the hope of a future payment to make up the difference. That is how it works. Let us say that farmer sees another place where he can get maybe \$5 a bushel right now, cash.

● (1720)

I challenge the Liberals. There are two or three of them over there who can think for themselves. Will they have the courage to vote against their party and vote for common sense and say yes, if the farmer wants to have the right to sell his grain outside the wheat board he should have the right to do that?

That happens to be in my view almost a human right. Whose grain is it? Who seeded it? Who prepared the soil? Who paid the taxes? Who paid for the fuel? Who paid for the fertilizer? Who paid for the tractors and the machinery? Who worked 18 hours a day? Who prayed for rain? Who prayed for the locusts to go away? If we can get rid of the Liberals and the locusts, the farmers will have it made.

Let me be serious here at the end of my time. I really want to appeal very seriously to the members over there. The people who are making the decision on whether to vote for this are not hearing these arguments. May they please use their heads. May they please be independent in their thinking and vote for what is right.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, this is the first opportunity I have had to rise in the House to speak. I cannot think of a better subject to do it on. It is a subject that I have grown up with all my life and heard about all my life.

Before I get into my speech, I would like to thank the people who helped put me here, the people who worked on my campaign and the people who had enough courage to vote for me. I hope I do not let them down.

It is with a feeling of responsibility that I rise today to address the amendment to the wheat board act, Bill C-4, and in particular Motion No. 1.

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This wheat board act historically has been a subject of much discussion in the constituency I represent, the constituency of Lethbridge, and obviously right across the prairies. Quite frankly, it has been a very divisive subject. It has pit rural neighbour against rural neighbour and region against region. It has caused a lot of hardship and a lot of hard feelings among the farm families on the prairies, probably more than any other subject.

There are grain farmers on the prairies who want to see the Canadian Wheat Board completely dismantled. They are fed up with the lack of accountability to the producers. That is what this is all about. It is accountability to the producers, not accountability to the government, and the lack of options that these producers have to market their products.

We seem to be at an impasse here. The government has taken this bill, it has worked with it and brought it back and it is still not acceptable. Either the government continues to ignore the demands of producers, while many grain farmers are inappropriately fined and jailed, or it takes this sorry excuse of a bill back to the drawing board, makes some serious amendments and starts listening to the full scope of recommendations by producers and even its own Western Grain Marketing Panel.

When this government had the opportunity, why did it not change this tired legislation? Why did it choose not to? Why instead did it bring forward a half baked proposal that does not address the critical problems that are facing beleaguered grain farmers today?

If producers did not support the bill when it was Bill C-72 during the last Parliament, then they will not support this one. This government cannot change things just by slapping another number on it.

Sadly enough, perhaps this piece of recycled legislation is the best the Liberals can come up with. Considering that the Canadian Wheat Board controls \$5 billion in sales, has approximately 110 producers and that farm group after farm group testified at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food that this is a seriously flawed piece of legislation—I have letters from producer groups in western Canada explaining the problems they see with the legislation and begging this government to make changes—I guess I naively thought that the government would come up with something better, make a more serious effort on it.

In Bill C-4 the government has failed to prove to producers that it is in the grain marketing business. The time is long overdue for grain marketing to be treated with common sense using sound marketing principles in order to bring maximum returns to the producers for their products. That is what this bill should address, maximum returns for the producer. A previous prime minister even went on record in years past to say “why should we sell this grain?”

• (1725)

Monopolies in other industries are rarely tolerated, so why are grain producers exceptions to the rule?

Thousands of grain farmers have spoken and Bill C-4 shows that the government is not listening, which perhaps may help to explain why it is rushed through committee.

The government has not shown producers that it will be responsible to them through a completely producer elected board, insisting instead on appointing the key members of that board. The time has come for government to relinquish its monopoly on grain marketing.

A fully effective board of directors is fully elected board of directors if the voice of farmers is truly to be heard.

Subsequently, if the aforementioned amendment were adopted, section 3.02(4) would be deleted since it would not be necessary to specify equal powers between elected and non-elected directors.

The government has insinuated all the way through the process, and I heard the minister responsible say this, that the expertise to run this board does not exist among the producers. They have to have five appointed members because it is such a large business. I suggest to the government that it look at some of the operations these producers have if it wants to see efficiency in operations. It could learn something and could maybe incorporate some of those practices into the bill.

Just imagine if producers ran their operations like the government does. We do not hear of too many farmers who are running up huge deficits year after year, all the while adding to a huge debtload. If only governments were held to the same degree of accountability as producers.

The government has chosen to cherry pick through the recommendations of the Western Grain Marketing Panel, focusing on the recommendations that fit its agenda and ignoring the recommendations that fit the needs of producers. What happened to all the recommendations that producers and the panel supported? Why were the requests for marketing offices producers are asking for ignored? Why is the government so afraid to put some options on the table for producers? Why did the government not resolve the contentious and divisive issue when it had the chance? Where is the transparency that producers are demanding? The auditor general is still denied access to the wheat board operations. This in itself is ringing alarm bells with producer groups across the country.

The Canadian Wheat Board does not have to answer to the Access to Information Act. How can the directors act freely if they are bound by this secrecy? Why will the Liberal government not come clean?

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What has the government done in Bill C-4 to address the unbelievable problems in the grain transportation system in this country? Absolutely nothing. This government never even bothered to tackle the Canadian Wheat Board's role in grain transportation anywhere in Bill C-4.

Problems and inefficiencies cost grain producers dearly every crop year, year after year. The nightmare we experienced last year must not become a legacy to the efficiency or the lack thereof in our transportation system.

Why is it always the products of hardworking Canadian grain farmers that sit on rail sidings? Why are the grain cars put on sidings while other products continue to port? Could it be because neither the rail company nor the wheat board is penalized for late delivery? Could it be because the penalty goes directly to the producer, becoming just another transportation tax for producers to pay?

In closing, why when the Liberal government had the chance did it not address these problems? Why when the Liberal government had the chance, and took the time and went to the considerable effort of setting up a panel to make recommendations in producing the bill, did it not put to rest the suspicions of producers in the divisive aspect of the Canadian Wheat Board?

The rural families of Canada and the prairies, families on both sides of this issue, deserve far more.

The Deputy Speaker: 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

[Translation]

CHILD BENEFIT

Ms. Diane St-Jacques (Shefford, PC) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should review the level at which the child benefit is indexed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, in September, I moved a motion asking the government to review the level at which the child benefit is indexed.

• (1730)

I am now debating this motion as the spokesperson for the Progressive Conservative Party. I thank the members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for recogniz-

ing the importance of this issue, which is to help reduce child poverty.

First, let me explain the reasons that led me to table this motion. We are all proud to be Canadians. As we know, to be a Canadian is to be part of a society which is blessed with a quality of life, which is based on fairness, and which enjoys sound economic development. We rely on a Canadian way of doing things that promotes economic development and social justice. We are recognized all over the world as the defenders of tolerance and fairness. However, there is a fly in the ointment. Among all industrialized countries, we come in second place in terms of the number of children living in poverty, right behind the United States.

According to Campaign 2000, the changes that have occurred since 1989, when the government pledged to eliminate child poverty, look like this: the number of children living in poverty has increased by 46%; the number of two-parent families living in poverty has increased by 39%; the number of single parent families has increased by 58%; the number of children living in families where unemployment is chronic has increased by 44%; the number of children living in families on welfare has increased by 6% and, finally, the number of children living in unaffordable housing has increased by 60%. These figures speak volumes. The problem is serious. Today, almost 1.5 million children live in poverty.

I urge all hon. members to join the fight against this lack of equity. At the first ministers conference in June 1996, child poverty was put on the national agenda as a priority. Almost all premiers in Canada have asked their ministers responsible for social services to co-operate with the federal government on a new integrated child benefit.

The Minister of Human Resources Development recently announced this new benefit, and I congratulate him and his government on this initiative. A decision has been made to review the benefit and the respective roles of the federal, provincial and territorial governments in child assistance. The federal government intends to transfer to provincial and territorial governments the responsibility for helping low income working families. This function was filled by the earned income supplement, a program that will be integrated with the child tax benefit.

All low income families in Canada will receive this new combined benefit, whether the parents work or not. Provincial governments will no longer have to pay extra benefits to families on welfare for the dentist, the optometrist and many other services.

As I mentioned, the bill has not yet been announced. We all know it will come into force next July, but nobody really knows what is in it. It should define the role of the provinces. How much are they going to spend to alleviate child poverty, and how are they going to spend it? This undisclosed agreement is already called the reinvestment framework. Why is it called that? Because the federal government promised that the provinces would reinvest as much as the federal government, on a proportional basis of course, that is, the \$6 billion invested by the government and maybe the additional \$850 million it promised to invest in the next mandate.

The federal government will hand bigger and more equitable heques to all low income Canadian families. It has defined its own role more clearly, and we look forward to the reinvestment framework that will define the role of the provinces and territories.

• (1735)

Let us just say that this reinvestment framework will be, I hope, of a comprehensive nature because no support measure can in itself solve the problem of poverty. This is a vast problem that has to be addressed from a comprehensive point of view. Children are poor because their parents are poor.

Let us look at the report entitled "Improving Social Security in Canada". It shows how the Canadian family and its needs are changing. It says, quite rightly, that most social programs were created in the 1950s and 1960s, when the typical family included three children and two parents: a father at work and a mother at home. Today, the average family has less than two children, and both parents work.

Over the last 20 years, we have seen a steady increase in the number of double income couples, the number of working mothers with young children and the number of single parent families. Young parents are more educated, but they have unstable jobs, often part time, and without fringe benefits in most cases.

In 1990, the proportion of couples with school age children and with both parents working was 70%, compared to 30% in 1950.

To have a decent standard of living today, families need a double income. The family is changing, and support measures must change too. Many changes are needed. We need quality child care. We need to make support for the care of handicapped children more accessible. Child care services must be flexible to fit work schedules and work locations.

We have just seen how the social fabric of the family is changing, but everything else around the family is changing too. We must also look at community action programs for children. We must develop general approaches to problems related to children, prioritize new approaches and consolidate the ones that already exist, such as the community action program for children.

With the breakdown of the social fabric and the solitude felt by many people who live as shut ins in their apartments, not knowing their neighbours, we must rely on community organizations to renew the ties that have been lost and to rebuild our social fabric. We must help them, and this help is also part of a comprehensive vision.

There are also prenatal nutrition programs, or assistance to native communities, who are living in worrisome conditions, to say the least. As well, there are parental and maternity benefits. As

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I told you, the problem is extensive and must be examined in a comprehensive manner, which includes asking ourselves whether we really have achieved equality between the sexes because a legal framework exists, or whether the reality of the matter is something else again. Let us not forget that, of the 15.7% of children living with a single parent, that parent is their mother in 92.8% of cases, and that the vast majority of them, approximately 70%, live in poverty.

The longitudinal survey on children and youth revealed that one child in four is poor in Canada, that the economic disparity between them differs widely from one region of the country to another, that in Newfoundland one child in three lives under these conditions as opposed to one in four or five elsewhere in the country. It is a sorry state of affairs.

How can these children do well in school? How many of them arrive hungry, with no lunch or snack, having left chilly living quarters in clothes as thin as their parents' wallets? How many? One and a half million, one child in four. Under such conditions, neither you nor I nor any of my colleagues would do well.

Finally, we come back to the improved and expanded federal benefit. This benefit will mean that many families will have more money to help them make ends meet, and for many of them the benefit will play a vital role. But even the most generous benefit would not stamp out child poverty, because even in its improved form the benefit will still feel the effects of inflation next year.

I will, if I may, quote the Minister of Human Resources Development, who said recently at a dinner with members of the Laval chamber of commerce that by "putting our fiscal house in order, Canada has regained some leeway and the ability to make choices, important choices for society. And governing is about making choices".

• (1740)

Later in his speech he said also "There cannot be any real and strong economic union without having also a collaborative and dynamic social union to support it. The national child benefit is the latest example of this dynamic relationship between our social values and the concrete initiatives that are taken. One thing is certain: children who are cold and hungry when they arrive at school are in no condition to learn. This is unfair. In Canada, this makes no sense. Children are our future, the future of our society and the future of our economic development". And what he says is true.

The mechanism for the benefit is simple: the government will increase the revenue of low income families. As for the provinces, since they will have to pay less for social assistance, they will be able to invest again in programs and services. This is what the minister pointed out when he said "Each province will benefit

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from greater flexibility. Quebec's flexibility, for example, will increase by \$150 million a year".

But I would also like to point out that the people also need flexibility. Just imagine, if the benefit were indexed to the cost of living, the cost would increase by \$170 million a year. That is \$170 million the government saves each year, but it is also \$170 million less for the underprivileged every year. That is because there is no protection for the child benefit. That is because the benefit is only partially indexed.

Let me explain. The amount of the benefit is adjusted every year, but only if inflation is above 3%. Because inflation has remained under that level for a number of years now, and following the upswing in the Canadian economy, there has never been any increase or adjustment to their benefits.

Children are dependent on what governments decide. If we are giving them something today, it is because we gave them nothing before. We are only catching up. They have to be allowed to keep up with the cost of living. Canadian families are suffering from declining purchasing power, and the underprivileged have trouble meeting their family obligations.

The child benefit could be an important safeguard against the devastating effects of child poverty, but the value of the benefit has constantly declined over the last decade, because it is only partially indexed to inflation.

The federal government spent \$4.1 billion dollars in child benefits in 1984, and \$5.1 billion in 1994. This represents a 25% increase compared to an increase of some 46% in the cost of living. If the 1984 benefits had really been indexed to inflation, they would have risen to \$6 billion in 1994.

We understand that some decisions, such as setting a limit for indexation, were based on a certain context. When this was adopted in 1985 by the Conservative government of the day, the country was emerging from the economic crisis of 1982, and needed to tighten up its administration.

We were heading toward a financial dead end. This was what the right decision had to be. But, as the Minister of Human Resources has said, public finances have been put on a sounder footing. Now we have to make societal choices. To govern is to make choices, as the minister has said, but it is also knowing how to adapt.

According to the Canadian council on social development, if we add up all the 1% and 2% increases in inflation over recent years, the loss for Canadian families represents 13% of total benefits. This now ought to be addressed.

Inflation raises the nominal value of family income. Far more families are moving over the income limit every year by receiving the child benefit, even if the real value of their income has not

increased. The cumulative impact is a reduction in the child benefit of some \$150 to \$170 million yearly. As a consequence, an additional investment in the benefit system merely replaces what has been lost in recent years.

There is a way of counteracting this effect of inflation, and it is to agree to examine the level of indexation, which is why I rise to defend this motion today.

In 1996, the government recognized that the same situation for our seniors' benefits needed remedying. I am therefore asking that we do as much for our children.

• (1745)

I would like to conclude by reminding the House that we must tell our children that they are important to us. We must remind them that the intention in 1989 of eliminating child poverty by the year 2000 still stands. We must not forget, hon. members of Parliament, that we must be fair in the choices we make in society. We must not forget that it is the children living in poverty today who will be turning the wheels of the economy tomorrow. We must not forget to be fair in the way we consider the future.

Now that Canada's economy seems to be back on track, we must remember that we can now look ahead and put social justice in this country back in balance. To this end, we must present all of our children and their families with an honest and a realistic schedule for resolving the problem of child poverty.

We must remind federal, provincial and territorial authorities that, if they do not work together in carrying out their responsibilities and their duties toward those who are most disadvantaged, we will not resolve the problem.

I am not really trying to move them along, but for a number of years we have produced endless reports and studies and I think it is high time to show the million and a half children living in poverty that their country is trying to find ways to improve their situation. Let us give them the means we consider necessary to resolve their situation, and later on they will come to recognize our good intentions.

Let us try to give our children a healthy space to develop. A balance between federal, provincial and territorial governments and getting things in hand in the community will lead to the establishment of effective structures that will put an end to the devastating effect of poverty on children.

I call on the members of this House, therefore, in order to eliminate the negative effect of inflation, to review the level at which the child benefit is indexed, as they did with seniors' benefits. Let us reclaim Canada's title of champion of social justice.

[English]

Mr. Tony Valeri (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this private member's motion which recommends that the government review the level at which the Child Tax Benefit is indexed.

I am unable to support the motion and in the few minutes available to me I would like to explain my reasons. Before I begin I want to emphasize that the government continues to place a very high priority on making assistance available to families with children, particularly those at the low and modest income levels.

Let me take a moment to explain how the indexing provisions work with respect to the child tax benefit. Under the Income Tax Act the child tax benefit is partially indexed on an annual basis. It goes up each year by the amount the consumer index exceeds 3%. Many of my colleagues will recall that this policy of partial indexation was introduced to help address the severe fiscal problems facing the federal government.

Partial indexation of the child tax benefit is consistent with how other elements of the personal tax system are treated. For example, the basic personal credit, the spousal credit and the tax brackets are all partially indexed. This is a policy which applies broadly across the tax system.

The Income Tax Act has been amended a number of times to allow for the child tax benefit discretionary increases. In actual fact the motion before us today should be considered as a proposal to amend the Income Tax Act and move to full indexation of the child tax benefit base and threshold.

As hon. members know the only realistic alternative to discretionary increases is the full indexation of the child tax benefit. While the government fully supports the broader goal of increasing assistance to families with children, let us not forget that with an inflation rate of 1.6% per year, restoring full indexation of the child tax benefit would cost the federal government about \$160 million per year. In addition, it would be difficult to restore full indexation to some tax parameters and not others.

The federal revenue implications of moving to full indexation of all tax parameters are quite substantial, with a cost of \$850 million a year. The cost is cumulative, so it means that it will be \$850 million in year one, \$1.7 billion in year two, and so on. Such revenue losses could threaten the government's program to restore fiscal balance. Because of these potential fiscal costs the government is unable to support the motion.

• (1750)

However, I assure the House that the government will review the policy of partial indexation once our fiscal position makes it

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possible to do so. In the meantime the government is committed to targeting additional assistance to priority areas like families.

In the last two budgets, for example, the government increased by \$850 million the assistance provided to low income families through the child tax benefit. Since July 1997 over 720,000 low income working families have received increased benefits as a result of restructuring and enriching the working income supplement.

Maximum benefits increased from \$500 per family to \$605 for the first child, \$405 for the second child and \$330 for each additional child. Next July these benefits will be extended to all low income families as part of the joint federal-provincial initiative known as the national child benefit system.

The national child benefit system has three key objectives: to prevent and reduce child poverty, to improve work incentives and to simplify administration.

Under the national child benefit system the federal government will assume a larger role in providing basic income support to families with children. The provinces and territories will make corresponding reductions to the child component of their social assistance payments and reinvest all the savings in complementary programs and other benefits and services for low income families. For the lowest income families the proposed increases in the child tax benefit represent a 50% increase in federal benefits.

Before closing I remind hon. members the government has promised a further enrichment of child benefits of the same magnitude during its mandate. As I stated earlier, these actions demonstrate that assistance to families with children, particularly low and modest income families, is and will continue to be a priority of the government.

Let me repeat that the government will review the policy of partial indexation once it is fiscally appropriate to do so. For these reasons I am unable to support the motion before the House. I encourage all my colleagues to do the same and not support the motion.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak today to the motion moved by the member for Shefford, which states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should review the level at which the child benefit is indexed.

One can question the brevity of this motion, the strength of its wording or the message to be conveyed, but the fact remains that it is interesting to be able to debate this issue.

This is rather ironic. Members will recall that the present partial indexation was introduced by the Tory government of the day. This partial indexation works as follows. It was decided that as long as

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the inflation rate did not reach 3%, there would be no indexation. This means that, since 1992, there has been no indexation whatsoever. Therefore, families have been systematically losing money at a higher rate than the real inflation rate, because if the real inflation rate had been taken into account, the child benefit would have been increased accordingly. Right now, there is no indexation. For the families involved this represents a shortfall of \$850 million.

What is even more ironic is that the Liberals have been pursuing the same policy.

• (1755)

But in 1992, the current Deputy Prime Minister stated "The government talks about this new child benefit program it has come up with, but let us look at this program. In fact, a family with a \$40,000 annual income will only receive \$44 more each year. Within three years, this benefit will be reduced by 10% and, in ten years, most families will no longer be receiving any assistance because this benefit is not indexed for inflation". That is what the current Deputy Prime Minister said in February 1992.

When the Liberals came to power, they picked up where the Conservative government left off. They chose not to change this situation. According to the Caledon Institute, which conducts quality social analyses, the child tax benefit is infected by the partial deindexation virus.

It is a losing proposition for all families. Those that were entitled to benefits lose out on full deindexation, but low income families are much harder hit. In their case, whatever amount is not indexed represents money they cannot depend on for their daily requirements. This is a correction the Liberals failed to make and should have made when they came to office again in 1993. Today, they are being reminded of that fact the motion put forward by the Conservative member.

It will also be remembered that, before 1984, the family policy included family allowance payments, child tax credits and exemptions for dependent children. In 1984, some \$6.7 billion was paid out under this family policy.

With the changes introduced in 1997, this amount had gone down to \$5.1 billion, which means a \$1.6 billion cut in payments made to families over 13 years. So, the \$850 million that the human resources development minister said would be put back into the system will only partly offset the cuts made since 1993. That is why we may feel it is very relevant to take a good look at the child benefit indexation rate.

I take this opportunity to remind you of the somewhat prophetic words of Benoît Tremblay, who said in 1992—he was the member for Rosemont at the time—that it was tantamount to giving up on having a real family policy. We are moving away from a

family-based policy toward a policy designed to fight poverty, but we are no longer doing so by using an integrated approach that would allow families in Quebec and Canada to enjoy adequate benefits.

Mr. Tremblay said "The perverse effects will be felt gradually". These perverse effects have indeed become reality. What the Deputy Prime Minister said in 1992 did happen, and now we are facing a situation where, from year to year—because we are not about to see a 3% rate of inflation in the coming years—the same thing will systematically occur.

This means that, at the rate things are going, the \$850 million shortfall generated between 1992 and 1997 may well exceed \$1 billion by the year 2000. It also means that over an equivalent period in the future, let us say until the year 2002, the shortfall for families will total \$1.5 billion.

It is therefore urgent to look at the situation and to make up for this shortfall generated by a decision which was made by the Conservatives and maintained by the Liberals, and which now has a major negative impact on all families in Quebec and Canada.

The hon. member for Shefford is right in saying that the government should review the level at which the child benefit is indexed.

She is right, but I think we should do more than to review the level at which the child benefit is indexed. We should actually look at the possibility of fully indexing the child benefit. The government would then realize that, as far as this House is concerned, full indexation is the solution.

It must be remembered that the 3% rule came into effect following years during which the inflation rate had stood at 10%, 12%, 8%, 6% and 5%. Three per cent seemed very reasonable then. It was truly felt that automatic indexation would take place year after year. But this was not the case.

• (1800)

We have seen inflation rates of 2%, 2.5% and 2.8%, but it is the general inflation rate that counts. It can happen in a given year that the cost of living for daily necessities increases by more than 3%, but there is no indexing because the general cost of living index is less than 3%. So year after year, families have been absorbing this.

When we ask why there is an increasing number of poor children, why there is an increasing number of families who cannot make ends meet and why we are in the process of building a split society, the answer I would say is that we have been slowly undermining the middle class by eliminating a benefit that allowed people to have an adequate standard of living and remain above the poverty line.

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Therefore, we can say because of all this that we have a policy that discourages families with children, that the family policy has been replaced by the fight against poverty, but this does nothing to further the objective of a true family policy.

The government likes to say that it cares for children and that it wants to fight child poverty, but the \$850 million that it is promising to invest will only partially remedy the shortfall. An amount of \$1.5 billion was mentioned earlier. So there will still be a lot of room for improvement.

To achieve this, to ensure that the motion by the member for Shefford can be more effective, I will propose an amendment. I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after the word "review" and substituting the following: "the possibility of fully indexing the child benefit."

So the final version of the motion would read:

That in the opinion of this House, the government should review the level at which child benefit is indexed.

Therefore, in this period of prebudgetary consultations, the government will be able to determine the figures and make the assessments necessary to ensure fairness once again, to give our families a chance, and to send the message that we want families to take their rightful place and to have the financial means to provide an adequate education for their children. We have to restore full indexation and thus prevent a recurrence of the unfairness we have today, when inflation rates of 1.2%, 2% or 2.5% are depriving families of these benefits.

I will end with this and I would like to submit my amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe the amendment is in order.

[*English*]

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, when there is a debate about the welfare of Canadians, particularly young people, everyone is very interested. I commend my colleague from Shefford for bringing forward her private member's motion which reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should review the level at which the child benefit is indexed.

• (1805)

An amendment has been proposed by the Bloc to bring the level to full indexation.

As we are all aware as Canadians, or at least most of us who have had families, the child benefits payable in Canada have undergone many changes during the past two decades. The 1985 budget, which is about 12 years ago, subjected the entire child benefit

system to partial indexing. That is what the member for Shefford is suggesting we need to study.

Benefits increase only if inflation exceeds 3%. Since the Bank of Canada and the Government of Canada have made a commitment not to allow inflation to go over 3%, what we essentially have is no benefit increases even though there are inflation increases, which means that the value of the benefit is steadily eroding.

This partial deindexing has now been in place for 12 years. It really amounts to an automatic annual tax increase. This is because inflation still erodes the value of the benefit and erodes the value of the threshold at which maximum benefits are paid. There is a double whammy which increases the tax payable for families with children.

Neither the child benefit nor its threshold of \$25,921 for maximum payment is fully protected against inflation. The value of the benefit has steadily declined for 12 years.

The Liberal government is doing a lot of breast beating about child poverty and how it will attack it. It is very interesting the government has done nothing about something that has eroded the disposable income in the hands of families who have to look after children.

Unbelievable though it might be, the parliamentary secretary just said "We would like to do things like this but we will oppose the motion because there will be a fiscal cost to this". He is really saying "We need the tax bucks, so forget it". This keeps eroding the income of poor families who then produce the poor children the Liberals say they care so much about. Sometimes we do wonder if it is not true that Liberalism simply is saying the right thing but doing nothing.

The partial deindexing of the child benefit like the partial deindexing of the so-called refundable GST credit and the partial deindexing of the personal income tax system is regressive. We use these buzz words a lot, but it really means that it hits poor people more than it hits higher income people. This falls most heavily on the working poor, the very ones with the poor children, the child poverty the Liberals have said they will do so much about.

These tax increases are not transparent. The Liberals can say one thing and do another. It is very easy for them to hide this tax increase. Although it happens every year the tax increase is never debated in the House and most Canadians do not even realize it is going on. It is like the bracket creep we keep talking about. It is the same sort of thing.

One of Canada's leading social critics says that this amounts to social policy by stealth. I find repugnant that this is from a government, from a party that is always talking about compassion

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for the poor and the downtrodden. It says it will help those most in need and to redistribute the social benefits of the country to those who need them the most.

Yet what do we find? We find policy after policy after policy, including the current increases in the Canada pension plan premium, which fall most heavily on those least able to pay penalizing the families and the children most in need of the extra dollars the government is sucking out.

• (1810)

This erosion of net family income continues in many ways. The child benefit is only one example. It results in higher and higher taxes.

The average Canadian family has suffered a \$3,000 drop in real income since the Liberals took office in 1993. If the Liberals had actually said their policies would cost \$3,000 more a year by the time they were out of office, how many Canadians would have voted for that?

What did the Liberals get elected on? Jobs, jobs, jobs. They were also to get rid of the GST. They did neither. They dropped the average Canadian family income by \$3,000. No wonder there is child poverty. Now the Liberals can ride to the rescue and say that they will certainly do something about it. They caused it, so they should do something about it.

Between 1951 and 1973 real family incomes more than doubled, but since the mid-1970s total family earnings in real dollars adjusted for inflation have actually not improved at all. This in spite of the fact that more and more two people in a family are working. There is less ability for parents to make choices about caring for their own children because they simply need the extra dollars from both of them working.

Despite the rising numbers of dual income families, total inflation adjusted after tax incomes have fallen by \$2,733 per worker since 1984. This is simply unacceptable. It is no wonder families do not have enough money to feed and clothe their kids, to pay the mortgage or the rent, and to make sure that their children have the necessities of life. It is because the government thinks it is more necessary for the government to have the money than for the children to have it.

This is incredible. I hope nobody misses this fact. Canadian taxpayers must start paying taxes at an income level of about \$6,460. If they make that grand sum of \$6,460 per year the government says "All right, guys, start paying up". Who can live on \$6,000? Somehow government thinks that if they make over that they owe the government something.

A family of four at an income level of \$11,800 has to pay income tax. It is brutal, absolutely brutal. Under the seniors benefit the government says they do not have to pay tax for a family income of \$11,000, but a family of four has to pay tax. No wonder there are

poor children and families in the country. Yet every year the government wants more. It takes more and more. I am happy, Mr. Speaker, that you and many other members of the House care about this matter.

The average Canadian family spends more in taxes than on food, clothing and shelter combined. In 1996 Statistics Canada said the average Canadian family spent \$21,000 on taxes but only \$17,000 on food, clothing and shelter. Government takes more out of us than we have left to look after our needs.

The Liberal government is simply increasing the rate. It has an insatiable appetite for tax dollars. That is why we call the finance minister a taxaholic. That is exactly what he is. One bottle is not enough any more. It has to be more and more every year.

The Reform Party simply says enough is enough. When Canadians make money they should be able to keep the amount necessary to feed their children, to clothe their families and to provide them with shelter and the necessities of life.

The government takes a whole chunk of the money Canadians need to look after their families and then says that it is giving some back. The parliamentary secretary just said they would like to give more if they could afford it. They will someday but in the meantime they cannot because they have fiscal costs. It would cost them too much. They need our money.

We have to start giving Canadians tax relief. Government does not have the right to take more and more money.

• (1815)

We need to give Canadians tax relief. We need to look at things like this indexation.

We support the motion of this member and hope the House will as well.

[Translation]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to take part in this debate on the child benefit. It is an issue that is very important for children and families in this country. I would like to congratulate the member for Shefford on her decision to move this motion. On behalf of all my colleagues in the New Democratic Party, I would like to indicate our support for the motion as amended by the Bloc Quebecois.

[English]

This motion is clearly an important one for all of us to be debating in this House. It calls for a review of the indexing of the child tax benefit. It is a very important initiative that should be part—and I add, a part—of a number of changes to the child tax benefit and to a whole range of initiatives dealing with children's needs and children's poverty in this country.

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It is clear that the child tax benefit will erode over time if it remains partially indexed. A portion of its gains will be lost to inflation each year. The inflation over 3% formula, in operation for more than a decade, means that the value of child benefit declines in real terms by 3% each year as well.

As the member for the Reform just mentioned, it is in fact "social policy by stealth", as so aptly put by Ken Battle of the Caledon Institute. As my colleague from the Bloc pointed out, the origin of this problem does rest with the Progressive Conservatives. Let us keep in mind that the Tories introduced this negative feature into federal benefits, into the personal income tax system and the refundable GST credit, and it is the Liberals who have continued this policy.

Without a doubt in our mind, this government, the Liberal government today, must move quickly to reindex benefits to inflation to stop this decline.

As I said at the outset, this is about one benefit, one initiative important to our goal, a goal I believe we all hold in common: to reduce child poverty, but it should be recognized as only a beginning. We must have in this country a comprehensive strategy to reduce child poverty that includes specifically setting targets for reducing unemployment.

How can we have a strategy to reduce child poverty unless we reduce unemployment? In fact, no strategy to reduce child poverty can be complete without a real target for reducing unemployment and a will to meet those targets.

Statistically speaking, it should be noted that for every 1% drop in the unemployment rate, 72,000 children can be lifted out of poverty.

There is another element that must be part of any strategy to address child poverty in this country today. That initiative is something that has been promised so many times over by Progressive Conservatives and Liberals in this country in election after election after election and then put on the back burner. That must be raised again to the forefront of our political agenda, and that of course is affordable child care.

The child tax benefit is structured to impel low income mothers into the workforce without providing funding for quality child care options.

• (1820)

The federal government should be ashamed of its decision time and time again to keep this issue on the back burner despite clear commitments, especially in the 1993 election, to ensure that this country would have a national child care plan to provide quality, affordable, accessible spaces for families right across this country.

There is no discussion initiated at present by the federal government around this issue at all. There is no hint of any plans from the

Liberal government to strengthen child care as a complement to the child benefit.

How can we address child poverty? How can we assist families cope in these very difficult times unless we make very serious inroads in the provision of such a valuable service for this country?

The statistics speak for themselves. For all the time the Liberals have been in power and failed to keep their promise on a national child care plan, failed in providing a meaningful social assistance program in this country and failed in so many other respects, in that time 200,000 more children have fallen below the poverty line.

More and more families, especially single parent families headed by women with small children, are struggling on a day to day basis and falling further and further behind.

It is absolutely imperative for this House, for this Parliament to look at the child benefit in a much bigger context. The \$600 million in new federal spending announced in the 1997 budget is only a drop in the bucket compared to the billions of dollars the federal government spends on other programs, the additional billions the federal government hands out in tax expenditures and the \$7 billion Ottawa has cut from federal social transfers to the provinces under the CHST.

The national child benefit, however important, does not really offer any new gains. It merely substitutes ground already lost. As a result of a decision in the late 1980s to partly remove inflation protection from the existing child tax benefit, its value has been eroding by up to \$150 million a year.

The government's announcement of \$850 million down payment or \$600 million in the new federal spending will only serve to bring poor families closer to where they were when the Liberals took power in 1993.

Many of the provinces today are pushing for a further commitment of \$2.5 billion into the fund by the year 2000. Certainly it is our hope and I hope the hope of many other members in this House that this government, the Liberal government, will move ahead with such a commitment.

Without a commitment to a comprehensive anti-poverty agenda, the child benefit is but a band-aid solution that actually acts to depress wages and further marginalize poor people.

Children are poor because their parents are poor. Eliminating child and family poverty will require a concerted effort on all our parts. It will require and demand a comprehensive strategy from the federal Liberal government that would include many essentials, that would include job creation, housing, child care, training and post-secondary education.

We have no hesitation in supporting the motion today, particularly as amended by the Bloc to ensure full indexation of the national child benefit. However, we want to register our concerns about the absence of a comprehensive strategy from the Liberal government

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and use this opportunity to call on the government to come forward with a meaningful comprehensive strategy.

We must act now in order to put Canada back on track to meeting the all-party goal, members will remember, introduced in this House in 1989 by the then NDP leader Ed Broadbent, a goal that said we must end child poverty by the year 2000.

• (1825)

Well, we are awfully close to the year 2000 and we have only seen child poverty worsen in this country. It is getting more serious with each day that passes because of a failure on the part of our national government to take up this issue and put in place a comprehensive strategy that gets at the roots of the problem.

Let us use this opportunity today to recommit ourselves to that goal to eliminate child poverty from this country as quickly as we can.

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to debate the motion of the hon. member for Shefford. I congratulate her for bringing this matter to the House. It is something we are all concerned about and that is the issue of child poverty.

We talked a lot tonight about the issue of inflation and how we need to adjust child tax credits for that. I would like to come at this from a different angle.

It was not that long ago that not all of our legislation, through the income tax system, was totally indexed to the rate of inflation. In fact, we lived in inflationary times. Peoples' wage agreements and various other aspects of their financial lives were tied to the consumer price index.

I suggest that that creates an inflationary spiral. In other words, every time the rate of inflation went up, everybody's income went up, child tax credits went up, everything else went up and it similarly impacted on inflation. I cannot help but impress on the member how devastating that inflationary time we lived in not long ago was to low income families. They are the ones who are less likely to be able to adjust to the dramatic rising costs of living, their rent, food, et cetera.

That is one aspect I want to address on why I oppose the member's motion. I believe that if we move in this specific area of child tax benefits, we will similarly be obligated to do the same thing throughout the whole income tax system. You cannot very well argue that at one point is a necessity and yet at another point it is not.

If you look at it in broad terms you will also see that this would create over \$850 million in lost tax revenues. Not only that, it also brings us back into this inflationary economy which will have a tremendous dilatory effect on low income families.

The government is concerned about the issue of child poverty. We did in fact inject \$850 million into the envelope of an enhanced child tax benefit system for working income families. As we speak members of both federal and provincial governments are debating the issue of how to deliver this program within provincial envelopes.

I am happy to see that one of the things our government is insisting on is that there be an accountability package that goes with it. In other words, it is not simply money locked into an envelope of a benefit package but there is some way as a country we can measure the success of those programs. In other words, there is some way to measure if child malnutrition has been improved.

These are things that are not so easy to jump up and be in favour of and implement. They take time and effort and dedication.

• (1830)

I am very pleased to be part of a party and a government dedicated to the issue of child poverty, trying to find ways not only to get money out to those families most in need but also to ensure that money gets to those children to alleviate the very problems that some of the members have brought out here today.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order please. It being 6.30 p.m., the period set aside for Private Members' Business has now ended and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

[*English*]

When the House resumes consideration of this matter, the hon. member for Durham will have five minutes remaining in his speech.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly a pleasure to see you in the chair this evening.

I rise today on a very serious issue dealing with impaired driving in Canada. Last October 24, I asked the Minister of Justice if she would table rapidly amendments to the Criminal Code dealing with this serious issue. I also asked her if she would commit to concrete steps on behalf of the government to review the Criminal Code,

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roadside procedures, and enact a victims bill of rights in unison with an effort to combat drunk driving in Canada.

The minister to date has not committed to either of those requests. One thing that we have seen in the past is that her predecessor and, I would submit, the current Minister of Justice have given lip service to amendments in this area. They have often talked of it and they have appeased, I would suggest, to some degree victims rights groups and those concerned with this issue by giving the appearance of wanting to do something about it, seeming very sincere and genuine in their efforts.

However, to date we have not seen anything concrete either by way of a legislative initiative or even the time spent in talking to these groups.

If there is anything that has become clear over the past number of months in this House on the issue of impaired driving it is that the statistics and the effect on the ground that impaired drivers have on the roads and highways throughout the country and on the lives of Canadians are significant. The statistics are absolutely shocking when one delves into them.

The minister in her answers to the questions indicated that she was waiting for a report to be tabled by the transportation department. As well, she was waiting to meet further with her provincial counterparts. I again suggest that this is a delay because it is very clear that none of these individuals in the Department of Transport or her provincial counterparts can effect an immediate change to the Criminal Code of Canada. That responsibility lies with the minister herself.

I reiterate today what I have said previously. In my mind, the Minister of Justice has an opportunity to do something and to do something quickly.

I want to suggest a few things in the time I have. The statistics I have indicated have been stated time and time again: 4.5 persons killed in Canada every 24 hours, every day of the week, 365 days of the year. Impaired drivers injure or kill over 300 people in Canada every day. In 1995 alone, 519 people were killed across the country by impaired drivers. These are shocking statistics.

It is very clear that alcohol significantly increases the risk every time a person gets behind the wheel, regardless of the level of intoxication.

It is time to do something and quickly. The most effective way to do that is to bring in amendments to the Criminal Code that would strengthen police ability to deal with impaired driving. Nothing has been done to date.

I suggest there are concrete things the government can do today. As a start it would be to lower the blood alcohol concentration that is criminal in this country, to review the Criminal Code with respect to reasonable and probable grounds required by police

officers so that they might investigate crash sites involving death and serious bodily harm. That evidence of an accident would, in and of itself, be grounds for police officers to make a demand.

• (1835)

The government could change the language in the Criminal Code to reflect the seriousness of impaired driving accidents involving death and the suggestion would be to characterize it as vehicular homicide. If nothing else, this would emphasize the seriousness of the offence.

The creation of these new standards would also go hand in hand with the enactment of a victims bill of rights which would include and enhance greater participation of victims in the criminal trial process.

If the Minister of Justice is committed to this issue and is prepared to do more than just lip service then these issues will be brought up further in the justice committee and will be acted on rather than simply given fair comment and ongoing debate.

This is something the government must take a leadership role in. The Canadian public has spoken very clearly. Eighty per cent of people in this country want the government to act on these issues.

Ms. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I point out to the hon. member that things are not as simple as he puts them. There has been much discussion in this House on this issue. Despite what the hon. member said, we are on the record as saying this is a serious issue and we are taking it very seriously. The minister will be taking it up with her provincial counterparts.

I remind the hon. member, as a member of the justice committee, that the justice committee has already stated that we will be dealing with the issue of drinking and driving as well as with the issue of victims rights.

[*Translation*]

This debate shows that it is obvious that impaired driving is a problem we dearly want to see resolved, whatever our political persuasion. Although members do not all agree on the best solutions to this problem, they all share the same goal, which is to reduce the number of cases of impaired driving.

[*English*]

Recent statistics from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics were released yesterday. The rate of persons charged with impaired driving in 1996 went down by 7% from what it was the previous year. The 1996 rate showed a marked decrease of 47% compared with the 1986 rate. That does not mean we are proud of these statistics or that we should all say the problem has been solved, but contrary to the statistics mentioned by the hon. member, these recently released statistics indicate the rate of persons charged with impaired driving has gone down. For 1996 all the jurisdictions in

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Canada reported a decrease in the rate of persons charged with impaired driving.

The centre stated that in looking at the adult court survey data included in the *Juristat* that unlike other offences under the Criminal Code, persons charged with impaired driving are more likely to be found guilty.

The minister is very committed to bringing forth some solutions to this problem. She will be—

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the parliamentary secretary. The member for Frontenac—Mégantic.

BC MINE

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on November 4, I reminded the Minister of Human Resources Development that 300 miners in Black Lake had lost their jobs, that their average age was 52, that the region is suffering high unemployment, and that these workers were calling for a modified POWA program.

Louise Harel in Quebec is in agreement. Jean Dupéré, the president of Lab Chrysotile, is in agreement. Only our Minister of Human Resources Development in Ottawa is refusing to budge.

The minister should sit down and take a serious look at the issue of these men from the BC mine in Black Lake. Black Lake is four kilometres from Thetford, and the small *a* asbestos region is not the same as the large *A* Asbestos region. The guys from the BC mine are not workers from British Columbia, as the parliamentary secretary to the Minister for International Cooperation claims.

Why does the Minister of Human Resources Development himself not reply to our questions regarding the creation of a modified POWA program for the workers of the BC mine? The department is completely adrift.

• (1840)

All the big shots in the Liberal Party are getting involved: the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for International Cooperation, and tonight, the reply will probably come from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice.

That is why they think the BC Mine workers are from British Columbia and that is also why the minister himself is wrong in portraying the city of Asbestos as the capital of the asbestos industry.

The minister should leave the war veterans aside and take care of the BC Mine veterans. Furthermore, he should address the issue of cooperation between Quebec and Canada instead of letting the

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for International Cooperation stumble in his place.

The people in the Black Lake region would be better served if cabinet knew that Black Lake is not Asbestos and that the BC Mine is in Black Lake and not in British Columbia.

Most of these workers are over 50 and they are entitled to a modified POWA because, on March 7, 1996, an application to that effect was submitted to the Minister of Human Resources Development; furthermore, the program must be modified because Jean Dupéré is ready to make his own contribution to this POWA.

So I am very eager to hear the reply of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice.

[*English*]

Ms. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister, despite the fact that he is not here, is sensitive, open and always willing to listen to Canadians.

As we have previously indicated, the government recognizes difficulties experienced by Canadians who lose their jobs, particularly those affected by the closing of the mine in Black Lake, in the hon. member's riding. However, this layoff cannot be considered under the program for older workers adjustment.

[*Translation*]

The POWA ended last March because, among other things, it was not fair and equitable to all older workers in Quebec and Canada. The program was offered only in some provinces. The Government of Canada assumed 70% of the cost and the provinces 30%. There were so many restrictions to the program that a good number of older workers simply could not qualify.

The government generously offered almost \$3 million to help the miners at the British Canadian miner re-enter the workforce. The Department of Human Resources Development went from passive income support to proactive measures in order to help workers re-enter the workforce. Provinces also worked along that line.

[*English*]

The employer has always indicated its willingness to help workers. The Government of Quebec is prepared to pay its 30% share of a program which no longer exists because of its inequities.

[*Translation*]

Our government wants to work in co-operation with the company and the province of Quebec for the benefit of Quebec workers.

The Deputy Speaker: 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 6.44 p.m.)

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

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