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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, February 4, 1998

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 4, 1998

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: As is our practice on Wednesday we will now sing *O Canada*, and we will be led by the hon. members for Beauséjour—Petitcodiac and Acadie—Bathurst.

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

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Ms. Sophia Leung (Vancouver Kingsway, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Canadian Heritage for her recent visit to Vancouver.

The minister participated in a discussion with 25 leaders of arts and culture in B.C. This is the first such encounter in B.C. to my knowledge. Our meeting was very productive and revealed a need for further discussion on Canadian culture. The people of B.C. want to have their say in creating the Canada of tomorrow.

The participants were delighted to speak on cultural issues. They value the minister's work as a champion for Canadian culture and her willingness to engage in discussion on this important topic.

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CONDITIONAL SENTENCING

Mr. Jack Ramsay (Crowfoot, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Alberta court of appeal's scathing indictment of the Liberals' legal loophole called conditional sentencing is completely justified.

The court of appeal stated that the use of this skimpily drafted legislation undermines respect for the law. This scathing judgment is fully justified and here are just some of the reasons why.

Darren Ursel received a conditional sentence after abducting and sodomizing a young woman. Eric Robertson walked free after pleading guilty to 11 counts of indecent and sexual assault. Just last week a Montreal judge allowed two men to walk free after they were convicted of forcefully raping a teenage girl.

In the face of this unacceptable use of conditional sentencing, what has our justice minister done? Absolutely nothing, except to say "Leave it to the appeal courts".

We on this side of the House implore the justice minister to immediately amend the law and plug the loophole. Deny rapists and other violent offenders the benefit of this legal loophole. Make the amendment before respect for the law—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Jean Augustine (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on December 14, 1995 the House of Commons declared February as Black history month. Canadians have recognized that African Canadian history is a part of Canadian history.

Across our nation community organizations, provincial governments and hundreds of individuals will be commemorating and paying tribute to the significant contributions which African Canadians have made historically and will continue to make to the economic and social development of our nation.

From the United Empire Loyalists to the newcomers of today, Canadians of African origin have worked in the domestic trade, the medical field, the agricultural sector and in the business sectors of our economy.

I am proud to take this opportunity to commend every organization and individual who is working to provide greater public awareness by sharing with the broader communities the diverse history of our country.

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[*Translation*]

ICE STORM

Mr. Jean-Paul Marchand (Québec East, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the people of Québec East for their solidarity toward

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the victims of January's ice storm. Their generosity meant that a very large number of people were able to receive assistance.

I would like to draw particular attention to the initiative of Mayor Émile Loranger of Ancienne-Lorette, which provided assistance to over 3,000 victims.

• (1405)

The city hall served as the control centre for co-ordinating free accommodations for 1,025 people from Saint-Hyacinthe and Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu in more than 15 hotels. In addition, some thirty city employees and a number of volunteers were also involved in the operation, canvassing numerous companies for assistance.

Thanks to all those who were so generous with their assistance, Ancienne-Lorette's Operation Ice Storm Solidarity was a resounding success.

Congratulations to all those involved.

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[English]

THE LATE MARK MACGUGAN

Ms. Shaughnessy Cohen (Windsor—St. Clair, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier this month Canadians lost a wonderful judge and former parliamentarian, the Hon. Mark MacGuigan of the Federal Court of Appeal.

Mark MacGuigan represented Windsor—St. Clair which was known then as Windsor—Walkerville in this House for 16 years. Others will speak of him later today. Some spoke of him yesterday at a memorial service. On February 14 there will be a memorial service in Windsor at which others, including his constituents, will speak.

Let me say this to those of us who are here and particularly those of my colleagues who did not know Mark MacGuigan. For those of us on the backbench who sometimes wonder what kind of an effect we are having, I suggest that you measure your progress by that of the late Hon. Mark MacGuigan. As a member of this House, he was the father of our Constitution. He led those debates and he led those committee discussions prior to 1982. As a civil libertarian and as a backbencher, he also became the father of our great charter.

* * *

EATING DISORDERS

Mr. Paul Bonwick (Simcoe—Grey, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise challenging my colleagues across Canada to join the National Eating Disorder Centre in combating a quiet killer.

Eating disorders, like anorexia and bulimia, are affecting as many as 20% of young Canadian women. Imagine colleagues, young women in high schools, colleges and universities around this

country, two out of every ten of them are showing symptoms of these diseases.

This unknown epidemic is destroying the lives of hundreds of thousands of young Canadian women across this country. This disease knows no boundaries.

Colleagues, please assist in educating your constituents about these disorders, for recognizing these disorders is the first step in defeating them.

In my riding we have felt the agony of losing some of our young women to these deadly diseases. However organizations like the Simcoe County Eating Disorder Association are determined to make sure these tragedies do not occur again. Please take time to learn about this disease that is killing our young women in all parts of Canada.

February 1 to 7 is Eating Disorder Week in Canada. Please join in.

The Speaker: My colleagues, I hope you will always include the Speaker in any of your statements, rather than speaking just directly to one another.

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THE OTHER PLACE

Mr. Cliff Breitkreuz (Yellowhead, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the patronage packed parliamentary senior citizens home, called the other place, is due for renovations. The desks, paintings and chandeliers can stay in the red chamber but the mouldy Tory and vacationing Liberals must go.

Senator Ron Ghitter, the red Alberta Tory, should be the first. This hand picked appointee should be shamed out of office. Last year he only worked half time but still cost taxpayers a cool \$155,000. Mr. Ghitter sits in the seat once held by Stan Waters, Canada's first elected Senator.

Senator Ghitter, do the honourable thing and let your name stand in a Senate election.

* * *

CESO

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to acknowledge the contributions of two of my constituents to the Canadian Volunteer Advisors to Business, CESO.

Mr. Ernest Nemeth has recently completed a CESO assignment to Russia where he assisted in the development of export opportunities for a light aircraft manufacturer. Mr. Jim Murray was in Latvia assisting in the development and growth of a plastics manufacturing firm.

CESO is celebrating its 31st year of providing assistance to developing nations, emerging market economies and Canadian aboriginal communities.

Congratulations to my constituents for their valuable volunteer contributions. [English]

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[Translation]

REFERENCE TO SUPREME COURT

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the prime minister and intergovernmental affairs minister received a basic lesson in democracy from two of their federalist allies.

Claude Ryan and Daniel Johnson publicly disavowed Plan B of the federal strategy, reference of the Quebec question to the Supreme Court. Loud and clear, they affirmed the right of the Quebec people to freely determine its own future.

• (1410)

What is important, however, is that these two former leaders of the 1980 and 1995 no campaigns clearly represent the emergence of a consensus in Quebec on this matter. They felt obliged to insist that the future of Quebec is in the hands of the people of Quebec.

The federal government must face facts: the strategy of going to the Supreme Court turned out to be a very bad idea. Since a Quebec consensus is in place, reference to the Supreme Court is pointless.

* * *

ICE STORM

Mr. Robert Bertrand (Pontiac—Gatineau—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the people of Pontiac—Gatineau—Labelle faced considerable hardship during the days of the ice storm. We also witnessed extraordinary generosity, and I would like to tell you today how great it was.

We will not soon forget the generosity of the municipal leaders and other representatives of social and economic groups. We will long remember the spontaneous acts of solidarity, not to mention everybody's incredible patience.

We have also realized that the spirit of self help is our community's greatest asset in a fight to ensure our survival—nothing less.

The Government of Canada will spend some \$250 million to help the victims. We will remember that, at the height of the storm, over 15,000 regular and reserve military personnel were deployed to help local authorities in all the regions affected.

In short, while I hope that no one will ever have to face a catastrophe of such proportions again in the future, I want to thank everyone—

The Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt. The hon. member for Athabasca has the floor.

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ICE STORM

Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I and my colleagues from this side of the House toured the sugar bushes of eastern Ontario and met with many local producers.

The massive devastation that this ice storm has left on one of Canada's heritage industries is indescribable. These producers are feeling abandoned and neglected and need immediate assistance to prepare for the 1998 season. They also need long term professional assistance to evaluate the long term effects on the maple trees.

The maple sugar season is only 30 days away and action is needed to be taken right now. I urge this government to act immediately to save this unique Canadian industry from becoming a fatality of the ice storm of 1998.

* * *

ICE STORM

Mr. Bob Kilger (Stormont—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, residents of Cornwall and Akwesasne and the counties of Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry, Prescott and Russell will always remember the ice storm of 1998.

The government House leader and I join in congratulating the municipal leaders and their employees, firefighters, police, hydro crews, local radio stations and the numerous volunteers who gave unselfishly of themselves to serve others in need.

We salute the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces for their invaluable assistance. They were proud to serve and we are proud of them.

[Translation]

We could relate a number of stories of individual heroism arising from this experience, but the bottom line is that Canadians gave their all and were concerned for the welfare of others.

[English]

I agree with the hon. House leader and quote with sincerity, "Never before has the spirit of community and mutual responsibility been so deeply felt. Thank you all."

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MULTILATERAL AGREEMENT ON INVESTMENT

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more and more Canadians are coming to the view that the multilateral agreement on investment is not in the best interests of Canada. These same Canadians are also concerned about the

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secretive nature of the negotiating process and feel that there is a need for more input from the Canadian public.

Canadians do not trust Liberal assurances about culture, about the environment and other things threatened by the MAI that Canadians value, like public services and the power of democratically elected governments to act in the public interest.

The NDP stands with all Canadians opposed to the MAI and will be doing all it can to work with the national campaign against the MAI. The NDP calls on other MPs, a few of whom seem to be seeing the light, to join us in the effort to make the Prime Minister and the Minister of International Trade rethink their commitment to the MAI.

Let us not permit the MAI to change the golden rule into a rule that says those with all the gold make all the rules.

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[Translation]

TRIBUTE TO SENATOR GUY CHARBONNEAU

Mr. André Harvey (Chicoutimi, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to pay tribute to Senator Guy Charbonneau.

The Hon. Guy Charbonneau made an important contribution to Canada as a captain in the Fusiliers Mont-Royal regiment during World War II, as an entrepreneur and as a senator. Indeed, he held the position of Speaker of the Senate for nine years, longer than anyone else since Confederation.

His dedication to and involvement in democratic life in Canada cannot go unrecognized. For 35 years, he was an active member of the Progressive Conservative Party. He believed in democracy and in the need for Quebeckers to have an alternative.

• (1415)

It has been said that, with his passing, Quebec lost a faithful son and Canada a loyal patriot. I agree.

I join with my colleagues in expressing support to his family and friends and, on behalf of my party, extend my deepest condolences.

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ICE STORM

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to stand in this House to thank the people of Abitibi at the municipal level, in the health sector and the RCMs, the James Bay Cree and the Air Creebec airline, Transport Canada and community organizations.

During the ice storm and its disastrous aftermath, they provided unending support by gathering wood and donating funds, food and equipment for the storm victims in the southern part of Quebec.

I thank the volunteers, carriers, Hydro-Quebec and Telebec workers and others who did not spare time or effort.

I also thank the people of Abitibi whose generosity brings home to Quebec the strength and beauty of Canadian solidarity.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, a few hours ago Boris Yeltsin declared that the United States might provoke global warfare if it followed through with its threatened attack on Iraq. No one seems to know whether this was a calculated definition of the Russian position or one of those off the cuff comments the Russian president is inclined to make.

Does the prime minister have a more accurate assessment of the Russian position? And if he does, would he be willing to share it with the House?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have nothing new to say. I have been informed of the statement made by the president of Russia. The situation remains the same for us. I guess it is also the position of the Russians that we should have a negotiated settlement.

As far as I know, Russia's position is that Saddam Hussein should respect the resolution of the security council. This is Canada's position also. Our efforts at this moment are to try to resolve it diplomatically. The Russians, the French and others are involved.

As for us, there has been no decision made by anybody at this moment to go beyond trying to find a negotiated settlement.

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, despite the confusion on the Russian position it would appear that the Iraq issue is becoming more confrontational and urgent by the hour. Yet this Parliament has not received any in depth briefing on this matter and Parliament has not even discussed the principles which should guide us in supporting or opposing actions by the U.S. and the United Kingdom or the UN.

Would the prime minister agree that Parliament should have a debate on this subject as soon as possible? Would he be willing to ask the House to arrange a date and a time as expeditiously as possible?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier this week, if there is military intervention and Canada is asked to participate, there will be a debate in the House of Commons before a final decision is made by the Government of Canada.

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Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, if it is demonstrated that Saddam Hussein is continuing to produce weapons of mass destruction, and if this is done in defiance of UN resolutions, and if diplomatic efforts fail to stop it, then Canada is going to be asked whether it will support or oppose military action to uphold the UN resolution. To properly make that decision Parliament needs an update on the state of readiness of the Canadian military for potential action in Iraq.

Would the prime minister commit to having that information available to Parliament at the earliest possible date?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course before we have a debate we will make sure people are properly informed of the readiness of Canadian forces to participate in a situation like that. There is no request for Canada to participate and so no decision has been made by anybody at this time. Everybody is working to convince Saddam Hussein to respect the decision of the security council.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, back when he was transport minister, Doug Young gave \$32 million to build a road in New Brunswick. When he got booted out of Parliament last summer, he bought that same highway for a toll road for himself.

• (1420)

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton West.

Miss Deborah Grey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that.

Back when he was transport minister Doug Young spent \$32 million of taxpayer money to build a road in New Brunswick. Then after he got booted out of Parliament last summer he bought that same highway to use as a toll road for himself and the ethics counsellor says “that’s okay with me”.

I want to ask this prime minister why are the ethics of his government based purely on a wink and a handshake so much like Brian Mulroney’s ethical questions?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): I do not know if we are celebrating a wedding, Mr. Speaker, but I want to say that the member for Cumberland—Colchester has talked with the ethics counsellor about it. He went to see him. All that has been discussed with the member.

There is a post-employment code for public office holders. That is a public document. Mr. Young has satisfied all these requirements and the deal they are talking about is the construction of a

road by the provincial Government of New Brunswick. The federal government has nothing to do with the construction of this road.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, if done properly, private-public partnerships for infrastructure would be a really good idea.

What is so dangerous about the Doug Young scandal is that it absolutely smears the reputation of these projects. The idea of public-private roads should not be tainted by patronage and corruption.

Yesterday the Minister of Transport expressed nervousness, saying that he does not want—

The Speaker: I ask all hon. members to be very judicious in their choice of words. I would like the member to go to her question, please.

Miss Deborah Grey: Certainly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to ask the transport minister if he thinks if the shoe fits, wear it. Yesterday he said that he did not want such flip-flops in the future. If it is not okay for the future, why is it okay now?

Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when one cuts through all the rhetoric I think there is a legitimate public policy question that has to be addressed and that is, in future federal-provincial agreements how are we to take into account the fact that tolls may be charged. I think that is a legitimate issue to be debated in Parliament, perhaps by the transport committee.

The hon. member opposite should not confuse public policy with an attempt to smear an individual, a former member of this House.

* * *

[Translation]

REFERENCE TO SUPREME COURT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Claude Ryan, leader of the No camp in 1980, and Daniel Johnson, leader of the No camp in 1995, voiced their profound disagreement with the reference to the Supreme Court.

For his part, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs kept repeating that there should be a legal framework for the democratic process of a referendum on the sovereignty of Quebec. But there is already a legal framework.

• (1425)

Does the Prime Minister realize that the 1980, 1992 and 1995 referendums in which he took part were always held within the context of the law?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Referendum Act is a law governing popular consultation. It

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cannot govern the separation of a province wishing to leave a country that all citizens have an interest in keeping together.

As for democracy, when will the Bloc Québécois realize that the people of Quebec have twice decided to remain in Canada? When will it respect the will of Quebecers?

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a few days before the referendum, I heard the Prime Minister speak the following words in Verdun: “The question is clear. If you vote Yes, you will live in another country, and if you vote No, you will remain in Canada”. Now he says he did not understand this question. We, however, know that, on two occasions, this same Prime Minister did not keep his promises. We in Quebec know that.

The Prime Minister took part in three referendums in Quebec. In so doing he, like his predecessors, Mr. Mulroney and Mr. Trudeau, accepted and recognized Quebec’s referendum process and its legal framework. Why then does he refuse to recognize this same legal framework today?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I said that a referendum act is for a popular consultation. But the decision to separate Quebec without respecting the legal framework is unacceptable. Everyone must respect the Constitution of Canada because it is a democratic constitution protecting all citizens of Quebec and of the rest of Canada.

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

On the evening of the 1980 referendum, Pierre Elliott Trudeau said “this evening we are experiencing both the most beautiful and the most painful sides of democracy”.

By now trying to impose a new legal framework for the next Quebec referendum, is the Prime Minister not in full contradiction with his former boss, who recognized that the referendum of 1980 was held in an eminently democratic fashion?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that I do not have with me the speech made by the former Prime Minister, but I would invite the hon. member to read it to the end. The Prime Minister of the time made it clear that he had no intention of negotiating anything resembling a secession based on such a confusing question.

I would also ask the hon. member to read the Quebec Referendum Act, which clearly states that referendums are consultative in nature. It is for this reason that, according to the person who drafted the legislation, Mr. Burns, no rules are set in terms of the majority required, given the importance of what is at stake. The fact is that

referendums are only consultative in nature. They carry more or less political weight, depending on the clarity of the question and of the answer.

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not only is the Prime Minister repudiating his former boss, he is repudiating himself. On October 31, 1995, he said, and I quote: “In a democracy, the people are always right”.

My question is for the Prime Minister. What has changed since 1995 for the Prime Minister to no longer accept the legal framework that applied then and that he himself recognized?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister who was in office in 1995, and whom we are pleased to still see in that position, said in this House, before the then Leader of the Opposition—who is now the premier of Quebec and who did a great deal of ranting and raving—that we had to comply with the Constitution and that it was out of the question for Quebecers to lose Canada as a result of confusion. The Prime Minister even said “If you in the BQ and the PQ ask a clear question, you will take quite a beating”.

* * *

[English]

BANK MERGER

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the finance minister.

Yesterday the finance minister accused the NDP of hijacking the bank merger process. It is the minister who is hiding behind a task force that will not report for eight months. The task force in fact told him not to wait. I will quote directly: “We do not expect the world to wait for our final report. Changes are taking place quickly. Decisions must be made. It would be unrealistic to put everything on hold until our processes have been concluded”.

● (1430)

Why does the minister not stop behaving like a deer frozen in the headlights and let Canadians have their say?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these are indeed strange times. We have just seen this cuddling up on the far right. Again we have an example of the NDP seeking to lobby for their new found friends in the big banks and seeking to have them jump the cue.

Let me simply say to the Leader of the NDP, she will not allow her clients to jump the cue. We will establish public policy and then we will decide the issues.

Oral Questions

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister blabbers on about jumping the cue. He dismisses the genuine concerns of Canadians as verbal diarrhoea.

If you ask Canadians should we change the existing federal policy that big banks shall not buy big banks, they would say "No way, no thanks".

Is that why the Minister of Finance is afraid to let Canadians have their say?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, quite the contrary. The reference to obiter excreta really comes from what the hon. member was saying.

In fact let us understand very clearly that what we want is a full public debate. We want to have the task force report. We want to have the debate take place in this House and across the country. The NDP are not going prevail against the will of Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

TRANS-CANADA HIGHWAY

Hon. Jean J. Charest (Sherbrooke, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport said that, when the amount of \$32 million was allocated for the highway in New Brunswick, he did not know that a toll highway was planned.

Can the Prime Minister tell us whether it is the policy of his government to charge for highways twice, or whether he does not instead intend to ask the Government of New Brunswick to return the \$32 million taken from Canadian taxpayers' pockets?

[English]

Hon. David M. Collette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this particular agreement was a normal federal-provincial highway agreement whereby the federal government paid \$32 million to New Brunswick. It is a small portion of the total cost of the highway.

Subsequent to that the New Brunswick government decided, in these times of restraint, to engage the private sector and hence the introduction of tolls.

What I have said is that there is nothing wrong with the agreement, the rule under which this deal was made. There is a legitimate issue that should be decided on, how we structure future deals. That is something we should discuss in this House.

Hon. Jean J. Charest (Sherbrooke, PC): Mr. Speaker, the minister also said yesterday and I quote "It was never envisaged that a province or a private company would profit". That is an exact quote from the very same minister.

Patronage is taking its toll on the Liberal benches. I would like to know from this Prime Minister whether or not he is going to stand up for the Canadian taxpayer and demand that the \$32 million be returned to where it should be? It should be returned to the Government of Canada rather than taken from the taxpayer of Canada.

Hon. David M. Collette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have said publicly that the \$32 million will not be factored into the toll regime by the private company. That answers the question.

I hope the hon. member can understand that.

* * *

SURTAX

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in the 1986 federal budget the then finance minister Michael Wilson slapped a 3% and 5% surtax on every Canadian taxpayer, calling it a temporary deficit reduction measure.

Does today's finance minister agree with this 3% and 5% deficit reduction surtax? Should it be eliminated immediately now that the books are in balance or is he prepared to continue with what amounts to a \$3 billion rip-off of Canadian taxpayers?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is probably perfectly reasonable for the hon. member to attempt to establish a position at this time.

We will be bringing down a budget in the not too distant future at which time the government's budgetary plans will be revealed. We do not have to take a back seat to this party or any other on reducing taxes. We reduced them for families with children. We reduced them for people with disabilities. We reduced them for students. In each and every case this member and his party opposed those tax reductions.

• (1435)

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the finance minister will want to explain to Canadians their position on the GST, whatever it is this week. Income tax was a temporary measure 80 years ago.

Now the finance minister is trying to weasel out of the fact that their government is prepared to continue to keep the 3% and 5% temporary taxes introduced by the Tories.

We want to know why the government is not prepared to loosen the burden for Canadians who are suffering under this huge \$3 billion a year rip-off.

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I guess we would like to know is why the hon. member would swallow himself whole. Before Christmas all we ever heard was taxes, taxes, taxes.

Now, all of a sudden, the percentage of taxes to be cut has changed. His obsession with taxes has changed. No longer is he

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interested in taxes. In fact, he is even suggesting to one of his members from Manitoba that provincial income taxes should go up.

One member from Alberta would suggest to compensate for the CPP that personal taxes go up. When is this Reform Party going to understand that we are going to reduce taxes? We do not want to increase them the way they do.

* * *

[Translation]

REFERENCE TO SUPREME COURT

Mr. Pierre Brien (Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Yesterday, Daniel Johnson, the leader of the Liberal opposition in Quebec, clearly stated that it was up to Quebecers alone to decide on the wording of the referendum question.

Does the Prime Minister agree with this clear statement by his main federalist ally in Quebec, the very individual he recognized as the leader of the No camp in 1995?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the National Assembly obviously has the right to put whatever questions it wishes. The Government of Canada, in Mr. Ryan's opinion, has the power to determine whether it believes that Quebecers wish to cease being Canadians.

Mr. Ryan says we have the power, we say we have the obligation, and the court will tell us whether we have the right.

Mr. Pierre Brien (Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by stubbornly going ahead with the Supreme Court reference, will the Prime Minister or his minister admit that he is in the process of losing all his federalist allies, including the leader of the 1980 No camp, Claude Ryan, and the leader of the 1995 No camp, Daniel Johnson, and that now his only allies are the Reform Party, the Equality Party and Guy Bertrand?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many Quebecers think that the last question was unclear, that the procedure was unclear. We even know that it was fraudulent, that the Quebec government wanted to use our savings as Quebecers, up to \$17 billion of our savings, to try to prop up markets shaken by secession.

We have nothing to learn about democracy from people who have lied to Quebecers.

[English]

INDIAN AFFAIRS

Mr. Mike Scott (Skeena, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, eight months ago the minister of Indian affairs invited aboriginal Canadians to write her personally about their concerns. She promised confidentiality.

When Bruce Starlight wrote, that promise was broken and the letter was leaked directly to Chief Roy Whitney, the subject of the letter.

Yesterday the minister admitted that this may be a breach of the oath of secrecy. My question is, who did the breaching? Was it the minister and her office or was it Roy Whitney's golfing buddy, the Prime Minister?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I made it clear in this House yesterday that I have asked for an investigation of the process of this letter and how it travelled through my department.

Indeed, I am outraged that the letter was received by Chief Whitney, but we have a process in place to review this.

My question is how does the hon. member think anyone can take him or his party seriously about the issues of aboriginal people when what they want to do is cut a billion dollars out of the budget of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development?

Mr. Mike Scott (Skeena, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, how can anybody take this minister seriously after this breach of confidentiality? The minister says that there is an investigation under way and a government employee is doing the investigating.

This smells more like damage control and whitewash than it does a proper and sincere attempt to get at the truth. Will the minister commit here and now to calling in the RCMP for a proper investigation?

• (1440)

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear that the gentleman who is going to do the investigation is outside the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. He is a man who has 20 years of experience in security and review. He will do a complete and thorough job.

Again, if we want to talk about confidence, I have no idea how the hon. member opposite intends to build any kind of confidence with aboriginal people when what your party wants to do is cut \$1 billion from education, housing and infrastructure for aboriginal people. It is an investment which you do not view as being important—

The Speaker: My colleagues, I would ask that you be sure to address the Chair in your answers and questions.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

BILL C-28

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-28 amends certain provisions of the Income Tax Act and proposes, among other measures, to ease the tax requirements for Canadian businesses that have subsidiaries involved in international shipping, in tax havens such as Liberia and Bermuda. Oddly enough, this tax saving measure would be retroactive to the 1995 fiscal year.

My question is for the Minister of Finance. Who asked him to make such an amendment to the Income Tax Act, and how many Canadian businesses will benefit from this measure?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will answer the question because this is a very important issue.

I heard the comments made by Bloc Québécois members, who are trying to question the integrity of the Minister of Finance. Let me say that this decision in no way puts the Minister of Finance in a conflict of interest situation.

The companies currently held in trust will not benefit in any way from the decision made by the Department of Finance to improve the tax system. Bloc Québécois members are totally wrong to try to tarnish the reputation of the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I simply asked a question. I did not tarnish anyone's reputation. And I expect a reply to my supplementary.

Can the Minister of Finance tell us if the few businesses that will benefit from this generous tax measure include Canada Steamship Lines, which is fully owned by the minister and which has a number of subsidiaries in Liberia and Bermuda?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer is no.

* * *

[English]

INDIAN AFFAIRS

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the Indian affairs minister has sent a message to the grassroots native people. She has told them to shut up and stop bothering her or they will end up like Bruce Starlight.

How many people had access to this confidential letter and who are they?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member will wait, we will discover that as a result of the investigation.

The message that this party is giving to grassroots aboriginal people is that we believe in the existence of aboriginal rights. We understand that our role is to reflect those rights in Canadian society. Through our statement of reconciliation and our response to the royal commission, we have shown that we have a plan and a vision to build harmony, which is a breakthrough for aboriginal people in this country.

We see none of that in the platform of the party of the hon. member.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am afraid this investigator is a spin doctor. I do not think he is an investigator. It ought to be the police. Grassroots natives across this country know of the friendship between the Prime Minister and Chief Roy Whitney.

Can the minister tell the House that no photocopies of Bruce Starlight's letter went to any colleagues in cabinet or to the Prime Minister's office, yes or no?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a very strange pattern that has evolved as a result of questions from that party.

First of all, I would note that last fall the members for Dewdney—Alouette and Edmonton North were forced to admit that allegations they made in this House were false and without fact.

Today the member for Edmonton North is again smearing a former member of this House, with no truth and no proof.

Yesterday in the paper the member for Skeena had to admit that the accusations he is making about Chief Whitney are based on something for which he has no evidence to support.

* * *

● (1445)

[Translation]

VICTORIA BRIDGE

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

In order to avoid total closure of the Victoria Bridge in Montreal, which would penalize the 40,000 drivers who use it daily, can the Minister of Transport make a commitment today to take all the steps necessary to—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transport has the floor.

Oral Questions

Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are involved in discussions at the present time with CN on the Victoria Bridge, and I remain optimistic that it will be kept open after March 1, to the benefit of everyone in Montreal.

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MAPLE SYRUP INDUSTRY

Mr. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

It is clear that the Canadian maple syrup industry, with its \$120 million of business yearly, has been heavily affected by the recent ice storm.

Can the Minister tell the House what financial assistance is planned to compensate the maple syrup producers for damage to their trees, and what reassurances they can be given?

[English]

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, right after the heavy part of the storm was over I personally witnessed the damage throughout rural Canada, including that in the maple industry. The damage varies. I can honestly say that it was severe to very severe in the maple bushes throughout eastern Ontario and Quebec.

The support from the federal government, as we know, must be instigated by the provinces and then the support through the disaster funding assistance program agreement with the provinces kicks in.

We have already mentioned some of the types of things that would be covered such as the repair and replacement of pipelines, et cetera.

* * *

CABLE SERVICE

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately Canadian consumers are getting dinged in Mr. Rogers' neighbourhood these days. The cable giant is again taking advantage of its Liberal sanctioned monopoly to punish nearly two million Canadians across this country. This time around the subscribers get to pay \$2 a month for absolutely no extra channels and no extra service.

Why does the government not stand up and put Canadians first rather than last?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a very simple way of ensuring that one has no increase and that is to stick to the basic service.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, what she is saying is that Canadians will not have a choice. They

presently have an extra package and if they want to maintain that extra package they are going to have to pay an extra \$2 because of the extra channels they do not want.

What are the choices? Is this a Liberal choice? Why do the cable companies have the monopoly they have? Why does the government not give Canadians the option? Why does this government not give Canadians the opportunity to see competition and do their job?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): We have, Mr. Speaker.

* * *

BANK MERGER

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

The minister made a ridiculous statement saying the NDP is trying to hijack the process in terms of public hearings and bank mergers. How can he say that when the minister himself hijacked the process in December when he signed a WTO agreement allowing more foreign banks in this country?

Why did he sign off on that WTO agreement in December without proper consultation with the Parliament of Canada, the people of this country or a report from the task force on financial institution? How could he do that?

Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there were many consultations in terms of the financial services agreement. It has been around a number of years. We had our APEC conference in Vancouver. Given the Asian crisis and the currency situation there was solidarity in saying that the crisis is not going to go away by blocking or building walls. It is by being more transparent, and that is exactly the basis of the financial services package. It is a win for the global community, as it is for the Canadian community.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Minister of Finance.

What the government did was pepper spray the people, not listen to the people. Why is the minister supporting a committee of Liberal backbenchers studying this merger? We all know he is salivating to be prime minister of this country, but if he wants to be leader of the country can he explain why Liberal backbenchers can study the matter but Parliament and the Canadian people cannot? Explain that effect on democracy.

• (1450)

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I have said is that the government is not going to decide on this issue until the task force reports and there has been a public debate. Liberal members are going to study this because they are concerned with this issue and they want to work.

The real issue is not why Liberal members are studying it on their own; it is why are NDP members not studying it on their own, why are Reform members and Tories not. The answer is that the membership on this side of the House is one heck of a lot better.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the prime minister. I appreciate his earlier mention but his own code of ethics states that at no time shall a former minister act on behalf of a company in connection with any ongoing proceeding to which the government is a party and on which the minister advised the government.

In the case of the New Brunswick highway Doug Young was a minister, he is now acting on behalf of a company, it is an ongoing proceeding, the government is a funding partner and Doug Young did advise the government.

Considering that, will the prime minister explain how his code of ethics could possibly clear his former minister?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is because someone who is no longer a member of this House has the right to work. I will ask Mr. Wilson if it is wrong that he is the vice-chair of Dominion Securities although he is a former minister of finance. What about Jake Epp, a former minister of energy who is now senior vice-president of TransCanada Pipelines? What about Don Mazankowski, a former minister of transport who is now on the board for Greyhound? He was also minister of finance and he is on the board of Great-West Life?

There is nothing wrong with that as long as they respect the post-employment guidelines.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, not one of those people wrote a cheque for \$25 million. In my meeting with the ethics counsellor the other day he said there were many issues of concern that should be of concern to the Minister of Transport. Maybe that is why John Grace, Canada's information commissioner, said that the ethics counsellor should answer to Parliament in the same way as the auditor general.

Will the prime minister commit to having his ethics counsellor answer to Parliament at least on this issue?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the ethics counsellor met with the hon. member and discussed the issue with him. He discussed the issue in public. He met and discussed it with the hon. member. He appears in front of committees. If he is invited to appear before the committee he will tell the public what he said to the member in private.

Oral Questions

STUDENT LOANS

Mr. Reg Alcock (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations has been tireless in its pursuit of improvements to the student loan program. Today the Minister of Human Resources Development met with CASA. Was the minister able to assure it that getting an education will not mean a lifetime of debt?

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Winnipeg South and all the members of the standing committee for their hard work. I know they have met with representatives of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. I had lunch with them today. They have made a very valuable contribution to the options we are considering now in order to improve our Canada student loans program. The prime minister's millennium fund will also help thousands of young Canadians pursue post-secondary education.

We hope to announce more details on these and other measures in the coming weeks as we follow up on our youth employment strategy.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, Major General Romeo Dallaire has been promoted to lieutenant-general. We in this House are all familiar with the allegations surrounding the deaths of the 10 Belgian soldiers who were executed while under General Dallaire's command. However, the public has not heard about General Dallaire's decision to send unarmed men on a reconnaissance mission, a mission that led to the death of a Uruguayan peacekeeper and the wounding of a Bangladeshi.

My question is for the defence minister. In light of these incidents and allegations, would it not be more appropriate to wait until these matters have been resolved before granting his promotion?

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, General Dallaire has acted in a proper fashion. He has acted both on behalf of Canada and on behalf of the United Nations in a very professional fashion.

• (1455)

He will be appearing before a United Nations commission with respect to the Rwanda matter. But I think he has acted quite properly. The promotion is quite warranted.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

BILL C-28

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, clearly Bill C-28 will benefit only Canadian businesses with marine transportation subsidiaries located abroad in countries considered tax havens. Some ten or so businesses will likely end up enjoying hundreds of millions of dollars in tax savings thanks to taxpayers.

Can the Minister of Finance tell us whether CSL Self Unloader Investment Bermuda, in Bermuda, will benefit from the tax measure he himself introduced in Bill C-28?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very surprised that the hon. member is rising to ask the same question in an attempt to sully the reputation of the Minister of Finance, when I already said no categorically.

* * *

[English]

CAPE BRETON DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Mrs. Michelle Dockrill (Bras d'Or, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in reference to the notice of question given to him this morning I ask the prime minister this. Is there a secret plan in existence to privatize the Cape Breton Development Corporation or, failing that, to shut Devco down, putting another 1,700 Cape Bretoners out of work?

Hon. Ralph E. Goodale (Minister of Natural Resources and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, a private sector firm has made a proposal and is studying the feasibility of the concept. I have not received—

Mrs. Michelle Dockrill: Yes or no.

Hon. Ralph E. Goodale: Mr. Speaker, the rudeness of the member is rather startling.

The answer is a feasibility study is being conducted by a private sector firm on its own initiative and no decision will be taken by Devco or by this government until we get that information.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the prime minister.

Yesterday in this House the Minister of Transport rose and stated that the government had entered into an agreement with the province of New Brunswick; as a matter of fact it would respect that agreement, a deal is a deal.

The helicopter deal was not a deal. The Pearson airport deal was not a deal. Scrapping the GST was not a deal.

Will the prime minister please tell me today if the only deals that are respected are those entered into with former Liberal cabinet ministers? Is he prepared to tell Doug Young to go hit the road?

Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the question because it gives me another opportunity to explain to the hon. member that we are talking about a \$32 million federal contribution out of a total deal of \$887 million. The federal contribution is not going to be factored into the tolling arrangement now being charged.

In other words, the federal contribution is not financing the tolls on that highway. I hope the hon. member can get that through his head.

* * *

MONEY LAUNDERING

Mr. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the G-7 financial action task force has been critical of Canada for our failure to eliminate money laundering activities in this country. International criminals are the beneficiaries of inaction on our part.

Will the solicitor general please advise this House what Canada is doing to address this serious problem of international money laundering.

Hon. Andy Scott (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have the opportunity to respond to the member's question.

Very specifically, the ministry is seized with the question of money laundering. That is the reason I recently visited Vancouver and visited the co-ordinating committee on organized crime. That is the reason why last fall in our first ever statement on organized crime I announced that this session we will be bringing forward legislation to do just that.

* * *

TRANSPORT

Mr. Lee Morrison (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, ever since the Minister of Transport announced the appointment of Mr. Justice Estey to do a review of the grain handling system, the CPR and the CNR have been issuing a blizzard of notices of discontinuance of rail lines. They are trying to get in ahead of the deadline.

If they are allowed to continue this, breaking the spirit of the Canada transportation act, if not the letter of the law, by the time Mr. Justice Estey gets his report in there is not going to be much left to report on because they will have chopped up piecemeal the entire rail system.

Point of Order

● (1500)

My question for the minister is will he use his ministerial powers to have a moratorium on rail line abandonments until Mr. Justice Estey has concluded his work?

Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is correct in the sense that the railways are expected to follow the spirit of the law, if not the letter of the law. I have every confidence that they have been doing that and they will do it.

On the specifics, the hon. member made an allegation that somehow the railways are engaged in this kind of activity. I will certainly look into that and get back to him at the earliest convenience. I do not believe that that is the case. I believe that they are acting in good faith and that they want to co-operate with Mr. Justice Estey and his commission.

The Speaker: That will bring to a close our question period for Wednesday.

My colleagues, I want to listen to a point of order and then I will go directly to tributes for the day. The point of order will be presented by the hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands.

* * *

POINT OF ORDER

BILL S-4

Mr. Lee Morrison (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order with respect to Bill S-4, an act to amend the Canada Shipping Act, which was sent from the Senate on Monday, February 2.

Bill S-4 violates Standing Order 80 which states that “all aids and supplies granted to the sovereign by the Parliament of Canada are the sole gift of the House of Commons and all bills for granting such aids and supplies ought to begin with the House as it is the undoubted right of the House to direct, to limit and to appoint in all such bills the ends, purposes, considerations, conditions, limitations and qualifications of such grants which are not alterable by the Senate”.

I would like to point out that while we in the official opposition support the principle of this bill, we are against the practice of introducing bills in the Senate for ethical reasons and, in this case, reasons that breach the financial privileges of this House as stated in our rules and as provided for in section 53 of the Constitution Act, 1867.

● (1505)

Specific to my argument is Bill S-4's attempt to enact proposed amendments to part IX of the Canada Shipping Act which seeks to substantially increase the limits of liability for owners of ships, docks, canals and harbours. The federal government is a major owner of ships, docks, canals and harbours. It will be liable under the terms of this bill.

Bill S-4 substantially increases ship owners' limits of liability anywhere from 300% to over 2,600%, depending on ship tonnage.

The liabilities for the owners of docks, for example the government, canals and ports and any persons for whose negligence from such an owner is responsible would be increased to the greater of \$2 million or \$1,000 times the tonnage of the largest ship that has used the dock, canal or port within the previous five years. If the loss or damage in question was the result of their personal negligence where the damage had been intended or where it had been known that the damage was probable, the owners of docks, canals or ports would lose the benefit of even that increased limitation. Therefore, not only does this bill increase the limit of liability upon the crown but it removes the benefit in a certain number of conditions.

On June 12, 1973 the Speaker ruled that Bill S-5, the Farm Improvement Loans Act, was out of order because the bill, while not in itself proposing a direct expenditure, did propose substantial additional liabilities on public moneys. The Speaker ruled that the bill infringed on the privileges of the House.

On September 23, 1991 the Senate Speaker ruled out of order a Senate bill that sought to extend war veterans' benefits to merchant seamen. The Speaker pointed out that the bill would give rise to claims by merchant seamen and their spouses against the government and would cause the government to incur liabilities.

The proposed amendments to the Canada Shipping Act would substantially increase the limits of liability upon the government, as was the case with the merchant seamen bill and the Farm Improvement Loans Act.

In the report of the special committee of the Senate appointed to determine the rights of the Senate in matters of financial legislation, it was concluded that the Senate cannot directly or indirectly originate one penny of expenditures of public funds or impose a cent of taxation on the people. This conclusion would support the Speaker's rulings with respect to the Farm Improvement Loans Act, the merchant seamen bill and my arguments regarding Bill S-4.

This government by introducing this bill in the Senate has ignored the fact that through the centuries the principle has always been maintained that taxation requires representation and consent. This government has not figured out that the only body in Canada

Point of Order

that meets this test is the House of Commons. The elected representatives of the people sit here, not in the other place.

Mr. Speaker, I therefore ask that you remove Bill S-4 from the order paper since it violates the financial privileges of this House.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to support my colleague's point of order by addressing specifically the liability of the crown.

I would argue that the liability issue that my colleague has referred to regarding ships in section IX of the Canada Shipping Act is applicable to the federal crown despite the fact that this is not expressly stipulated in the act. The presumption of crown immunity from statute, in both its common law form and as enacted in section 17 of the Interpretation Act, only applies to statutes which are prejudicial to the crown.

• (1510)

Liabilities for crown owned docks, canals or harbours are not imposed by the Canada Shipping Act, but arise from section 3(b) of the Crown Liability and Proceedings Act, which states: "The Crown is liable in tort for the damages for which, if it were a private person of full age and capacity, it would be liable in respect of a breach of duty attaching to the ownership, occupation, possession or control of property".

In the Alphonse Desjardins case, 1994, the Quebec Court of Appeal ruled that other provisions of the Canada Shipping Act did not apply to the crown, but that the provisions in part IX did apply to the crown. In that case a boat owned by the crown was charged with discharging pollutants into the St. Lawrence River, contrary to section 664 of the Canada Shipping Act. The application of an offence provision, such as section 664 in part XV, would prejudice the rights and interests of the crown.

Another more obvious reason why section 664 would not apply to a crown owned vessel is section 641 of the act, which declares that "this Act does not, except where specially provided, apply to ships belonging to Her Majesty". There is no similar provision for government owned docks, canals or harbours.

Bill S-4 unmistakably constitutes an indirect demand for supply because it would leave the crown bound to make a demand for supply.

The government House leader keeps reminding this House that my party supported a Senate bill in the last Parliament. I would like to point out that the official opposition plans on supporting the principle of Bill S-4, Bill S-3 and Bill S-5. The principle in these bills is not what is at issue here.

What is at issue here is the principle of democracy. It is obvious from the minister's comments that he does not recognize that the people of Canada are represented in this House and not the unelected Senate.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude by saying that I ask that you consider this argument which we have put forward today carefully and remove Bill S-4 from our order paper as soon as possible.

The Speaker: I think we are bordering on debate, but if there are other facts which hon. members would like to present, I am prepared to hear them.

Mr. Bill Gilmour (Nanaimo—Alberni, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I also rise to support my colleague's motion.

Beauchesne's sixth edition, citation 11, comments on the necessity to adjust the interpretation of our precedents and traditions in the light of changing circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, when this issue was first brought to your attention this citation was referenced in terms of the five parties which presently sit in the House of Commons, as opposed to the two which sit in the Senate.

I would also like to add the argument that when the Fathers of Confederation drew up the Constitution Act, 1867, they included a provision which restricted the Senate.

Section 53 of the Constitution Act, 1867, provides that:

Bills for appropriating any Part of the Public Revenue, or for imposing any Tax or Impost, shall originate in the House of Commons.

Back in the 19th century most of the work of Parliament concentrated on the appropriation of money. Today the government has grown so large and is so extensively involved in the every-day lives of Canadians, it would make sense that this restriction upon the Senate be expanded.

The reason for restricting the Senate back in 1867 was because senators were unelected and unaccountable to the people. They are still unelected and they are still unaccountable to the people.

The evolution of our rules includes keeping the relevant rules, discarding those rules which no longer make sense and adopting new rules when new rules are needed. For example, members of this House are protected by the privilege of freedom of speech which goes back to the bill of rights of 1689. At the same time we are guided by rules which were adopted only a few short months ago which addressed the reality of five parties in this House.

The Senate issue today is more of a 20th century matter. Since the present day Senate simply does not fit into a modern democracy, we should consider bringing the Senate into the 20th century. To begin this process the government could end the practice of introducing bills in the Senate today. It is that simple.

I would ask that the Speaker consider my remarks, as well as those of my colleagues, and judge on them.

• (1515)

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first this is not a question of privilege as was alleged from the beginning. If it were a valid point it would be a point of order. However, it is not a valid point at all.

Tributes

The Senate does not rule the bill to be out of order where it was introduced. The bill does not include a royal recommendation.

In the submissions of the members who have raised this, there are reflections on speeches of ministers, five parties in the House of Commons and so on. This has nothing to do with whether or not a bill requires a royal recommendation.

Finally, if the hon. members across are advocating a constitutional change, may I suggest that a point of order will not achieve it.

The Speaker: Yesterday a point of privilege was raised on another bill and I am still gathering evidence on that.

I would like to juxtapose the bill that is being referred to, I believe it is S-4, as the member said, and I would like to satisfy myself and I am sure hon. members will give me enough time. Just so we understand, this was raised as a point of order, not as a point of privilege and I will treat it as such.

If there are no other points of order, I am going to proceed to tributes. The first tribute is to a former parliamentarian, the Hon. Mark MacGuigan.

* * *

THE LATE MARK MacGUIGAN

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the late Mark MacGuigan. He was a person of remarkable talents and abilities, with outstanding achievements as a scholar and professor of law, as a parliamentarian and cabinet minister, and finally as a judge of the Federal Court of Appeal. He had two earned doctorates, one in philosophy and one in law. He taught in the law schools of the University of Toronto and Osgoode Hall.

Two of his students at the University of Toronto were none other than the present Minister of Finance and the member for Toronto Centre—Rosedale. I am sure that they would be the first to say that Mark's teaching helped prepare them for their current achievements and that any deficiencies on their part are surely their own responsibility.

It was not surprising that when the University of Windsor decided to establish a faculty of law it turned to Mark MacGuigan to be its founding dean. He came to Windsor in 1967 and by the spring of 1968 he had organized the school and was making it ready for its first students.

Pierre Trudeau was elected as Liberal leader in the spring of 1968. He called an election a few weeks thereafter and this led to the long time member for Windsor—Walkerville, the Hon. Paul

Martin Senior, leaving the House of Commons to become government leader in the Senate. Many Liberals in the riding urged Mark to seek the Liberal nomination. He did so and went on to be elected in that famous 1968 general election.

Although relatively new to Windsor—Walkerville when first elected, he rapidly won the confidence of his constituents who re-elected him four successive times. That he sought office as a Liberal was not surprising. His father was a Liberal cabinet minister and later a judge in his home province of Prince Edward Island. Mark was proud of his island origins and Irish heritage. The Minister of Finance in a church service yesterday told the story that when as a child Mark was asked about his origins he said he did not know but that he knew one thing for sure and that was that he was a Liberal.

In the 12 years between 1968 and 1980, he set high standards in the quality of his work as a parliamentarian. He showed what many observers outside of this House do not sufficiently recognize and that is what a member of Parliament can do and achieve without first entering the cabinet.

He was chair of the special committee on statutory instruments in 1968-69, joint chair of the special joint committees on the Constitution of Canada in 1970-72 and again in 1978. In this capacity he made important contributions to the development of the concept of a Canadian charter of rights entrenched in a fully Canadian Constitution and what this should mean for the civil liberties of all Canadians.

● (1520)

He was chair of the justice committee in 1975 and chair of the subcommittee on penitentiaries in 1976. He was parliamentary secretary first to the minister of manpower and immigration and then to the minister of labour and multiculturalism. Finally in 1979 he was briefly opposition critic for the solicitor general.

With this successful parliamentary experience it should not have been too surprising that when Pierre Trudeau formed his last government in 1980 and he invited Mark into his cabinet, it was not in some junior post but rather first as foreign minister, then called the Secretary of State for External Affairs, and next as Attorney General and Minister of Justice.

As foreign minister he was an active voice for Canada around the world. As Minister of Justice he worked to bring the law closer to ordinary Canadians and to serve them better through the operation of our legal system.

He did not run in the 1984 election but was instead appointed to the Federal Court of Appeal. There he brought his intellect and legal scholarship to bear in an amazingly productive way. I am told that in his close to 14 years on the bench he wrote some 300 judgments. Most of them represented the majority view of the court and many have come to be considered as leading cases in the fields they covered.

Tributes

I had the privilege of serving in this House with Mark for some 16 years. In fact his riding adjoined my own in the city of Windsor. There we shared countless platforms and events and worked together on projects important to our community. Here in Ottawa we worked together in our caucus and in cabinet.

Throughout, everything he did was touched by his personal simplicity, his humanity, his natural down to earth friendliness. He could speak. He could communicate on equal terms in the same direct friendly manner with everyone he met, whether they were foreign ministers of other countries, provincial attorneys general, blue collar workers or newcomers to Canada in his own riding.

Everything he did was inspired by his own deep religious faith, influenced by the great Roman Catholic religious philosophers he had studied in such depth, especially Saint Thomas Aquinas and his modern interpreter, Jacques Maritain. This faith was the basis for his commitment to the cause of human rights and civil liberties.

He believed, as he wrote in his book which was published just a few years ago, *Abortion, Conscience and Democracy*, that an acceptance of a pluralistic society is God's plan for the world.

I cannot conclude these remarks without noting the remarkable courage with which he fought against his final illness for several years. He continued during all this time his vital work as a judge of the Federal Court of Appeal.

We have lost in Mark MacGuigan a remarkable human being, a great Canadian.

In 1995 Mark was awarded the Tarnopolski Medal for Human Rights by the Canadian section of the International Commission of Jurors. He reflected, I am sure, his view that his task and that of all of us was and is, to paraphrase the words of the 82nd Psalm, to judge the poor and fatherless, to do justice to the afflicted and destitute, and to rescue the poor and the needy.

Mark MacGuigan was a loving husband, father and grandfather. On behalf of the Government of Canada and the Liberal caucus, on my own behalf and also on behalf of his successor from Windsor, the current member for Windsor—Walkerville, I express sincere condolences and sympathy to Mark's wife, his children and his grandchildren. May his memory be as a blessing.

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Mark MacGuigan.

Mark MacGuigan served Canada in such a way as to set a standard for many Canadians to achieve. Not only did he serve in this House of Commons but he spent many remarkable years as a federal court judge.

Mark held portfolios in external affairs and justice before he was appointed to the bench in 1984. He was well known for his ardent support of the charter of rights and for his support of freedom of choice in the abortion debate.

• (1525)

We in this House are saddened by the death of a colleague who stood by his convictions and stepped out in front of the crowd to be heard.

Canada was changed forever by Mark MacGuigan's criminal code reforms and amendments to modernize the divorce law as well as the increased influence he had on reforms to immigration laws.

Today my colleagues in the Reform Party join with our colleagues in all parties to salute a dedicated Canadian who served his country so well. We also pass along our sincere regrets to his family and many friends across Canada.

Farewell, Mark MacGuigan.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add my voice to those of my colleagues from the Liberal Party and the Reform Party to regret the passing of this former Liberal minister.

This minister, who was the Minister of External Affairs from 1980 to 1982 and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada from 1982 to 1984, was known as a competent minister, who showed respect for his opponents, was a perfectionist and, more importantly, made himself very available.

He was a native of Prince Edward Island. Like his father, who was a minister too and a Supreme Court judge, he studied law. He taught law at three universities. Many MPs past and present were his students, and he is remembered as an excellent professor and an outstanding communicator. This talent for communication eventually led him to a career in politics. Following his election in 1968, he sat in this House for 16 years.

I also remember him because, as a student and a young teacher interested in politics, I followed his career. I was deeply touched, for example, by the battle he waged for the American draft dodgers during the Vietnam war. He wanted to amend the Immigration Act.

As a member of Parliament, he was a model in terms of both attendance in the House and personal action of a member who believes in a cause. After his years as a minister, he left the political arena in 1984, after participating in the leadership race following Trudeau's departure. He was appointed a justice of the Federal Court of Appeal. His career as a judge was successful as well. However, he will be remembered mostly as a MP devoted to his constituents and a profoundly human man.

In my name and in that of all Bloc Québécois members, I would like to extend our deepest condolences to all of his family and his party.

*Tributes**[English]*

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of all my NDP colleagues in adding our sincere condolences to the family of Mark MacGuigan.

I had the pleasure of serving in this House with Mr. MacGuigan from 1979 to 1984 and I remember him well.

We pay tribute this day to a distinguished career in the public service, a distinguished career in academia, which was recognized earlier by the Liberal member who spoke of his selection to head up the University of Windsor law school, a distinguished career in Parliament as a backbencher and as a minister, and a distinguished career after Parliament on the judiciary.

I want to remember him in particular as someone who self-consciously wrestled as a person of faith with the many difficult questions that people of religious orientation have to deal with in politics. He had to deal as a Roman Catholic with various difficult issues having to do with abortion and divorce.

I understand he wrote a book on these subjects and how to deal with these very difficult topics in a pluralistic society. I did not know about that book until I read about it in one of the obituaries. I now look forward to reading it because it seems to me that he was wrestling, with his considerable intellectual powers, with very difficult questions which all of us need to address.

This is one of the aspects of parliamentary life that sometimes goes unnoticed in the back and forth and the rough and tumble of this place. We sometimes miss the fact that many of us, and in this case Mark MacGuigan, wrestle at a competent and deep intellectual level with a lot of difficult issues. We pay tribute to someone who was willing to do that, to do it in the public domain and to offer his life as a service to Canada.

• (1530)

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the members of the Progressive Conservative caucus to offer our sympathy to Mrs. MacGuigan, her children and the children of the Hon. Mark MacGuigan.

I want to take a moment to give thanks for his life and for his public service to Canada. Dr. MacGuigan's parliamentary career brought him in contact with many issues that still resonate around this House. He tried to improve the way this House does its work. He was the co-chairman of the special joint committee on the Constitution of Canada in 1971. He took an avid interest in the statutory instruments committee and understood its importance to the freedoms of all Canadians.

His ministerial career came at a time when Canada was examining its place in this hemisphere. The justice system having to deal with family relationships and the devastation caused by drunk driving was one of the many issues he touched upon in his distin-

guished legal career. He was certainly an accomplished jurist and legal scholar and professor, as touched upon by some of the other members.

Mark MacGuigan leaves behind a record of achievement and respect for others upon which he reflected at a 1971 convocation at the University of Prince Edward Island where he said "institutions and people change slowly and one must not allow impatience even in the cause of righteousness to cause a lack of respect for the freedom of others to believe and live differently from us". Very prophetic words.

As a dedicated thinker and tribune, he has come to the end of his life. Canadians and this House are better for his participation in public affairs. We mourn his passing.

* * *

THE LATE MR. BRUCE BEER

Ms. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on January 12, 1998 the long and distinguished life of Bruce Beer came to a peaceful conclusion after 87 memorable years. Residents of my riding of Mississauga East and others throughout the Peel region as well as today's deputy prime minister will affectionately recall a hardworking community minded friend who embodied grassroots politics.

In 1962 Bruce Beer stunned political observers when he was elected to the House of Commons and became the very first Liberal to represent Peel county in the 20th century. Residents in Peel remember his bubbly populist campaigns often quenched by his supporters' chants of "we want Beer, we want Beer", which was obviously a winning slogan.

Peel residents showed so much respect for Bruce Beer that he was victorious in four consecutive elections. The Right Hon. Lester B. Pearson recognized Bruce Beer as a man who emerged from the steepest challenges of the century to represent his community in Parliament. Mr. Pearson appointed him as parliamentary secretary to several ministers during his tenure, including finance minister Mitchell Sharp.

At the age of 12 Bruce Beer put his own education aside to help out on the family farm in difficult times and continued to sacrifice his clear academic potential in support of his family and community throughout the Great Depression.

Only at the end of that sparse era did Bruce Beer return to academics. Earning many scholarships, Mr. Beer graduated from the Ontario Agricultural College in 1939. For the next 20 years Bruce Beer earned the confidence of the many diverse farming communities in Peel. He was sowing the seeds of his future in politics.

After his groundbreaking victory for the Liberals in 1962, Beer continued to fight for the issues of greatest concern to his constitu-

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ents. His own experiences in the Depression led to a staunch advocacy for farm loans programs and milk subsidies that maintained the strength of the farming communities in southern Ontario. He was a fixture on the agriculture committee and was Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture for the bulk of his career where he could have maximum impact on the issues closest to his heart and community.

• (1535)

Mirroring the transition occurring in Peel County during his tenure as Peel's MP, Bruce Beer broadened his impact beyond agriculture. While representing rural farming communities as well as townspeople, Bruce Beer met the challenges of a region engaged in rapid transition toward urban industrialization. He received the post of Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance at a time of unprecedented economic and industrial expansion in Canada and especially in Peel which has since expanded from one to seven ridings.

Mr. Beer continued to serve his community after retiring from public life in 1972, always making time to assist people in the community.

Mr. Beer is survived by his wife, three children and six grandchildren, who can all be proud to have known the man whose potential and hard work eclipsed the world of challenges and lead him to the House of Commons while never leaving his roots in the farming communities of southern Ontario.

I am sure all members of this House join me in extending heartfelt sympathies to Bruce Beer's family who can rest assured that his memories will live on in the House of Commons as they will throughout the region of Peel.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I also rise today to pay tribute to Mr. Bruce Beer and to extend sympathies on behalf of the Official Opposition to his family at this time of grief.

I listened with interest to the tribute that was paid to him just now and a couple of thoughts came to mind. One was this man was elected four times to the House of Commons, no small feat in and of itself.

I read through the obituary that was published in the *Toronto Star* following his death and, Mr. Speaker, I thought there are a couple of things that are very notable that you can tell about a man that you have never met before from the tributes his opponents pay to him. It was very interesting that one of the tributes paid to him was by someone who opposed him. The quote I think is worth repeating by a Conservative opponent who ran against him in 1965 and of course lost. He stated he "recalls Mr. Beer as a gentleman, honourable opponent and a good committee member and I cannot believe I am saying this about a Liberal but he was always approachable. I have never heard a bad word about Bruce".

Would it not be good, Mr. Speaker, if all of us in our political life could go through four terms of office, if that was our case, and have our political opponents say such kind words?

I think too that Mr. Beer came from a generation that had to pull themselves up by their boot straps. As has been mentioned already, he went to work at 12 years of age, working in the dairy industry for 10 cents a day. There are stories that warm the heart but must bring tears to the eyes too when we think of the hard times that he must have gone through.

His daughter recalls in a fond way how her father would head out the door always singing and quoting poetry. As he stomped off to work, she said, "he would chant: Someone said it couldn't be done, but he with a chuckle replied that maybe he couldn't but he would not be the one who said it couldn't be done until he tried".

I think he was obviously a man of laughter and had much to offer Parliament and Canada. We thank his family for the sacrifice that he made during his elected life and we grieve with them at his passing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of myself and my colleagues of the Bloc Québécois, I wish to offer condolences to the family and friends of Bruce Beer, who recently passed away at the age of 87.

After graduating from the Ontario College of Agriculture in 1939, Bruce Beer began a career as an ag. rep. Elected for the first time in 1962, he represented the people of the riding of Peel until his retirement from active politics in 1972.

• (1540)

During his time in Parliament, Bruce Beer was to serve as parliamentary secretary to Minister of Agriculture John Greene and Minister of Finance Mitchell Sharp, in the Pearson government.

In 1972, he decided not to seek re-election. He was appointed judge of the Citizenship Court, and held that position until his retirement in 1975.

As parliamentarians, we are all aware of just how demanding a life in politics is, and Bruce Beer's family must be proud of all his accomplishments.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleagues in the NDP, I would like to add our sincere condolences to the family of Mr. Beer. We join in paying tribute to a life which was long and well lived. He was held in great respect by his community.

I did not have the honour of serving with Mr. Beer, but I understand from a colleague who did that he had the respect of all members of the House. He was a man who carried himself with a

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great deal of dignity and acted in a way which attracted the respect and admiration of all members of the House.

He was a great spokesperson for rural Canada and for his constituents.

For all of these things we express our gratitude and we pay tribute to him on the occasion of his death.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, I want to associate the members of the Progressive Conservative caucus with other members who have spoken in offering our sympathy to Bruce Beer's wife, his children and grandchildren, his sister and brother.

Bruce Beer was a member of this House during the turbulent 1960s, a period of great instability in the House of Commons. He reflected this when he spoke to the House for the first time on December 18, 1962, saying that he was not certain if he was giving his maiden speech or his farewell sermon. He left that as a question to be resolved posthumously.

As well, history will show that this was indeed his maiden speech in a long and distinguished career in this House. Re-election after re-election and several appointments as parliamentary secretary to a number of ministers, including the minister of agriculture, demonstrated Mr. Beer's competence and popularity in his community.

An examination of *Hansard* reveals that Mr. Beer vigorously championed the cause of farmers and rural communities, as well as urban areas of his constituency.

He helped to build his community, his country, and his service in this House reflects that. For that we are certainly grateful, and for his family who shared him with the people of Canada.

* * *

THE LATE DAVID ORLIKOW

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I feel extremely privileged to be able to pay tribute to our dear friend and colleague, David Orlikow. I do so on behalf of the New Democratic Party caucus, my leader, and particularly those members from Manitoba, such as the member for Winnipeg—Transcona, who had a very close association with David for many years.

The constituency that I was elected to serve on June 2 is largely David Orlikow territory. I am reminded of that daily by his former constituents.

My personal goal is to achieve David Orlikow's high standards of service and his great fighting spirit. My hope today is to do justice to David Orlikow's memory on behalf of all of his constituents in Winnipeg North who were served so well and so faithfully

by David Orlikow throughout his 26 years as a member of Parliament.

It is not an easy task to try to convey in the fullest sense the kind of contribution he made to our party, to his community and to his country; nor is it an easy task to capture the sense of great loss which we all feel at this time.

On behalf of everyone in this House I extend expressions of deep sympathy to his daughter, Leslie, his grandchildren and all members of his family.

● (1545)

Politics and the pursuit of social justice were David Orlikow's life work. He served in public life for 43 years and he served at all levels of government: school trustee, alderperson, member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly and member of Parliament for Winnipeg North between 1962 and 1988.

David Orlikow died on January 19, a few months short of his 80th birthday, fighting to the very end. He was, as we always knew him, a fighter for social justice, always demanding fair policies when it came to immigration policies, refugee policies, workers rights, always associated with the labour movement and free collective bargaining and a very important part of our party as a founding member of the New Democratic Party and a lifetime member of the CCF and the NDP.

I am sure there is not a person in this Chamber who knew David and worked with him or received one of his many phone calls who did not end up feeling a great sense of admiration and respect for David Orlikow.

We remember David Orlikow for his devotion to the people he was elected to serve, the priority he gave to constituency concerns and problem solving, his determination to achieve fairness one case at a time, his tenacious, unapologetic, no frills approach to getting the job done and his dogged persistence to pursue any injustice or any issue he felt was important. Just look at his record.

I did a quick count of all his House of Commons entries between 1962 and 1988 and came up with a staggering total of 2,906, and he did it all without a lot of fanfare and not much media attention. However, when he did get a headline we knew what David stood for. We knew how he saw his purpose as a member of Parliament. Speaking out against poverty, standing up for equality and fighting the banks, that was David Orlikow. Imagine what he would be saying today about the proposed bank merger.

That fighting spirit came through right to the end. He had conversations with several of us, including the member for Burnaby—Douglas, just days before he died about the need to convince the Canadian government to extend compensation to all the families of the victims of the Allan Institute and the CIA brainwashing experiments.

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Today we feel the loss of a great parliamentarian, a social activist, a mentor, a friend and a colleague. Let us honour his memory by recommitting ourselves to achieving David Orlikow's high standards of political representation, public service and human compassion.

Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhan (Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the government caucus joins with the House in paying tribute to the memory of Mr. David Orlikow who from 1962 to 1988 served as the member of Parliament for Winnipeg North, the former constituency I had the honour to serve since as his successor until the boundary changed in June last year. It now constitutes a significant part of my riding of Winnipeg North—St. Paul.

May I convey on behalf of the Liberal caucus and my constituents my deepest condolences to his immediate family and relatives.

Mr. David Orlikow left this earth on the 19 ultimo when the House of Commons was in recess. This week, as we begin another year and another chapter in the books of parliamentary history, we mourn the loss of a former colleague whose death reminds us of a chapter in history we ourselves will eventually place in the bookcases of this great House.

• (1550)

In death, our true legacy is measured whatever the magnitudes. In death, our time on earth takes on a more historical perspective.

We are reminded that we have had predecessors and we will have successors. Our time in this Chamber is only for a moment. For that moment we must fully dedicate ourselves to the best of our abilities, creativity and industry; yes, to the best of our minds and to the best of our hearts.

There is no assurance of longevity on this earth. There is only the assurance of a lasting legacy of good work. As we reflect today on the legacies of those who precede us, we are reminded of the importance of our own work in the present, the fruits of which will become the valuable legacies for those who succeed us.

We can never erase the moment when we took our oath and became a member of Parliament. For all of us here, our personal legacy began the very moment when we made the steadfast decision to serve the Canadian public in the way we knew best, to serve in Parliament, a place where we debate to reconcile competing philosophies, logics, claims and priorities.

We do so best guided by thinking straight from the mind and straight from the heart, as our prime minister has so eloquently expressed on more than one occasion.

I am sure for David Orlikow it must have been a most rewarding career, representing the former constituency of Winnipeg North for

26 continuous years. The years of commitment he dedicated to his constituents were hallmarks of his tenure.

Indeed it would be a daunting task to review page by page in *Hansard* the story of his parliamentary career, but we know he served his constituents well, for they elected him nine consecutive times, a political record by any standard.

Allow me to share with members one intervention he made by way of a member's statement on December 14, 1983 when he called for legislation to "ensure workers some right of control of new technology". He was advocating that unless there was opportunity for consultation in the workplace the result would be a deplorable state of human and economic suffering.

He took the case of 15 Bell Canada telephone operators in Midland, Ontario who were to be displaced a month later when automation was to be introduced to the phone switchboard system. Writing on this case for the May-June, 1996 issue of the periodical *This Magazine*, author Heather Menzies observed "nothing came out of the intervention".

This judgment would later prove to be premature and in fact wrong. Mr. Orlikow's effort may very well have planted a seed for others who advance similar causes.

A little over a decade later, in September 1997, the Government of Canada issued a report entitled "Valuing our People", a report in part about the new technology and workforce of the future.

Allow me to quote a relevant paragraph from this document: "Public service workplaces can be made more efficient and better suited to the requirements of new technologies while improving employees' quality of life. Employees believe that all it will take is commitment, better use of state of the art technology and consultation with employees". Let me underscore those two phrases, new technology and consultation with the employees.

Truly Mr. Orlikow had the foresight to recognize the future impact of this linkage 14 years earlier.

Let me conclude by saying it was with this vision, the vision of one David Orlikow, that won the support of his constituents for more than two and a half decades.

His colleagues who knew him best said of him David was a tireless defender of his constituents and champion of many causes over the years. In tandem with his peer, Mr. Stanley Knowles, he represented Winnipeg's colourful north in Parliament. I share this sentiment.

Indeed as a member of Parliament, Mr. Orlikow contributed his share. Mr. Orlikow knew and lived parliamentary life, secure in purpose, serving his constituents for a quarter of a century plus one year with unswerving commitment and dedication.

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• (1555)

Although his time in this House and on this earth has come and gone, we know that what he had uniquely contributed as a member of Parliament and as a citizen of Canada will forever be etched in a chapter of the history books of this great nation.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the official opposition to pay tribute to a person who has served our country in this Chamber, Mr. David Orlikow, who passed away on January 19.

It has often been said that every generation of Canadians stands on the shoulders of those who have gone on before and built the foundations of our country. I and my colleagues are aware of the valuable contribution Mr. Orlikow made in the second half of this century to public life in Canada. I would like to list a few of his qualities and achievements.

First, his long record of public service. He served his fellow Canadians for a total of 43 continuous years in elected office at four different levels of government. That is truly remarkable. From 1945 to 1951 he was a school trustee in Winnipeg. From 1950 to 1958 he was a Winnipeg city alderman. From 1958 to 1962 he was a member of the Manitoba legislature. As mentioned earlier, from 1962 to 1988 he was the member of Parliament for Winnipeg North. That means he had 18 consecutive wins. That is an achievement hard to match, a pretty good record.

Second, his involvement and advocacy in non-governmental organizations. Mr. Orlikow worked with various NGOs from the John Howard Society to the Elizabeth Fry, the Jewish Labour Committee and the Canadian Labour Congress.

These activities further demonstrated his concern for the many social issues that earmarked his parliamentary career. These issues included poverty, illiteracy, human rights, services for the disabled and workers rights. He fought tirelessly for these issues.

Third, his faithfulness to his political roots. He was faithful to the end to his political roots and the philosophy which he readily acknowledged were in the eastern European political traditions. He found these political expressions in voices in the CCF and the NDP in Canada. He was an active member of his party and sought to advance its cause and influence. He needs to be remembered and to paid tribute to as somebody who fought really hard for what he believed in always.

Fourth, he was a tireless worker on behalf of his constituents. This is one area of all of our parliamentary work that I am sure we would all aspire to. Mr. Orlikow was a great example, apparently dedicating total Saturdays and other days, from sunup to sundown, to have appointments with his constituents. It is no wonder they re-elected him as many times as they did when he offered that kind of service.

Finally, Mr. Orlikow was a husband, a father and a grandfather. Those are the things which last far longer than any parliamentary career.

Mr. Orlikow was predeceased by his wife Velma in 1990. He is survived by his daughter and two grandchildren. It is to those loved ones that we want to pay tribute, for no person is an island. Each of us who serves in public life knows how valuable and how important family and friends are. We would not be able to be here and do the job that we do unless there are many people who love us and support us back home.

I and my colleagues in the official opposition join in extending our sympathy and prayers to the total family and to those people who care about Mr. Orlikow.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois, I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the family of David Orlikow, who died January 19 at the age of 80.

He was born in Winnipeg in 1918 and began his political life in 1945 through involvement in his community first and then as city councillor with the City of Winnipeg until 1958. After serving as a member of the Manitoba legislature from 1958 to 1962, he was elected to the House of Commons for the first time in the June 18, 1962 general election under the banner of the New Democratic Party to represent the people of Winnipeg North. He sat in this House for 26 years consecutively.

Mr. Orlikow is also to be remembered for his involvement in human rights, as president of the Elizabeth Fry Society, as secretary on the human rights committee of the CLC and as director of the Jewish Labour Committee of Canada. His long career in public service is a most honourable one, and his family and friends should be proud of his accomplishments.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of my caucus and the PC Party of Canada and as a Manitoban to pay tribute to a truly great Manitoban.

On January 19, 1998 one of Manitoba's longest serving politicians died in the hospital of heart failure at the age of 79. David Orlikow was a member of Parliament for over 25 years and served his constituents of Winnipeg North with great dignity and professionalism. He gave over 40 years of his life to the public, working for the greater good of Manitobans. Whether it was in the capacity as a former MLA, alderman or school trustee, he served the public to the best of his ability. His strong belief in social justice led him

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to his political career where he fought for human rights, immigration and the union movement among other things.

David Orlikow was remembered best for his tireless commitment to his constituents. He often spent long hours both in his office and talking with his constituents trying to solve whatever problems they may have had.

There is one word that would best describe David Orlikow and that word would be dedicated.

Regardless of one's political stripe it is difficult not to respect a man of his calibre. Unfortunately I was not able to get to know him but David Orlikow will be greatly missed by all who did have that opportunity.

There is an old adage that one cannot demand respect but one must earn respect. In Mr. Orlikow's situation, he earned the respect of all Manitobans.

I would like to extend my condolences on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party to the surviving members of the Orlikow family.

On behalf of Manitoba, thank you for your years of public service.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

MEMBERS BENEFITS STUDY COMMISSION

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table in both official languages a copy of the report by the commission studying MPs' benefits.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 81, I wish to designate tomorrow as an allotted day.

While we are on the subject, I would ask if there is unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order 81(16), in the combined periods ending March 26, 1998 and June 23, 1998 the total number of opposition motions that shall come to a vote shall be not more than seven.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Does the hon. House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the 19th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership and associate membership of some standing committees and one standing joint committee.

If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 19th report later this day.

* * *

● (1605)

CRIMINAL CODE

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Ref.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-305, an act to amend the Criminal Code (selling wildlife).

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce this private member's bill which would bring the offence of selling wildlife parts under the Criminal Code. This is a concern that many Canadians have with regard to the protection of endangered species and the illegal taking of wildlife and the selling thereof of parts such as horns et cetera for whatever reason.

This bill would have the penalties for the illegal killing of wildlife and the selling of parts brought under the Criminal Code.

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

BANK ACT

Mr. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-306, an act to amend the Bank Act (bank charges).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce the Act to amend the Bank Act (bank charges).

This bill is important for several reasons. First, because it is the first bill I have introduced in the House. Second, I would like to tell you that this bill has its origins in Brome—Missisquoi. It came about because of a series of meetings I have been conducting for the past two years in the 42 municipalities in my riding.

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[English]

On Monday nights I hold town hall meetings all across my riding. At two out of three of those meetings people have brought up the subject of bank charges. This proposed bill relates to the concerns of millions of Canadians. The banks should be considered a public service in relation to consumers.

[Translation]

This bill also calls for transparency. I think it is important that Canadian consumers be better informed about fee increases. They must also be more aware of the new service charges constantly being imposed on new products, as fast as the banking industry can think them up.

I will quickly review the bill's principles. The bill provides for a committee of the House to make a recommendation to the government regarding the introduction of regulations setting maximum charges.

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

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I present this petition on behalf of constituents of my riding as well as other ridings in western Canada. This petition deals with a piece of legislation that will again be coming forward to this House, Bill C-4, the bill that deals with the Canadian Wheat Board.

I will read the petition as listed. It says that Bill C-4 does not make the necessary changes to the Canadian Wheat Board that the majority of western Canadian farmers want to ensure that the Canadian Wheat Board operates in the best interests of the producers and that Bill C-4 opens the possibility of including more crops under the Canadian Wheat Board's jurisdiction which will adversely affect the marketing and processing of non-board grains.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to withdraw the parts of Bill C-4 which would allow for additional crops to be marketed by the Canadian Wheat Board and that no more crops are brought under the Canadian Wheat Board's monopoly.

I wish to present this and table it in the House.

● (1610)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Hon. members, the Chair got a bit ahead of the House. We are going to go back to where we should have been, which is to the first reading of Senate public bills. On motions, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the leader of the government in the House.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives it consent, I move that the 19th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented to the House earlier this day be concurred in.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have unanimous consent to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move:

That the membership of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be modified as follows: André Harvey for Norman Doyle, and that Norman Doyle be added to and André Harvey be deleted from the list of associate members.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have unanimous consent to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PENSIONS

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, following consultations with all sides of the House, I wish to seek consent of the House to put the following motion, with the support of members of the Liberal Party, the Reform Party, the Bloc Québécois, the Conservative Party and the independent member for York South—Weston. I put this motion to the House with my NDP colleagues on behalf of the 130,000 U.K. pensioners living in Canada, 60,000 of whom are women.

I move:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should renew its commitment to British pensioners living in Canada and vigorously pursue an agreement with the Government of the United Kingdom to provide them with uprated pensions to achieve benefit parity with other U.K. pensioners.

Routine Proceedings

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The House has heard the terms of the motion—

Mr. John Nunziata: Mr. Speaker, may—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): There is no debate on this.

I am going to start over again and ask for the agreement of the House.

Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I am sorry, hon. members, but I think we have to go back to this again.

Hon. members, after consultation with the clerk I am advised that the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas asked for unanimous consent to introduce the motion. Unanimous consent to introduce the motion was given. It was given as I understand it without debate.

• (1615)

The House gave unanimous consent to move the motion without debate, as I understand it. The House then heard the terms of the motion and the question was put.

I am going to put the question again just so we get it clear. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Carried. On a point of order, the hon. House leader for the Reform Party.

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to get this clear. Are we asking that the particular motion go through and to what stage? If approved now, does this motion go? That is the first question that I would like answered.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The Chair has been corrected. The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas presented the motion but there was no mention of any debate on the motion. We

received unanimous consent to present the motion and waive notice, which is what we did.

The second aspect of the question of the House leader of the Reform Party is what happens to the motion. It then becomes a resolution of the House and that is the end of it.

What we have to arrive at now is an opportunity for the member for York South—Weston to rise on debate but at some future date.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unanimous consent was sought to put the motion and unanimous consent was received.

All that remains to be done on the part of the Chair is to put the motion, to ask whether it is the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion, at which point it may be in order for a member to say a word or two. Then the motion would be put to the House, not at some later date but now. The idea of the consensus was to get it passed and done with.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The Chair appreciates the timely intervention by the member for Winnipeg—Transcona. I will put the question.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Carried. On debate, the hon. member for York South—Weston.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. John Nunziata (York South—Weston, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to make some very brief submissions with respect to the motion. I would like to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): On a point of order, the whip of the Reform Party.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, this is turning into a botch-up. We have to stop and correct it now.

After a motion has been tabled and has received unanimous consent of the House, I do not think you can then move to debate it. After it has had unanimous consent you cannot then debate it.

There is no point debating something that we have all approved. There is something in the order that you have to correct. We cannot debate something we have passed or we will be here all day debating it. We cannot do it in that order.

An hon. member: If you want to debate, we will debate it.

Mr. Chuck Strahl: I am sure, Mr. Speaker, you have to look at that. It is not in the right order. We cannot be debating something we have passed.

Routine Proceedings

• (1620)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): On a point of order, the hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona.

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr Speaker, after asking whether it was the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion everyone said “Agreed” and you said “Carried”.

The motion is carried. You cannot debate a motion after it has been carried. The motion is passed and the matter is resolved.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): On a point of order, the chief government whip.

Mr. Bob Kilger (Stormont—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just for clarification, I understood the motion was put forth in a way that did not specify without debate. There might be some technical procedural matter here that we are dealing with and it is probably causing confusion.

Having said that, I wonder if we could get some indication from the hon. member for York South—Weston, who is seeking the floor, as to how long he might be. That might help us in getting on with the matter.

On the basis of the member for York South—Weston wanting the floor for a minute, would we be agreeable to letting him speak, I would submit, and then carry on with the other business of the day?

An hon. member: Agreed.

Mr. Randy White: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Hon. members, this is going to be a long evening. With the co-operation of all members, perhaps we can cut the Chair a little slack here and get past this.

Perhaps the Chair should have asked whether the original motion being moved was with or without debate. The fact of the matter is that it was not mentioned. The chief government whip has given us, the royal us, an opportunity to move beyond this, so I would beg the indulgence of all members to allow then—

Mr. Jim Karygiannis: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): No, we do not have unanimous consent. The motion is carried.

The Chair then asks for unanimous consent of the House to allow the member for York South—Weston to make a statement. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): There is not unanimous consent. On a point of order, the hon. member for York South—Weston.

Mr. John Nunziata (York South—Weston, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, this motion was introduced on December 10 and through a miscommunication the motion was not carried at the time, notwithstanding the fact that I am in complete support of the motion.

The reason why the motion is back before the House today is because unanimous consent was not given on December 10. However, today, the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas has sought unanimous consent. It is a motion that is worthy of complete and unanimous support in the House. I urge the prime minister and the government to go to bat for British pensioners living in Canada who have been discriminated against by the British government by having their pensions frozen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The Chair would presume it is a fairly long stretch to call that a point of order.

* * *

PETITIONS

RAIL SERVICE

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr Speaker, I am very pleased to present a petition on behalf of the constituents of Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough and the people of Nova Scotia pursuant to a call to parliament to initiate passenger rail service in Cape Breton and Eastern Nova Scotia.

It asks for a return of that service to the people of that part of Canada. I am very pleased to table it in the House today, pursuant to the standing orders.

• (1625)

PUBLIC NUDITY

Mr. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from my constituents.

The undersigned residents of Canada draw to the attention of the House that incidents of explicit nudity in public places are becoming more and more frequent; that each incident of nudity harms the public, specifically children; that there are laws in Canada to protect our children against this form of nudity in all media but currently there are no laws protecting our children in public places; and that there would be fewer such incidents if certain legislative measures were taken.

Therefore the petitioners call upon parliament to enact legislation to amend the Criminal Code, specifically sections 173 and 174, so that indecent act and public nudity provisions clearly state that a women exposing her breasts in public is an indecent act.

I add my voice to that too.

FAMILY RIGHTS

Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present two petitions on behalf of my constituents.

Routine Proceedings

The first group of petitioners asks parliament to recognize the fundamental rights of individuals to pursue family life free from undo interference by the state.

ABORTIONS

Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the second group of petitioners supports a national referendum to be held concurrently with the federal election on the question of government funding for medically unnecessary abortions.

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by several hundred residents of Burnaby.

The petitioners note that the Food and Drugs Act is designed to protect Canadians from potentially harmful effects related to food and drug consumption, that the consumption of alcoholic beverages may cause health problems, and that fetal alcohol syndrome and alcohol related birth defects are preventable by avoiding alcohol during pregnancy.

The petitioners therefore call upon parliament to mandate the labelling of alcoholic products to warn pregnant women and other persons of certain dangers associated with the consumption of alcoholic beverages.

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. Nelson Riis (Kamloops, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to associate myself with the previous petition.

Pursuant to Standing Order 36 it is my honour to present a petition on behalf of thousands of people from the city of Kamloops and the region around that city.

They point out that it is time the GST be reduced. The GST was introduced because the government said we had a serious deficit problem. That deficit problem has essentially been eliminated.

Therefore they call upon parliament to urge the government to bring in legislation to begin phasing out the GST.

* * *

[*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 would ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[*English*]

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would you be so kind as to call Notice of Motion for the Production of Papers No. P-6 in the name of the hon. member for Brandon—Souris.

That an Order of the House do issue for copies of all plans, drawings, documents and proposals initiated by the crown, or by others on behalf of the crown, surrounding the 1992 internal managerial review that was conducted by the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Peter Adams: Mr. Speaker, a search of the registry files of the Grains and Oilseeds Division International Markets Bureau did not uncover any plans, drawings, documents or proposals initiated by the crown or by others on behalf of the crown regarding the 1992 internal managerial review conducted by the Canadian Wheat Board.

In his appearance before the standing committee in its consideration of Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts, first session, 36th Parliament, 46th Elizabeth II, 1997, Mr. Lorne Hehn, chief commissioner of the Canadian Wheat Board, indicated to the hon. member that he would not make the report public because in conducting the internal review the board indicated to its employees that it would guarantee confidence and confidentiality of their comments made during the review. Mr. Hehn also conveyed the same view in a letter to the hon. member.

I therefore ask the hon. member to withdraw his motion.

• (1630)

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, I do not withdraw my motion. I wish to transfer it for debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Transferred for debate)

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

IRAQ

The Speaker: My colleagues, at 2.15 p.m. this day, I received an application from the hon. member for Sherbrooke for an emergency debate. It is in order at this time that I consider this request and I call on the hon. member for Sherbrooke.

Hon. Jean J. Charest (Sherbrooke, PC): Mr. Speaker, I make this application pursuant to Standing Order 52 to discuss an important matter, otherwise known as an emergency debate.

Mr. Speaker, you will find in the communication that I delivered to you, that the argument is based on the following. Pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 52, I hereby give notice of my intention to move a motion for the adjournment of the House to provide the House with an opportunity to debate an urgent situation developing in Iraq and the response thereto of the Government of Canada.

It will be well known to you, Mr. Speaker, that the Iraqi government has refused to co-operate with the inspection teams mandated by the United Nations to eliminate the Iraqi ability to produce and use large quantities of chemical and other weapons of mass destruction.

In a statement to the British House of Commons on February 2, 1998, only a few days ago, the foreign secretary confirmed that Iraq "has developed the know how and equipment to produce biological and chemical weapons on an industrial scale" and that "without effective UN monitoring, Iraq could produce enough anthrax every week to fill two missile warheads and could within weeks be producing a large volume of nerve gas".

To date, ministers of the crown, ministers of the Government of Canada, have failed to provide the House of Commons with a statement of its policies on this urgent and life threatening situation. As participants in the previous United Nations military action against Iraq, Canadians could very well be targeted by this action.

The Government of Canada has a duty to inform the House of Commons of its policy, and the House of Commons in return has a duty to consider and comment on that policy.

In light of the continuing refusal of Saddam Hussein to accept diplomatic intervention and the increasing possibility, Mr. Speaker, of a military intervention, it is appropriate, in fact urgent, that you use your discretion to permit the House of Commons to decide whether or not it wishes to debate this question under the procedure authorized by Standing Order 52.

S. O. 52

[Translation]

This is an emergency situation. I do not have to remind you of the statement made today by the President of Russia, who said that a global conflict was a possibility. Some tried to pretend that his comment was meaningless. If so, it is even worse. The comment is from the President of Russia.

Given the importance of holding an emergency debate to sound out the opinion of the House, the rules provide that you can take this into account. I urge you today to make good use of your discretionary power and to allow an emergency debate.

In conclusion, after consulting the other parties, I believe our colleagues from the Reform Party, the Bloc Québécois leader and NDP members also feel that it is important to express their views on this issue, and I think you would get the unanimous consent of the House to proceed in this fashion.

[English]

The Speaker: As I said earlier, my colleagues, I received this letter at 2.15 p.m. today. The member of Parliament for Sherbrooke has read the gist of what is in the letter. There is no debate on this.

• (1635)

Excuse me, I did not hear the final comment. Would the hon. member for Sherbrooke please clarify. Did he ask that other leaders in the House of Commons be allowed to comment in his statement?

Hon. Jean J. Charest: Correct.

The Speaker: On that point, I will go to a point of order.

Mr. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This is the first we have heard of this. I would be grateful if you would reserve your decision until we have heard from the government House leader.

The Speaker: My colleagues, I was in the process of saying that I find this to be, as all requests for emergency debates are, an important matter. I am going to give myself a little time to think about it.

I am going to make a decision on this before the end of this sitting day. I understand that we are going to be seized with a vote in the near future so I will reserve my decision on this particular matter. I will return to the House this day with an answer.

If I understand correctly, the hon. member who is the leader of the Conservative Party has asked for unanimous consent to put a motion to let the other leaders comment on this matter right now. That is what they have asked for.

Government Orders

First of all, does he have permission to put the motion? Is there the unanimous consent of the House for the member of Parliament for Sherbrooke to put the motion?

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would not object if there were consultations along party lines. I understand there is already an adjournment debate for tonight but I would not mind a consultation between people so that we could establish perhaps if it could be done some other day. In terms of giving an agreement right now without consultation, we will have to deny that.

The Speaker: I do not want the House to become too embroiled in a debate. I think if the House is given a little bit of time, it can resolve this matter.

There is no unanimous agreement to let the other leaders speak in this matter right now, so that matter is settled. My decision is that I will take some time to reflect on this matter. I will come back to the House before this sitting day is over. This matter will stay rested for now.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

INCOME TAX AMENDMENTS ACT, 1997

The House resumed from February 3 consideration of the motion that Bill C-28, an act to amend the Income Tax Act, the Income Tax Application Rules, the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, the Canada Pension Plan, the Children's Special Allowances Act, the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, the Cultural Property Export and Import Act, the Customs Act, the Customs Tariff, the Employment Insurance Act, the Excise Tax Act, the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act, the Income Tax Conventions Interpretation Act, the Old Age Security Act, the Tax Court of Canada Act, the Tax Rebate Discounting Act, the Unemployment Insurance Act, the Western Grain Transition Payments Act and certain acts related to the Income Tax Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-28. Call in the members.

• (1710)

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

(*Division No. 69*)

YEAS

Members

Adams	Alcock
Assad	Assadourian
Augustine	Baker
Bakopanos	Barnes
Beaumier	Bélair

Bélanger	Bellemare
Bennett	Bertrand
Bevilacqua	Blondin-Andrew
Bonin	Bonwick
Boudria	Bradshaw
Brown	Bryden
Bulte	Byrne
Calder	Cannis
Caplan	Carroll
Catterall	Cauchon
Chamberlain	Chan
Charbonneau	Chrétien (Saint-Maurice)
Clouthier	Coderre
Cohen	Collenette
Comuzzi	Cullen
DeVillers	Dhaliwal
Dion	Discepolo
Dromisky	Drouin
Duhamel	Easter
Finestone	Finlay
Folco	Fontana
Fry	Gagliano
Godfrey	Goodale
Graham	Gray (Windsor West)
Grose	Guarnieri
Harb	Harvard
Hubbard	Ianno
Iftody	Jackson
Jennings	Jordan
Karetak-Lindell	Karygiannis
Keyes	Kilger (Stormont—Dundas)
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)	Knudson
Kraft Sloan	Lastewka
Lee	Leung
Lincoln	Longfield
MacAulay	Mahoney
Malhi	Maloney
Manley	Marchi
Marleau	Massé
McCormick	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough East)	McLellan (Edmonton West)
McTeague	McWhinney
Mifflin	Milliken
Mills (Broadview—Greenwood)	Mitchell
Murray	Myers
Nault	Normand
Nunziata	O'Reilly
Pagtakhan	Paradis
Parrish	Patry
Peric	Peterson
Pettigrew	Phinney
Pickard (Kent—Essex)	Pillitteri
Pratt	Proud
Provenzano	Redman
Reed	Richardson
Robillard	Rock
Saada	Scott (Fredericton)
Serré	Shepherd
Speller	St. Denis
Stewart (Brant)	Stewart (Northumberland)
St-Julien	Szabo
Telegdi	Thibeault
Torsney	Ur
Valeri	Vanclief
Volpe	Wappel
Whelan	Wilfert
Wood—143	

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Anders
Axworthy (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar)

Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska)	Bailey
Bellehumeur	Benoit
Bergeron	Bernier (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Bigras	Blaikie
Borotsik	Breitkreuz (Yellowhead)
Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville)	Brien
Brison	Cadman
Canuel	Casey
Casson	Charest
Chatters	Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic)
Crête	Cummins
Dalphondu-Guiral	de Savoye
Debien	Desrochers
Dockrill	Doyle
Dubé (Lévis)	Dubé (Madawaska—Restigouche)
Duceppe	Dumas
Duncan	Earle
Elley	Epp
Gagnon	Gauthier
Gilmour	Godin (Acadie—Bathurst)
Godin (Châteauguay)	Goldring
Gouk	Grewal
Grey (Edmonton North)	Guay
Guimond	Hanger
Hardy	Harris
Hart	Harvey
Herron	Hill (Macleod)
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	Hilstrom
Hoepfner	Jaffer
Johnston	Keddy (South Shore)
Kenney (Calgary-Sud-Est)	Lalonde
Laurin	Lebel
Lefebvre	Lill
Loubier	Lowther
MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)	Mancini
Manning	Marceau
Marchand	Mark
Matthews	Mayfield
McDonough	McNally
Ménard	Mercier
Meredith	Mills (Red Deer)
Morrison	Obhrai
Pankiw	Penson
Perron	Picard (Drummond)
Plamondon	Power
Price	Ramsay
Reynolds	Riis
Ritz	Rocheleau
Sauvageau	Schmidt
Scott (Skeena)	Solberg
Solomon	St-Hilaire
Stinson	St-Jacques
Stoffer	Strahl
Thompson (Charlotte)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean)	Tremblay (Rimouski—Mitis)
Turp	Vautour
Venne	Wasylycia-Leis
Wayne	White (North Vancouver)
Williams—123	

PAIRED MEMBERS

Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre)	Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bernier (Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok)	
Fournier	Girard-Bujold
Minna	O'Brien (Labrador)
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)	

The Speaker: My colleagues, before I declare the motion either way, I am talking to the people of Canada on your behalf. From time to time we break in a new clerk who calls all the names of our

Private Members' Business

parliamentarians. Our new clerk, Marc Bosc, did it for the first time today.

I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think you would find unanimous consent for something that has been discussed among House leaders, that we immediately proceed to private members' hour, as the government does not intend to call business for today, and at one hour from now we commence the adjournment debate.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

INCOME TAX ACT

The House resumed from November 17, 1997, consideration of the motion that Bill C-223, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (deduction of interest on mortgage loans), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

• (1715)

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House we debated Bill C-28, on which we have actually just voted. We discussed the ideas of Liberals on tax reform. They propose to tinker here and tinker there, but in the end we get a more complicated tax system with even higher taxes.

Bill C-223, which was moved by my colleague, the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar, proposes a substantial tax break that will not only benefit first time homeowners but the Canadian economy as well.

The purchase of a first home is one of the biggest undertakings in a person's life. It is a stressful time for a young couple. I remember a few short years ago when my wife Wendy and I bought our first home in 1989. I remember how hard it was to save up enough money for a downpayment and after that point going to visit dad to borrow a little extra. We all know what happens when we borrow money from dad. Dad never forgets.

Mortgage rates at that time were quite high at 11.75%. We were a single income family. I was working as a teacher. We were working on a tight budget. It was very difficult. We lived on a tight budget for many years just to be able to afford the house.

Private Members' Business

Some would say that as a teacher I was making a very good wage. I would not disagree that teachers make a fair wage. But how many more young people are working for less wages? They have a harder time buying a house for the first time, to save enough money for a downpayment to purchase a home.

Young people also have second mortgages before they even begin, that being their share of the \$600 billion federal debt which on average is about \$77,000.

Large amounts of debt have been racked up. Young people are having to face that as well as all other obligations they are encountering. This means the future of the next several generations will be mortgaged. A percentage of every cent that young people earn will be spent to pay for the irresponsible spending habits of past governments.

I hope we will not squabble about a once in a lifetime tax break for people who are just starting out. They are forming the foundation for the next generation in this great country of Canada.

The homebuyers plan is an option for first time homebuyers. However they have to be able to invest in RRSPs. For many people that is a luxury which is unattainable after they have paid for rent, food, car insurance, heat, hydro and clothing, not to mention that half of their salaries goes to taxes.

The CMHC program helps first time homeowners to pay for their downpayments. That is a big help. However the service costs several thousand dollars. The tax break called for in the bill would help to offset that cost.

In reading some of the opposition to the bill it was quite interesting to note that some people have questioned the motives of the Reform Party for bringing the bill forward. The government indicated the cost of the bill and the loss of tax revenue.

We could argue that the benefits of putting this money back into the pockets of individuals would be an enormous benefit to all Canadians. Young Canadians would have a break when starting out. They would have a tax deduction which would give them more disposable income to put back into their local economy. It is a common sense idea. It makes sense.

Young families that are just starting out would have more money for big ticket items they might not be able to afford now, such as appliances, furniture, electronics, or a new or used car. Tax revenues from these purchases would offset the tax breaks, not to mention the positive impact on the economy.

Many people commented on the bill when my hon. colleague introduced it in the House. The Canadian Manufactured Housing Institute has given it full support as it would generate greater investment in the housing area. It would create spinoffs in industry. It would help to stimulate the economy. It has received favourable response from many others.

• (1720)

I would hope we could lay aside any partisanship to take a look at this idea as being a common sense way to give young Canadians who will form the future generations of the country an opportunity to establish a home, a place, an environment where they can raise their families. As we know, this provides the social fabric of society.

We should look at the idea contained in the bill as an opportunity to have government policy reflect the values that Canadians hold. Let our actions speak louder than our words.

I conclude by urging all members to give the bill serious consideration. It is an opportunity to build Canada and to give the young people across the nation an opportunity to get a good start and to create a good foundation for future generations of our great country.

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I address the House today on Bill C-223.

The Progressive Conservative Party feels strongly about encouraging the opportunities for Canadians to purchase their homes. Our party introduced a home buyers plan where Canadians could borrow up to \$20,000 from their RRSPs for their first home and first home loan insurance program through CMHC.

These initiatives have successfully assisted thousands of Canadian families to buy their first homes. Thus the PC Party has demonstrated unequivocally its commitment through action to allowing ordinary Canadians to reach the goal of purchasing their first home.

In 1998 we continue to believe that home ownership should be an attainable goal for Canadians. The Liberal government policies have made home ownership less attainable than it has ever been before.

Excessively invasive government policies such as high income tax rates, the highest in the G-7; payroll taxes which prevent the growth of employment and frankly represent the single greatest impediment to the growth of employment in Canada; and interprovincial trade barriers, excessive regulations, have contributed to a 6% drop in personal disposable income in recent years. It is certainly an abysmal performance relative to that of the United States.

High unemployment and lack of job security are the scourges that affect the Canadian public at this time. Interest rates are of little importance if there is little job security or if jobs cannot be found when one is determining whether or not to purchase a home. The biggest obstacle that stands between Canadians and the attainment of their goals is the Liberal government.

Clearly the best way to assist Canadians to achieve their goals is for government to provide a plan for growth. We need to reduce payroll taxes. We need to reduce income taxes. Our party is calling for a broadly based income tax reduction which will benefit all Canadians.

We trust Canadians. We believe putting more money in their pockets will help them attain and achieve their goals. Lower tax rates will contribute to higher job growth. Working Canadians with higher disposable incomes will have more money to purchase items they want to purchase such as homes and to pay for the education of their children. This will better their lives and the lives of future generations of their families.

Our plan for growth will work for Canadians and will put more Canadians back to work. We need meaningful tax reform and we need a holistic approach to tax reform. Taxes are designed to pay for services provided by government. Effective tax policy should be neutral. It should be non-directional. It should be basically focused on the initial goal of raising funds for the operation of government.

Why do people in Canada need to hire accountants or lawyers to deal with their own government? It is fundamentally wrong. Governments have overtaxed Canadians and then have manipulated Canadians through egregious and excessive loopholes. These are what I refer to as people control mechanisms which the government utilizes to push people in a particular direction. Its Pavlovian, paternalistic tax policy tries to control Canadians and their behaviour.

The tax code is meant to raise revenue. It is not meant to be directional in terms of affecting the spending habits of Canadians.

• (1725)

Yesterday I listened at length to Reform members pontificate about Bill C-28. I believe that they too espoused a simpler, flatter tax code.

Yesterday the member for Prince George—Bulkley Valley said that the Liberals, instead of wanting to fix the tax code, were simply making changes to make it more confusing for Canadians. The member for St. Albert said:

Is it any wonder that Canadians are losing faith with their tax system and the complexity of the Income Tax Act?

What a difference a day makes. I guess hypocrisy is only half a mortal sin. It strikes me that Bill C-223 provides a subsidy for a particular activity and to a considerable extent complicates further a tax code that is already far too complex.

Will Reform table the costing of the bill? When Canadians need a simpler tax code the Reform Party wants a more complex one. Tax changes have to be holistic and are not developed in a vacuum or in isolation. We cannot forget the most fundamental rule of public policy, that is unintended consequences of public policy, especially when considering tax policy. We have to be very careful.

Targeted subsidies are a slippery slope. I thought the Reform Party was opposed to subsidies. This is in effect a subsidy for a particular group of Canadians and serves in some ways to discriminate against many Canadians, the poorest of Canadians who may not be in a position to buy a home but who would benefit from broadly based tax cuts and from an increase in personal deductions to about \$10,000, which is part of our platform.

The Reform Party would like us to endorse bigger and more invasive government. The Reform Party has suddenly decided to

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side with the government. It is on the side of fiscal interventionists. Why not provide a tax break to all Canadians?

The PC Party dropped taxes as a percentage of GDP from 14% to 13% from 1989 to 1993. That is what we did with personal income tax. The Liberals have increased it since by 1% back up to 14%.

Reformers like to talk about a flat tax but while they talk the talk of flat tax they walk the walk of fiscal interventionists.

Let us face it. A targeted tax break is better than no tax relief at all. Let us take a serious look at the effectiveness of mortgage interest deductibility and the risks, for instance, in the U.S. example. I realize the Reform Party imports wholesale a significant part of its platform from the U.S. Republicans, but it would be better off to listen to Jack Kemp than Jesse Helms on many of its policies.

The fact is that people like Jack Kemp and other advocates for flatter tax codes would like to see the removal of things like the mortgage deductibility of interest, which is essentially diametrically opposed to the whole concept of flatter tax. I assumed Reformers were flat tax people based on their platform but that they may have changed as of late. Some of their other policies have evolved as well. We can only hope their members join in these policies.

If we compare ownership rates, Canada and Japan with no interest deductibility have essentially the same ownership rate as the U.S. with interest deductibility. The question is has it affected the purchasing patterns of Americans significantly. France and the Netherlands have lower ownership rates than Canada with interest deductibility.

I will reiterate that a tax break in absence of an overall holistic tax reform is better than no tax break at all. We cannot argue with the intention of the bill to allow more Canadians to purchase their first home. That is a very positive goal for any legislation. However, we must not forget that the most important goal for the House should be to simplify Canada's tax code and reduce the tax burden for all Canadians.

In closing, we cannot forget the first law of public policy is the law of unintended consequences. As many economists predict, we are about to enter a level of unprecedented deflation. In a deflationary environment, if we create government policy incentives for individual Canadians to assume larger debt than they would otherwise assume, potentially we might create a situation that would actually punish many Canadians for wanting to do the right thing.

A tax break is better than no tax reform at all, but let us keep our eye on the ball and focused on what Canadians really need: broad based tax reductions, tax reform and tax simplification.

• (1730)

Mr. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Portage—Lisgar for his initiative in proposing this bill. I am sure he is well intentioned. He would like to give Canadians a tax break, he would like to stimulate housing construction in Canada and he would like to re-emphasize the importance of the home, the family, et cetera.

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I am sure that none of us in this House would disagree with those objectives, but the bill proposes that interest paid by a taxpayer on the first \$100,000 of a mortgage loan secured by that first qualifying home acquired by a taxpayer would be allowed as a deduction for tax purposes. I am afraid the bill falls short of meeting the objectives proposed by the member when he introduced this bill.

The bill raises a number of important questions but fails to answer them. I am sure they are begging for answers but I am not sure the bill really answers them. For example, is it appropriate to give a tax break to a citizen who does not own a home but who rents or who does not pay rent or own a home at all? Why give a tax break to someone who owns a home versus someone who does not own a home?

Why should first time buyers of a home receive a tax break versus people who already a home? Does that make any sense? I submit that it does not make any sense at all. Should our tax system reward borrowing and penalize saving? I am not sure that is the kind of incentive we want to build into our tax system.

If the mortgage interest were deductible clearly taxpayers would be motivated to have the highest mortgage possible. They would have more interest and more interest to deduct. Clearly we would be encouraging Canadians to borrow more and save less. I am not sure that is something we want our tax system to encourage. These are some serious questions that really beg answers. Maybe the member opposite will have a chance to address them but the answers are not contained in his private member's bill.

It is unfortunate that there are more questions that beg answers. Currently in Canada the capital gain on a sale of a principal residence is not taxable. If we allowed the interest to be deductible then surely the capital gain on the sale of a principal residence should be taxable. The reason a capital gain on a principal residence is not taxable in Canada now is that we do not consider an investment in a principal residence as an investment. It is the ownership of a private home. You cannot have your cake and eat it too. You cannot be tax free in terms of capital gains and have interest that is tax deductible.

There is the serious question of the cost of implementing this proposal. If this proposal were implemented the annual cost to the treasury would eventually be approximately \$3 billion a year. If the tax rolls were broadened to be at least within the context of the member's proposal to be more equitable in terms of not just first time home buyers but all homeowners, the annual cost to the treasury could rise to \$6 billion at a time when we are looking at fiscal priorities. I could think of a myriad of other good ways to give Canadians a tax break or to repay the debt or to invest in some much needed social and economic programs. First time home buyers already get some tax assistance under the home buyers plan.

What the bill fundamentally proposes comes from a misunderstanding of what Canadians want in their tax system. They want a progressive tax system. That is the whole essence of our tax system in Canada. Under this proposal individuals with higher incomes

would get a bigger tax break. That is really contrary to the whole philosophy and the principles behind the tax system in Canada, and I think quite rightly.

• (1735)

I am sure the member opposite gets a lot of his ideas from what goes on in the United States. Yes, it is true that mortgage interest is deductible for tax purposes in the United States, but again capital gains in excess of \$500,000 on a principal residence are typically taxed. In addition, most Americans do not really take advantage of the deductibility of mortgage interest because they prefer to take the standard deduction without any questions. Our personal income tax system in Canada is far more progressive than the U.S. income tax system.

While I and a lot of my colleagues I am sure would like to reduce the general burden of personal income taxes in Canada, and we are working very hard toward that end, I am quite convinced that this proposal is really not a very equitable or a very efficient way to give tax relief to Canadians.

If we look at the United States and just to sort of emphasize the lack of progressiveness in its income tax system, Americans hit the highest marginal income tax rate when they get to incomes of \$300,000 plus. By way of contrast, in Canada when we hit incomes of \$150,000 or thereabouts we start to hit the top marginal tax rate. That is by design. That is the way our tax system works. We say that those people earning the bigger incomes are able to share their wealth to some extent to help those who are in less advantageous positions. That is the whole philosophy behind the income tax system.

This measure is really not a very progressive step at all. I am sure it is really counter to what Canadians expect from their income tax system. For that reason I urge members of this House to vote against this bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Saint-Eustache—Sainte-Thérèse, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House this afternoon to speak on Bill C-223, an act to amend the Income Tax Act providing for the deduction of interest on mortgage loans, introduced by my colleague from the Reform Party, the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar.

On the face of it, this bill looks like a good bill, in the sense that it could indeed help boost housing starts. And as the old saying has it "When home construction goes well, so goes the economy".

The economy is going well because forestry workers are working in the forest again, providing lumber mill workers with wood to cut. Construction workers also have work. Everyone is working. This activity also brings in revenue for the government. With fewer people on EI, costs go down and, with more people paying taxes, revenues grow.

That aspect of the bill seems quite interesting. Another interesting aspect is the opportunity for our young people, who are just starting off in life, to get a nudge in the right direction from people

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with grey hair like mine so they will be off to a good start. That does sound good.

What I have more of a problem with is equity. Let us take a look at equity in this legislation. Take for example a \$200,000 house, on which, as I understand it, the first \$100,000 in mortgage would be deductible. How much would this \$200,000 house built in Montreal be worth?

Because of supply and demand, the same house would not be worth \$200,000 if it were built in Sept-Îles, Sherbrooke or remote areas like Abitibi.

• (1740)

And how would we manage to get equity for interest on this first \$100,000 deductible. That means the houses would not have the same value. This needs looking into.

The tax deduction is the point of most concern to me. It concerns me because again there would be two rates, one for the better off and one for the less well off. Let me give an example to explain what I mean.

A person with an income under \$30,000 could get a tax deduction of \$140 per \$1,000, while someone two houses further down the street who earned \$60,000 annually could, for the same \$1,000 deductible, get \$290 in assistance. Why that difference of \$120?

We in the Bloc are in favour of a refundable tax credit. This refundable tax credit, at a fixed rate, could be far fairer for everyone. That is why we have certain reservations, and will not be supporting this bill, barring amendments in the tax provisions.

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to enter the debate on Bill C-223. I would also like to thank the member for Portage—Lisgar for bringing this matter to the floor.

This is not the first time that this has been debated in the House of Commons. The ill fated government of Joe Clark and Mr. Crosbie made it part of its budget projections which eventually saw it defeated. Subsequently not many people have sought to reintroduce it.

I understand the member is interested in helping young families get a start in life, a very admirable position to have. I do not think it is going to attain the objectives he is interested in for a number of reasons.

First, this would increase the complexity of the existing income tax system. The thing that people mention to me is they want to see a simpler and fairer taxation system. We will have one group of taxpayers eligible for deductions and another group not.

I want to specifically talk about some of the problems of the American system which allows the deductibility of mortgage

interest. I am certain the administrative people in the United States would dearly love to get rid of the mortgage deductibility. The tendency of the government there has been to eliminate consumer deductibility for other forms of debt such as car loans and credit card interest, which have already been eliminated. The American system is tending to go away from the concept of mortgage deductibility.

What this does is encourage people to be in debt. I have some American friends who are quite amazed that Canadians eventually pay their houses off through a process of saving. Canadians have one of the highest percentages of home ownership probably in the western world because of that. I know the member is talking about first time home buyers, but it has been the tendency for Americans that every five years when their mortgage comes up for renewal they increase their mortgage. They increase it based on the inflated value of their real estate because there is a tax incentive to do so.

• (1745)

As a consequence few people actually try to pay off their mortgages and they live with debt risk. If there is a downturn in the economy, these people, the very people the member is interested in assisting, will end up losing their homes because they are too highly leveraged and the incentive to save has not been there.

Let us look at the experience in the United States. We have talked about the difference between the wealthy benefiting from this package as opposed to those who are not so inclined. Of course it benefits people who own homes as opposed to those who rent.

In the United States currently only 8% of new homeowners recently polled cited the tax break as a reason for purchasing their homes. In the United States only 6.2% of household earnings between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per year claim the deduction compared to 78.1% of filers who declared more than \$100,000 of taxable income.

We can see very clearly that the American experience is that the high income earners are the ones taking advantage of this and not those with low incomes. It is a regressive tax in the sense that it favours higher income groups at the detriment of lower income earners.

Previous speakers have mentioned that to some extent capital gains on personal residences are taxed in the United States. Of course Canada does not do that. If we introduce a process whereby people are allowed to deduct the interest they pay on their mortgages, it follows that we should also tax capital gains. I believe we would find there would be a lot of reticence if we moved in that direction.

This would be what we call a retrogressive tax. It would increase the complexity of the tax system. It is a reward for spending as opposed to saving. These all seem to run counter to the things which government should be promoting in our country.

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The Americans like this because they have a consumer driven society. Basically we will find in the United States that their savings rates are significantly lower than those of Canadians. That creates a great deal of uncertainty in their lives. Indeed many people live from paycheque to paycheque. I suppose we could argue that this happens in Canada as well, but it is more evident in the United States.

When the hon. member first opened debate on this issue he talked about who would benefit. I am surprised at the reference he made. He said that he had been informed by the banking industry that it would be in favour of this. Why would it not be? After all, if the banks are going to increase their mortgage business, why would it not be a great business to have?

I suggest to the hon. member that the people he is trying to defend, the first time homebuyers, are the very people the banks want to get into their clutches. The banks will tell them not to pay down their mortgages or save because the banks will lend them the money. We know who will become wealthy from that. It will not be the first time homebuyers, it will be the financial institutions which will benefit.

In conclusion, while I am aware of the good intentions of the member, I encourage my colleagues to vote against this bill.

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support Private Member's Bill C-223, an act to amend the Income Tax Act by introducing a deduction for interest paid on mortgage loans.

From listening to the former speakers, I believe they have really missed the boat. This bill is about putting money in people's pockets. When they have money in their pockets they spend it. When people spend their money we have increased economic activity. That is how the world operates.

I applaud the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar for introducing the bill. It would provide for the deduction of interest paid by a taxpayer on the first \$100,000 of a mortgage loan, secured by the first qualifying home acquired by that taxpayer. In other words, that is the ceiling.

• (1750)

If I can simplify this, for a mortgage amount of \$100,000 amortized over 20 years at an interest rate of 7%, and the government should take note that interest rates are unfortunately going up today, with that mortgage a buyer will pay an estimated amount of \$84,632 in interest.

To simplify this for those members who do not like math, let us divide \$84,632 by 20 years. We come up with about \$4,231.50. That is potentially \$4,231.50 more per year that a first time homebuyer would have to spend on their children, on the purchase

of a car, on an RRSP, on things like dental care, on furnishings and on the upkeep of their home. That is potentially \$4,231.50 depending on the terms of the mortgage, a homebuyer could put toward paying down a mortgage early, saving even more money.

No matter how we slice it, that is \$84,632 more in the pockets of the first time homebuyer. In other words, that is the interest.

What is the philosophy behind this bill? It is simple but profound. As I said in my earlier remarks, a dollar left in the hands of a taxpayer, a consumer, a parent, a citizen, is better used and more beneficial to the economy and all Canadians than that same dollar put in the hands of the tax collector, a minister or a bureaucrat.

Believe it. With a few more dollars in the hands of first time homebuyers this bill will achieve the following. It moves Canadians from renters to homebuyers. Instead of giving money to a landlord, more Canadians would have the opportunity to invest in themselves, their families and their futures.

In Winnipeg, the largest city in my province of Manitoba, 60% of the homes sold from January to September 1997 were purchased by first time homebuyers. According to an article reported in the *Winnipeg Sun* on October 27, 1997, Terry Kozak, a Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation spokesman said: "A record high of 25,000 Winnipeg renters could afford to purchase a home. The added incentive of tax deductible interest would encourage renters to take the plunge".

The second point I want to make is that in 1995 under the Liberal government, housing starts in Manitoba were down by 38.6%. Since then housing starts have seen very modest gains. According to CMHC single family housing starts are up in Manitoba by 10.7% compared to gains of more than 37% in Alberta for 1997. But as I already mentioned, interest rates are headed up. That is not good news for homebuyers. If the government is really interested in sustaining the growth in housing starts, it should pass Bill C-223.

The government should use this tax break for mortgage interest to counteract mortgage interest rates going up. That is good public policy. It is real compassion for families and other potential first time buyers just getting started in life. If all of us can think back 30 or 40 years, we will remember what it was like when we did not have two nickels to pinch.

Even the columnist who is not a fan of the Reform Party, Brian Mulroney's former chief of staff, Hugh Segal, agrees with the objective of this bill. I quote from his column of September 13, 1997. "Middle income Canadians would experience an increase in disposable and discretionary income, there would be an easier transition from renting to owning and the family home would for once be the beneficiary of enlightened tax policy as opposed to a victim". He goes on to say, "It was right when finance minister Crosby tried to introduce it almost 20 years ago", as the former speaker alluded to, "and it is even more right today".

• (1755)

My colleague has enunciated how there are many other benefits with the economic spin-offs that this tax break would create. There is no doubt we would see an increase in job creation, certainly jobs created for carpenters, plumbers, electricians. There would also be a big demand for the manufacturing sector to fill these homes.

Money spent locally in communities usually turns around about seven times. Every dollar that is spent locally spins around seven times.

Real jobs are created when governments put more money into the hands of the consumer. The expenditure of money is what makes the economy go around. The people of Canada are waiting for tax relief. I remind the House that we are the highest taxed people in all of the G-7 countries.

I close by saying that it is time we passed this bill. It would help first time homebuyers create their own homes and enhance the quality of life for their families.

Mr. Steve Mahoney (Mississauga West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am please to comment on this private member's bill.

First let me tell members in this House, some of whom may represent rural or agricultural ridings, that the agricultural product in my city of Mississauga happens to be homes.

When people ask what the population is of Mississauga, I generally respond by asking "What time is it". In times of recession in this country we have experienced growth in our community in the neighbourhood of 20,000 people a year. We currently have approximately 600,000 people. Our ultimate population will be 750,000 according to our official plan. Many of those will be people moving into homes and we would call them first time homebuyers.

Frankly, anything that is done that would legitimately assist a first time homebuyer in the city of Mississauga, in the community I represent, you would think would be something we would want to support. What is really interesting when we examine this bill in particular coming as a private member's bill from a Reform Party member is that this is a spending bill. If we analyse it, it is not a tax cut at all.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Members think this is funny. Let me share this with them and show them why the taxpayers of Canada would see this as a spending bill.

Anything that provides a tax cut means there is a cost to the federal treasury. The indications are that the cost of this at the minimum, at the floor level, would be \$150 million. To maturity

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the cost could be as high as \$3 billion. If we were to go to the next step, which would be to take it further than just first time homebuyers and expand it to include all homebuyers, the cost could be as high as \$6 billion to the federal treasury.

What the member is really asking for is to go to what fundamentally is an American system. This does not surprise me because all I hear when I hear Reform Party members stand up in this place is the defence of the great U.S.A. and its tax system, its safety system and social system. All they ever talk about is how great the United States of America is.

It would be a real treat to hear a member of the Reform Party stand in the House of Commons and talk about how great Canada is. But we do not hear that. We hear, "Let us get the Star Spangled Banner up there and tell everybody boy oh boy, the way to run things is the way they run it south of the border".

• (1800)

I happen to think they are wrong, as they chirp away, not only wrong but a dangerous policy.

There are ways to help first time home buyers. One very obvious way that the members opposite neglect to recognize is the interest rate in this country. Just think about the difficulty that a first time home buyer would have in buying a home in my community. The low end would be somewhere around \$130,000 for a townhouse up to \$200,000 for a fairly modest three bedroom home in a subdivision in my city. They would need a down payment of approximately \$30,000. They have to save that money. If they were buying a semi-detached or single home with a maximum CMHC insured mortgage, they would end up with a mortgage payment, if the interest rates were at 10%, as high as \$1,500 a month. That is a lot of money for a first time home buyer to assume.

If they were to buy the smaller home then they would be able to cut that down but it is still going to be \$1,000 or more per month. What people tend to forget when they are buying a townhouse is that they have to add on common area maintenance fees to the mortgage. Even for a townhouse at the lowest end of the market in big city Canada, we are talking about \$1,200 to \$1,500 a month in mortgage payments if the interest rates are as high as 10%.

What has happened since this government took office in 1993? By putting confidence back into the marketplace, by eliminating the \$42 billion inherited—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Steve Mahoney: The Tories do not like to hear about this. They wave it off. They do not want to hear us constantly remind the Canadian public about the legacy of Brian Mulroney. However, the facts are that in 1993 this government started out with a huge

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deficit which hurt us internationally. It hurt us in the money markets and in the marketplace. People said you cannot even manage your own household, don't talk to us about other households.

We have managed this household. We have put this country on the road to fiscal responsibility and have balanced the books. From time to time the Leader of the Opposition stands up and admits that but then says, like the poor hungry boy in Oliver, please sir, I want more. That is all we hear. I have never heard such whining and snivelling coming out of the parties representing the west, primarily and the Reform Party, as we hear every day in this place. Please sir, I want more.

What they are proposing with this bill is that they want more. In what I can only hope is a noble attempt to try to do something for first time home buyers, I am prepared to concede that at least their intention is good.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Yes, go ahead and applaud yourselves, trained seals all. In any event, I am assuming they are trying to do something for first time home buyers but they are doing it in the most ridiculous way because they are asking all the taxpayers in Canada to foot the bill. They are asking this government, if we were to adopt this private member's bill, to assume the potential liability that could be as high as \$6 billion if we were to take it to its ultimate extremes. We are not prepared to do that. That is not the stated goal of this government.

When I first looked at this I thought it would be great to be able to deduct the interest on my mortgage. It is a laudable idea. Anyone looking at it would think it was wonderful. However, we do not pay taxes on capital gains when we sell our principal residences. That might have to change if that situation were to occur. There is a bit of a quid pro quo there.

• (1805)

The other aspect is when I look at the potential damage and the cost and the fact that we would be asking non-first time home buyers, renters, seniors, people who owned their homes for a number of years, to subsidize this. It is wrong headed.

What makes more sense is keeping our inflation rate low and non-existent, keeping our interest rates as low as they are because that benefits all of us, whether we are buying a first time home, an automobile, whether we are taking a vacation, whatever it is. It allows us to get the true benefit of revenue and money staying in our pocket because we keep interest rates down.

If Reformers would understand that, they would understand that this private member's bill, contrary to what they would say, is nothing more than a spending program they are asking this government to do, which I could not support.

Mr. Jim Pankiw (Saskatoon—Humboldt, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Mississauga West referred to the proposed bill as a spending program.

He said it was not really providing a tax deduction that does not currently exist but a spending increase because anything that provides a tax cut is a cost to the federal treasury. Therefore providing a tax deduction that does not currently exist to him is a spending program. It is twisted, perverse logic. It is bizarre logic. It is Liberal logic. There is really no logic there.

I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar for introducing this private member's bill. I would like to speak about the fairness of it and his attempt to bring fairness to younger Canadians who this would actually impact on.

Before I do, I am not quite done in my comments about the discussion the hon. member for Mississauga West was engaged in. He was singing praise for the fiscal management of the Liberal government, but the truth is that in the past four years, under this Liberal government, the national debt of our country has increased \$100 billion. Those are the cold, hard facts. There it is. It is as simple as that.

Then he referred to not only the member for Portage—Lisgar but to all Reformers as whiners and snivellers for trying to exercise the representation of our constituents here and speak on their behalf in an attempt to gain some tax relief for them.

They are burdened, as are all Canadians, by the level of taxation in this country. We are trying to put forward measures which would provide some relief of the over burdensome government levels of tax, but the Liberals are referring to us as whiners and snivellers.

In other words, they are saying that despite the fact that we are among the highest taxed citizens in the world, we are whiners and snivellers for complaining about it.

Earlier in discussion the hon. member from Kings—Hants, a Conservative member, suggested it was not a good idea to provide this tax cut for first time home buyers because it would increase the complexity of the tax code.

I point out to the hon. member that the complexity of the tax code doubled in the nine years the Conservatives governed this country. I think it is a little hypocritical to suggest what he did.

The most important thing I have to say about this bill is the fairness of it. What I am getting at is that yes, the Liberal government has increased our national debt \$100 billion and yes, the Conservative government prior in nine years increased our national debt by \$300 billion, and the Liberal government before that, a further \$200 billion.

• (1810)

Now we are saddled with this \$600 billion national debt that is placed on the backs of our future generations. It is younger Canadians who are going to have to bear that burden, being saddled

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with high taxes for the rest of their lives to pay off the mismanagement of past Conservative and Liberal governments.

Furthermore these same governments have mismanaged our Canada pension plan so it now has an unfunded liability of \$600 billion, for which the younger generation is also going to have to bear the burden.

If the hon. member from Portage—Lisgar is able to introduce a bill that would at least provide a bit of tax relief to the generation now burdened with the mismanagement of past Liberal and Conservative governments, the onus is on us to support that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired. The order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

* * *

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: Colleagues, at 2.15 p.m. today I received a letter from the hon. member for Sherbrooke asking for an emergency debate. Subsequently I gave the floor to the member for Sherbrooke. He encapsulated what was in the letter.

I have given very serious thought to this request for an emergency debate today. It is my decision that it does not meet all the contingencies for an emergency debate at this time.

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been moved pursuant to order made Monday, February 2, 1998.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ICE STORM 1998

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that the leaders of all of the parties, especially the Leader of the Opposition, asked for or agreed to a debate at this point to discuss the totally unprecedented events in eastern Ontario, Quebec and the maritimes in early January.

• (1815)

As you know there are times when nature reminds us who is really the boss on our planet. Despite our advanced technology and knowledge, we can one day find ourselves at the mercy of forces beyond our control. It is a great lesson in humility. For several million people in eastern Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Wolfe Island and Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, the ice storm brutally reminded us how vulnerable we are in the face of nature's fury.

There are times when we realize that our status as Canadians goes far beyond our geography, our citizenship and our common history. To be Canadian is to be a member of a living and active community. Wherever we live in this great country, be we rich or poor and whatever our political bent, we are all citizens. As such, when things go wrong, we help each other, we work together and we band together. As in the case of the floods in the Saguenay and in Manitoba, the ice storm of 1998 triggered this natural reflex in us.

A few weeks ago, no one would have believed that a continuous rain around the freezing point would put so many cities and villages in the cold and in the dark, for days in certain cases, and for weeks in others. No one would have believed that complex hydro networks which took years to build would be destroyed in a matter of hours, that giant pylons would bend in no time flat under the weight of the ice.

Most members of Parliament, including myself—either by personally visiting the affected areas or by watching the situation unfold on television—were able to witness the damage, as did all Canadians. Canadians quickly got over their shock and displayed a profound desire to help the victims of that storm. When this winter disaster struck, families, neighbours and, for that matter, all Canadians came to the rescue.

[*English*]

Faced with untold misery and uncertainty, communities came together. People reached out to one another. They lent a hand, they cooked meals, they opened their homes. As the extent of the crisis became clear, local and provincial governments quickly marshalled their resources to assess damage, to organize emergency food shelters, to co-ordinate volunteers, to provide people with information concerning where to go for help and to warn of the dangers.

Everybody wanted to help. There was no partisan politics involved.

I met with the premiers of Quebec and Ontario. During the first hours the premiers were all calling. The premier of Newfoundland offered to send his line men. The same offer was made by the premiers of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The premiers of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia called to ask what they could do. They told us that they had all sorts of equipment available. Everybody wanted to come to the aid of the people who were having difficulties. I would like to thank them for that. It was a great sign of solidarity.

Locally the mayors and the aldermen started to work.

[*Translation*]

Mayors followed the situation very closely, as did municipal officials. They spent days if not weeks with hardly any sleep, to provide assistance to those in need.

Ice Storm 1998

● (1820)

It was quite obvious that an exceptional effort was required, because this was a truly exceptional storm. Very quickly, the crisis took on national proportions and demanded a national response. It required the resources of the entire Canadian government.

When the governments of Quebec and Ontario called for help, all the resources of the Canadian government were mobilized. We were prepared to co-operate with provincial and local governments to speed up the relief effort. We had to look after people's safety and build co-operation.

We focussed on helping individuals, families, small businesses and farmers. The Canadian Armed Forces spearheaded the Canadian government's effort.

At the peak of Operation Recuperation, over 15,000 regular and reserve soldiers were deployed in all the regions devastated by the storm. They helped the hydro teams restore power. They cleared debris. They helped people get to shelters. They provided food and beds, and blankets for those who needed them. They visited all families that had not left their homes to make sure they were safe. They provided assistance to everyone.

I was able to see that their mandate was to do what needed to be done and ask questions later because this was a national emergency. They did an outstanding job at helping local authorities and all the victims.

Equipment was airlifted from Vancouver and Victoria, and stops were made in every provincial capital along the way to pick up the equipment local authorities were making available to the storm victims: generators, equipment provided by power companies in every province. Planes even had to be chartered abroad for this purpose.

The American army was called in under the terms of an agreement we have with them. I want to stress that the American army responded immediately to assist the Canadian army in carrying out its duties. In my opinion, this turned out to be a major source of help for the Canadian army, which has so often been called upon to help abroad.

[*English*]

When they had the occasion to serve the Canadian people, I met them and I know how anxious they were to do the right thing, a spirit they have developed over the years travelling abroad in difficult circumstances. They were very happy to help the citizens of Canada who were in trouble at that time.

I talked with the soldiers who came from all over Canada. They were in the local communities helping people. They came from British Columbia, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Alberta and Manitoba. Many of them were in Quebec and they could not speak a word of French, but they communicated in their own way with the people to help them restore order and gain comfort.

It was a great moment for them. All members of Parliament should be very proud of what the Canadian forces did in those troubled communities.

They did it with a sense of pride. It was a call to duty. Now they have been re-deployed. Some are still there because the problems have not been completely solved. They will stay there as long as they are needed.

When they arrived in the villages and in the towns, the sense of security, the sense of solidarity was felt by all the citizens.

Sometimes we have tended to criticize them, but it was good to see that when they were needed, they did a fantastic job.

● (1825)

[*Translation*]

In operation "recuperation", the federal government did all it could to help at the time. To date we have spent some \$250 million to help people in difficulty as the result of the catastrophe. We have advanced \$50 million to the Government of Quebec and \$25 million to the Government of Ontario to help them with the difficulties they face.

Obviously, we have not yet seen the final bill. It will be enormous, unfortunately. However, Canadian solidarity will be expressed once again, because up to 90% of the expenses incurred by the provincial governments will be reimbursed by the federal government. That is what Canadian solidarity is all about. We help each other out in difficult times.

The Minister of Human Resources Development made a fund of \$45 million available to municipalities to help them do the necessary clean up and repair work.

The Department of Public Works put all federal government equipment at the disposal of the victims. The minister sent the mayors—it was very urgent, he paid in advance—tax payments or payments in lieu of taxes so that the municipalities would have cash on hand to meet the unexpected obligations they must face.

Revenue Canada allowed all those importing generators and other equipment from the United States to cross the border quickly and will ask questions later to ensure that the laws have been complied with.

The Department of Health, with emergency systems located across the country, immediately gave the order to ship the available beds, bedding and medicines to the devastated regions as promptly as possible.

I believe the government did everything possible under the circumstances, and when our fellow citizens are in difficulty, it is our duty to spare no efforts to make their lives easier.

*Ice Storm 1998**[English]*

Canadians from across the land showed their solidarity. They sent blankets, food and money. There were all sorts of donations. The Red Cross has received \$6 million in relief so far. The donations came from everywhere, big and small. The NHL gave half a million dollars.

On the plane when I was travelling with Team Canada the businessmen raised \$150,000. One of them got up and said that there was a problem and everyone started signing cheques, despite having had to pay at least \$15,000 to be part of the team. Those businessmen pitched in \$150,000. There were all sorts of good examples.

[Translation]

I would like to give particular mention to Kai-ya Belfry and Linnea Clow, two 11th grade students from Prince Edward Island, who were in Quebec when the ice storm struck and who gave their friends back in P.E.I. the idea of collecting money for the disaster victims, and to two New Brunswick children, two little boys named Joshua and Christopher Ogden, who sent in part of their weekly allowances. They sent in \$2, a sizeable sum to them, and they sent it in.

[English]

Six rail cars containing some 360 cords of firewood were collected in Halifax, Windsor and Sydney, Nova Scotia. The member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke sent 12 trucks of his own firewood from a business he has with his brother. There were members of Parliament calling other members of Parliament offering help. There was equipment coming from everywhere. The member for Provencher collected generators to be sent to Quebec and Ontario because of the situation, because they were needed. The army was collecting and delivering them.

● (1830)

Imagine how the farmer who had not been in a position to milk his cows felt when he saw Canadian soldiers arriving with a generator to help him do his job. Imagine him standing at his barn door and receiving help from Manitoba, Saskatchewan or other parts of Ontario.

Members of Parliament called members in affected areas to offer help. That is something of which we can be very proud. Also I should mention Ashley Franzon, a grade four student at James Bolton Public School near Toronto, who organized a drive to collect emergency supplies.

[Translation]

A francophone club from Windsor, Ontario, called Place Concorde, organized a fund-raising event called "Brise-glace". The Grand Forks high school, in British Columbia, got in touch with the students of Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu to offer them assistance and

even to invite them to come to British Columbia during the storm, to share their facilities. The CHMB radio station, in Vancouver, collected over \$15,000. Such a show of solidarity, support and friendship is simply unprecedented.

That is why, my dear friends, even though the situation is not completely back to normal yet, we say thanks to all Canadians on behalf of those who benefited from their support.

I have always believed that while times may change, fundamental values remain the same.

This extraordinary reaction on the part of Canadians, whether they live next door or at the other of the country, reinforced my belief. I will never forget all that was done. More importantly, the victims of the ice storm will never forget it either.

This showed once again how lucky we are to be Canadians. In this great country of ours, one thing is now very clear: the word solidarity is not just a word, it is a reality.

[English]

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the official opposition welcomes the opportunity to share its thoughts and feelings on the January ice storm. I do not think of this opportunity—and I do not think many members do—as a debate. It is a get-together of members of Parliament from all sides of the House to express our thoughts and feelings. It is a good thing to do.

I would like to use this opportunity to do four things. First, I officially recognize the suffering and damage experienced by our fellow citizens as a result of the storm. This is something we do not always do as in the case of the droughts and floods in the great Peace River country. It is something we should do and should do more often. I welcome this opportunity.

Second, I welcome the opportunity to listen to the firsthand stories and reports from MPs whose constituencies were directly affected by the storm. All our members are from outside that region so we welcome the chance to hear the stories. We have heard some of them already but we want to hear some more.

Third, we want to join with other MPs—and the prime minister has done it to a certain extent already—in paying tribute to all those who endured the disaster and to those who came to their rescue.

Fourth, I would like to comment on the role of parliament in assisting Canadians to cope with natural disasters, not just at the practical administrative level but at the emotional level or at the level of the heart.

● (1835)

The facts concerning the ice storm of 1998 are well known. It is worthwhile taking a moment to state them in the House and for the record as a measure of the scope and the severity of this calamity.

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Three eastern provinces experienced a five day ice storm, the worst in half a century. Freezing rain froze on contact. Three inches of ice coated streets, power lines, trees and buildings. Trees, branches, power lines and utility poles snapped under the weight.

By January 9 many towns and cities were officially declared disaster areas. About 40% of Hydro Quebec's electricity transmission network was damaged. Some 24,000 to 30,000 utility poles were down. There were vast power outages, the triangle of darkness south of Montreal perhaps being the worst hit.

People were without electricity, phone, heat, food and water. Many rural communities also lost their plumbing, septic tanks, wells and sump pumps. Flooding was a major problem in many areas.

People from across the country donated mats, cots, blankets, food, portable generators, firewood and money. Emergency shelters provided help to over 100,000 people. The Canadian military, as the prime minister said, deployed 15,000 personnel to help people in need as well as to deliver supplies and equipment.

Businesses and offices closed in downtown Montreal for over a week and for days in the Ottawa area. The Retail Council of Quebec estimated \$180 million in lost sales due to power blackouts by the middle of the month, with the final total being much higher.

The Via Rail passenger service was out between Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and between Halifax and Montreal. Airports were closed.

The agriculture industry was particularly hard hit as dairy operations were crippled. Livestock and cattle were killed. The maple sugar industry was devastated.

I was raised on a dairy farm and I know what cows will do that have never been milked by hand and have always been milked by a milking machine when you try to milk them by hand. I do not envy the people who tried to do that.

At the peak of the storm more than three million people were without power, stretching from Ottawa and eastern Ontario through southern Quebec.

By week two 800,000 to a million people in the region were still without power. By week three 300,000 households were still without power and some rural areas are still without power.

At least 20 deaths in Quebec alone were linked to the devastation of the storm.

These are some of the sobering tragic facts, but they do not tell the whole tale. That is also why we have met here to listen to the firsthand stories and reports from those directly affected and to hear the more human side. We can listen to statistics and they are sad but it is the human stories that tell the whole story.

Some of these stories we have already heard from fellow MPs and from our own parliamentary staff. The official opposition's director of communications, Jim Armour, and his young family were without power for three weeks. Their basement was flooded. He had very little sleep at nights for days on end. Jim somehow still managed to try to keep up with his parliamentary duties while all the time worrying and trying to cope with the disaster at home.

There were thousands of public servants in this area who tried to do that. They were coping with the storm while trying to deal with keeping up their work to the best they were able.

Our grandchildren will hear the stories about the great ice storm of 1998. They will hear about how people went without electricity for weeks on end but were in no way left powerless because there was another power at work. They will hear how in the bitter cold and darkness the flame of human ingenuity and compassion burned ever more brightly. They will hear how the ice storm of 1998 changed the lives and relationships of people and made them feel more acutely conscience of what is truly important in life, the necessities we take for granted, and the value of both individual initiative and community. We want to hear these stories.

Fifth, the official opposition joins with other members of Parliament in paying tribute to the heroism of so many. To all those who endured this disaster we pay tribute to their fortitude and resourcefulness. To the hydro personnel, the army personnel, the Red Cross, the other relief people, the churches, and the local governments that have worked so hard to assist the suffering and repair the damage, we salute them tonight and we honour them.

We realize the words we say here can add little to the regard in which they are already held by those they helped and by their fellow citizens. We say the words anyway because thanks is a word we can never say often enough.

• (1840)

Finally, a brief comment on the role of parliament in assisting Canadians to cope with natural disasters. At the practical, administrative level, natural disasters call for action on the part of governments from the mobilization of relief efforts, including mobilization of the army to the provision of compensation. It is our duty to ensure that these tasks are performed promptly and efficiently.

There is another role for elected members of Parliament to play in such situations which I believe is equally important. That is to express the feelings which people in one part of the country experience when people in other parts of the country experience pain and loss and adversity.

Parliament must not only think but feel. It must not only deliberate but empathize. I fear, and I am talking about myself as

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well as other members, that sometimes we think and deliberate too much in this place and we feel and empathize too little.

Let us therefore take time this evening above all to express and share the feelings Canadians experienced when this disaster struck.

[*Translation*]

To my fellow citizens in Quebec who were hard hit by the effects of this disastrous ice storm, I wish to express my deepest compassion. I also wish to tell them that our party will support any measures necessary to ensure their well-being.

I would like, if I may, to add a personal note. In times of natural disasters, whether they be an ice storm, flooding in the Saguenay or the Red River area, fires in southern Alberta, or the recent storms and flooding in Nova Scotia, to name but a few, Canadians from across the country come together and help each other out in every imaginable way. They do so spontaneously and with sincerity. Is that not a sign that being Canadian really means something?

Why not give voice to the feelings we express during natural disasters at other times as well? The country would be better for it, more united by the feelings of its citizens.

[*English*]

What did Canadians feel? Let me summarize. Let me direct my words to those directly affected.

Alarm was one of our feelings when we saw pictures of families on television, parents who were scared, small children who were bewildered; fear for the old and the vulnerable, many of whom were stranded in unheated apartments; anguish when we saw people forced to leave their homes; pain when we learned that people had lost pets and livestock and suffered damage to property and business; sorrow for those who lost a family member or a friend to the storm. Our hearts are with them today.

We felt their frustration, anger and exhaustion when the weather eased and then worsened, when the lights flickered on and then they flickered off again. We felt the impulse to help in any way we could. As we watched, we felt admiration for the way they coped. We saw example after example of people making the best out of a bad situation.

We were encouraged to hear the optimism in the voices of people who called in to radio talk shows to share their experiences. We felt amazement at the generosity of people who opened their homes and their hearts to strangers, offering elderly neighbours, families, kids, cats and dogs a safe and warm refuge for days, even weeks, on end.

We felt thankful for the men and women who worked night after night in shelters, preparing hot meals, serving coffee, welcoming newcomers with open arms and encouragement. We felt pride watching Canadian soldiers offering a gentle hand to people in need.

Finally, as power was restored and their world lit up again, we felt great relief. We could imagine the simple and profound gratitude that they must have felt for their first warm bath and a hot meal.

• (1845)

While life slowly returns to normal for many, we know there are others who are still suffering, struggling and coping. We continue to think about them and to feel for them, feelings evoked in the hearts of Canadians by an ice storm, alarm, fear, anguish, sorrow, frustration but also admiration, encouragement, thankfulness, pride and relief.

Is there a lesson in all this that we could carry forward in the days ahead? I believe there is and it is this. If we, as Canadians, would express our feelings for our fellow citizens more frequently and more frankly, not just in times of natural disaster or political crisis but every week of the year, this country would be united not simply by laws or ribbons of steel or concrete but by invisible cords binding Canadians' hearts each to the other.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, one of the ridings hardest hit by this dreadful ice storm.

I am pleased to participate today in this emergency debate on the ice emergency that affected a fair part of Quebec, eastern Ontario and part of New Brunswick.

I would like to start by paying tribute to the thousands of volunteers who were so generous with their time and effort. First, I think we must take our hats off to the linesmen from Quebec, neighbouring Canadian provinces and New England.

We must also salute the work of all Quebec civil emergency personnel, the Armed Forces members from Quebec and Canada as well as the Red Cross personnel, the fire and police services from the various municipalities, the Sûreté du Québec and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The job done by CLSC employees should be acknowledged as well. While visiting shelters, I noticed that people were discovering what a CLSC is and all the services it can provide. I get the feeling that CLSCs will get much more business once this crisis is over.

Town employees, and the mayors in particular, who played a key role during this crisis, should be congratulated. They have made it clear, I think, that, in organizing our society, as much power as possible should be devolved to local authorities. They know their people, and they are in a position to act quickly and effectively, which this crisis has proven most eloquently.

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In addition to those I have named, there are certainly many more I have forgotten, who gave devoted service throughout this entire crisis.

The majority of Quebecers, many Ontarians, and some New Brunswickers as well, have had to call upon their innate ability to cope, as well as an exemplary solidarity. Their situations were not always easy to deal with, but at the same time they offered many families and friends an opportunity to lend each other a hand, to join in solidarity, in some cases to forge new ties.

I saw many people who usually live alone, very often low income people, sometimes seniors, and who discovered new friendships in the emergency shelters, made new friendships. Many of the workers and volunteers, said to me "There will certainly be problems once the emergency is over, because these people will then find themselves alone again, after experiencing this new situation. There will have to be some very careful follow-up to help them out when they go back to their isolation, after having experienced something else during the emergency".

That is one human factor the emergency gave us an opportunity to discover. We discovered many things, but that is certainly an important discovery.

I was affected personally for 36 hours, which is not much. I was not one of the disaster victims for several weeks. Some are still not out of the disaster situation. We have given a home to relatives from Saint-Hyacinthe, to people from the Beloeil region.

I visited most of the counties hit by the disaster, and the emergency shelters in Montreal. I became aware of the extraordinary morale, not only of the volunteers but also of the disaster victims, an extraordinary morale in the face of adversity.

• (1850)

I would first like to congratulate the members of the Bloc and, naturally, the members of the other parties as well. I mention those of the Bloc because most of us come from the Montérégie region and from the centre of Quebec. I want to congratulate the members from the other regions as well.

The member for Matane and the member for Lac St-Jean sent wood to members in the regions affected by the storm. Members from the Quebec City region took up collections throughout the weeks the regions were without power.

I also appreciated the fact that throughout the crisis everyone put their political opinions aside in order to get on with a job much more important than political partisanship.

Testimonials of support, shipments of wood, arrivals of vital supplies came from all over, from regions in Quebec and Canadian provinces and from the northeastern United States. In a crisis, Canadians and Quebecers and the vast majority of politicians can

set aside their differences and work together to help those in difficulty.

The same was true during both the floods in Manitoba last spring and the flooding in the Saguenay over a year ago. Quebecers and Canadians gave expression to their deep sense of solidarity and mutual help.

Solidarity has no borders. The people of Canada and Quebec did a lot jointly as did the people of the United States and Quebec.

Beyond the exceptional acts of solidarity, the horror of the ice storm remains. Some regions have not yet recovered, and some men and women are still without electricity. Our help went to those affected by this catastrophe, the victims, and it must continue to do so.

The Bloc Québécois has done everything in its power to ensure that the federal government helps everyone as much as possible, by enabling the victims of the storm to receive employment insurance benefits for the days of work they lost, ensuring that farmers get help and having the mail delivered on the weekend, for example.

I would like to take this opportunity to mention the invaluable co-operation of Canada Post. I was with the mayor of Boucherville and the Bloc Québécois member for Boucherville. There was a problem with the mail in their region and, in record time, I was able to reach the president of Canada Post, Mr. André Ouellet, who called me back immediately to rectify the situation.

I would also like to mention the wonderful co-operation of the Union of Postal Workers. The corporation had just come through a strike and yet, a few weeks later, the union and management worked together.

I must point out, however, that the Liberal government refused to agree with the Bloc Québécois' arguments regarding elimination of the qualifying period, the first two weeks of penalty for unemployed workers. In this regard, I call on the Minister of Human Resources Development to meet as soon as possible with the coalition of MPs from regions affected by the storm, composed of members of the Bloc Québécois and two Progressive Conservative MPs.

This criticism aside, however, the co-operation between Ottawa and Quebec City was, on the whole, exemplary and our two governments responded to the call. This does not mean attention should not be called to problems. It is our democratic role and our role as the opposition to do so. That is why we are paying special attention to farmers, especially owners of maple sugar operations and apple growers, as well as manufacturers.

Quebeckers can count on the Bloc Québécois to make suggestions to the government regarding measures to ensure that everyone receives equitable assistance. Quebeckers and Canadians will not

soon forget the worst ice storm in their history. To a certain extent, we have all emerged changed from this catastrophe.

We have become aware, for instance, of how tremendously dependent we are on electricity. We have realized that we are never alone in times of trouble.

I would like to pay tribute to the wonderful support of the Quebec government, and of its leader, Premier Lucien Bouchard, who laid out the facts and took the necessary measures. I also wish to commend the president of Hydro-Québec, André Caillé, who directed this large corporation during this extraordinary storm.

• (1855)

Given the enormity of the crisis, the Quebec government, which was co-ordinating emergency measures, managed the whole situation very well. On behalf of the House, I wish to congratulate them. Once again, I thank all volunteer workers, and assure all victims of our complete solidarity.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was in the heart of what was called and will be remembered as the “triangle of darkness”. I witnessed from close up the plight of those affected by the storm in my riding. These people faced adversity with courage and determination. Some of them actually continue to do so, since power has not yet been restored everywhere in the vast riding of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

It is in difficult times that real leaders emerge. Let me name a few who did so in this particular case. There are many, but time does not allow us to name them all. One of these leaders is unquestionably the premier of Quebec, Lucien Bouchard, who displayed a real ability for crisis management, and who acted like a true state leader by gaining people’s trust and promoting solidarity among all Quebecers in the face of a catastrophe.

Then there is André Caillé, who took measures to ensure that Hydro-Québec’s network, which could no longer serve 20% of Quebec’s population, would be rebuilt efficiently and in record time.

There is also Claude Bernier, the mayor of Saint-Hyacinthe and reeve of the Mascoutins regional county municipality, who behaved like a field general and a true crisis manager. I humbly salute him now, after putting myself at his service from the very beginning of the crisis. He acted with remarkable effectiveness and efficiency throughout this most difficult period.

I congratulate all the volunteers, the police forces, the fire departments, the Royal 22^e Régiment, with whom I had an opportunity to work. I also want to thank the hundreds of volunteers who worked without respite in shelters, in local community service centres, and for the Red Cross. I must not forget all elected

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municipal officials, that is the mayors and the councillors. Without their input, without their contribution, we would never have made it through this unprecedented emergency situation.

The crisis is far from over. Yesterday, the meeting I held in my riding of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot with some 600 people from business and industry reminded me of the harsh realities being faced by the people of my riding. These 600 people from business and industry told us that, in less than one month, they had lost about \$215 million worth of commercial and industrial sales.

Representatives of their workers came to tell us that, in less than one month, from January 6 to February 2, they had lost in excess of \$42 million in earnings. The director of the Saint-Hyacinthe industrial and economic corporation—whom I commend in passing for his very great efficiency—indicated to us that the unemployment rate in the greater Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot region at the present time was in excess of 30%. These few figures alone indicate the extent of the catastrophe and the work that remains to be done to rebuild the industrial base and to ensure that the work force reabsorbs this instant unemployment.

Yesterday these people were extremely vocal in expressing their suffering, and they asked me to pass on their wishes to the Canadian government. The first of these is for the Government of Canada to reach a prompt agreement with the Government of Quebec to put into place a true program for reconstruction of the industrial base, one that would provide compensation for ice damage to equipment and facilities not covered by insurance.

• (1900)

With respect to stocks of perishables that were lost, we have been asked if the federal government and the Quebec government could help pay compensation for these lost stocks of perishables.

We have also been asked to help pay the difference between running generators, which can cost anything from \$200 to \$2,000 to run depending on the size of the business, and using regular electrical power. Indeed, that is how it was done last year in the Saguenay region and Manitoba, where a program was established for industrial reconstruction.

Labour representatives asked that we speak out and continue to speak very loud and clear, to ensure that something comes of the fine words the Minister of Human Resources Development had in the early days of the crisis, that they actually translate into greater compassion. When the Minister of Human Resources Development spoke of humanism and flexibility, we all figured this meant he would not task every last HRD employee to collect overpayments from the ice storm victims. These people have already gone two weeks without pay or income of any sort and lived on half the money they should normally have been bringing in for three, four

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and even five weeks in some cases. Plus they have had to face extraordinary expenses.

There is still some hope, however, because we just learned moments ago—which explains my departure from the House—that the Minister of Human Resources Development has agreed to meet tomorrow with the MPs for Montérégie and mid-Quebec, the Bloc members and the two from the Conservative Party. We hope that at that time what the minister was saying at the beginning of the emergency will be translated into facts and that he will give up chasing after over-payments and harassing people who have already been sorely tried by a disaster without precedent.

I wish to assure the people of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, on behalf of my colleagues in Montérégie and mid-Quebec, that all Bloc Quebecois MPs are at their service. All of our offices are open every day to respond to their needs, to help them take the necessary steps, to support them as well in the trials they are undergoing. Please do not hesitate to call us, and please do not hesitate to contact us. We have been there from the start, and we will continue to be there right up until the end.

[English]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say at the outset that I am going to share some of my time this evening with the member from Beauséjour—Petitcodiac.

Think for a moment. It is 3 o'clock in the morning. Power went off three hours ago. The house is dark and cold, darker than dark and colder than cold. The rain won't let up. The creaking of the frozen trees and the cracking of their ice bound limbs mark the minutes of the longest night of your life.

You tell yourself everything will be all right, you will make it through. If only it would stop raining. If only it would stop freezing. If only the power would go back on. Then it does, like a miracle. The dark is banished, the warmth returns and you breathe easy again.

It is no miracle. It is not even anything but the ordinary. It is just another day and night on the job for public service workers. That is what is extraordinary. Out there in the dark, out there up some pole or down some ditch, out there scrambling over iced fence lines, out there pelted by driving rain, out there with the frayed high voltage wires, out there with the exploding transformers, they are hard at work.

They think nothing of it. It is their job and they do it. They do it night and day. They do it day and night until the power is restored and until life is normal again.

[Translation]

Throughout the entire ice storm and throughout the efforts to repair the damage, it was the same story. Everywhere we saw ordinary people performing extraordinary deeds, and not for

money, never for the money. Not the soldiers, not the Hydro workers, not the water and sewer workers, not the neighbours helping neighbours, not the strangers helping other ordinary people, never for the money.

• (1905)

Extraordinary. Extraordinary because, in this time of world-wide economics, when money seems to be the great motivator, money can do anything, except magic.

But what has helped us here was not the power of money, but the power of something far more important, the power of community, the simple instinct to help each other, no questions asked. It was extraordinary.

[English]

It was something much stronger and of greater value than money. It was the power of community, the simple instinct to look out for one another whether or not you could make a buck out of it. That was extraordinary. It is extraordinary when we are told how often that kind of thing does not matter anymore in our society, how all the old values are quaint curios with no place in this age of cyber space and virtual reality. There was nothing virtual about the ice storm. It was about as real as reality gets. In the face of that ice cold reality it was the values that made the difference, the values of community, of caring and of compassion, the value of social solidarity.

We should learn something from that. We should learn that there is value in things that are not ever traded on the stock exchange and that to casually throw them away, discount and diminish them is dangerous to our well-being, our well-being as individuals and our well-being as a society.

Another clear lesson from the ice storm is that we still count on government a lot. Private enterprise may be very good at some things but when the power is out and the cold is creeping in no one calls McDonald's or Eaton's or mbanx. We call and count on the services run by our governments. We expect and trust them to get done what needs to be done when we need it, and it was done.

Some members of this House have made a career out of attacking the institution of government, the very idea of government. They complain loud and long about the supposed great injury big government does to them. They attempt to rally support with calls to get government off our backs. They want to downsize, diminish, cut, slash, generally reduce government to nothing much more than a credit bureau or a cheque clearing house. Tonight their silence is deafening. No one is saying there was too much government during the ice storm. No one wants government to turn its back now.

The point is we all know there is a place and a use for effective and efficient government and it is not just during ice storms or floods either.

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We appreciate and understand that government at its best is a tangible expression of our desire to do right by each other, to make an unfair and unjust world a little more fair and a little more just. A strong, engaged and responsive government with a well trained, well equipped and well motivated public sector is necessary to create any chance for the kind of life we all want and we all work for.

Our relationship to ourselves and to our government was, is and should be much more than a cash and carry trade. That was not evident before the ice storm. It should be now.

A long time ago Jean-Jacques Rousseau set out the ideas that led us to form ourselves into democratic societies. He talked about the social covenant we all enter into when we consent to live in harmony together, each with individual rights and each with responsibilities to one another. He warned that such an arrangement could collapse into chaos when the social bond is broken in our hearts.

The ice storm showed us that social bond is not broken in our hearts, not yet anyway. It showed us how we must value and jealously protect that bond ahead of anything we could ever lock away in a bank. If we can do that we can be as certain of a bright future for ourselves and our country as any people who ever lived on this blue-green planet of ours.

[*Translation*]

Finally, I am thinking this evening of the victims of this disaster.

• (1910)

I would like to congratulate them on their courage and solidarity in facing up to this crisis. They have been a source of inspiration for the rest of the country, and we shall never forget their struggle. Thanks to these men and women, we have had an opportunity to witness a perfect example of the Canadian spirit, the spirit of sharing, of solidarity, of community.

Ms. Angela Vautour (Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in this House tonight with great respect to express a few opinions on the ice storm that affected eastern Ontario, western Quebec and the southern part of my province, New Brunswick.

I would also like to use this occasion to relate several stories of the bravery shown during the recovery efforts. I would also like to offer my best wishes to the victims and to civilians and the military for their efforts.

The situation following the ice storm was the result of a huge disaster that touched the hearts of Canadians from coast to coast. The storm claimed its thousands of victims indiscriminately. No one was spared, not even His Excellency the Governor General.

A number of my staff were affected by this natural disaster as were a number of my friends. Let me tell you what happened to a

member of my staff, who was visiting Hull. He was sitting in the living room with a friend when suddenly a tree crashed through the living room window destroying his car at the same time. So people who were not even really involved in the situation became victims too. A nightmare come true.

[*English*]

Let us hear of the heart breaking story of a dairy farmer in Prescott-Russell who awoke to find his main barn in the midst of collapse, not able to withstand the weight of the ice on the roof. Animals were trapped inside.

He and his family had slept in front of the wood stove for the fifth night. They awoke to hear a bomb like noise from behind the house. Then they heard desperate cries from their herd. Cows were dying as lungs were punctured, bones broken and flesh severed. His livelihood was shattered. All thoughts of prosperity were ruined.

That man loved his animals. He had suffered for five straight nights and had to go back into the house, grab his shotgun and put down 14 mature dairy cows, 9 of which were due to have calves within the next four months. This caused even more inner turmoil. The farmer had to leave the carcasses there to freeze.

He awaited the military to assist in the dismantling of his fallen barn and the disposal of the livestock that had perished. With the arrival of the military his worries were far from over. He then had to find another farmer who, like him, was both mentally and physically exhausted, had no electricity and little manpower, to take in the surviving animals so they could be milked and cared for to the best of the two men's ability.

He then contacted his insurance company, only to find that the damage was not covered. He lost hope and even considered suicide. My heart goes out to those people today.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to take time to thank the media—television, radio and the newspapers—which really told the story to those of us outside the crisis. We had an opportunity to see what was happening, and people outside the provinces affected had an opportunity to help those in despair. In this case, the media served as a very effective tool. They certainly did their job, and I think it important to recognize that.

Some victims' problems did not end with the storm and the return of electricity. Some people went back to work after the states of emergency were over to find themselves without a job.

• (1915)

They did not lose their jobs just because small businesses closed for lack of sales, but because they did not turn up for work, even though a state of emergency had been declared. These people, who were trying to survive in intolerable conditions, were unjustly

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forced onto unemployment insurance, adding to their pain and suffering.

We often watch television and see the results of tropical storms in the United States, without realizing that the same sorts of disasters can happen in Canada.

Human beings were not the only victims of this disaster. We saw parks destroyed, and wildlife dead because grasses and foliage were completely ice-encrusted. These were the silent victims.

[*English*]

Let us now talk about the unsung heroes who worked tirelessly in order to give a minimum standard of life to those affected by this storm. In Orleans and Kanata we had cadet squadrons who assisted and boy scouts assisted in Nepean and Verdun. Many, many workers ensured that shelters and emergency services were upheld. There were the relentless efforts of several power companies from across North America, including NB Power which still has employees in the field to restore power.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to thank the workers of New Brunswick Power for their efforts. Members of my own family are still in Quebec today trying to restore things to normal.

[*English*]

Let us not forget to give credit where a lot of credit is due. First in the Saguenay and Winnipeg floods the Canadian forces worked relentlessly as well. Now their duty was required in eastern Ontario, western Quebec and southern New Brunswick. Thank you, thank you. God bless you for your commendable work. You deserve to be proud and we deserve to be proud also.

It is very important to realize that the Canadian forces were there. As my leader mentioned, with all the downsizing it is very important to realize that there is a need for government services in this country. All the national disasters that we have seen are certainly proof of it.

We also have to look at the solidarity.

[*Translation*]

There was a great deal of solidarity. Everyone in the country was very concerned by what was going on. We saw the efforts made and people working together. They accomplished much and deserve recognition.

This also shows that, even in communities less fortunate than others in the country, people got going and did their share to help regions affected by the storm.

It is hard to believe that the cause of so much trouble used to be a way of life. We are so dependent on technology that we can no longer even survive without electricity.

I think we have to tell ourselves that, in another era, our parents and grandparents were able to live without electricity. Today, without electricity, everything grinds to a halt. Technology is certainly one of the causes of this disaster.

Once again, I want to say thank you to all those who helped. Often, misfortune brings people together, and that is what we saw. We saw that everyone banded together. They worked together. There were three provinces in critical shape and I again wish to congratulate everyone and wish all the victims the best of luck.

Hon. Jean J. Charest (Sherbrooke, PC): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with the hon. member for Shefford.

This evening, I hope to make a useful contribution to a debate that will enable us to not only thank many people who deserve it, but to also reflect on the lessons to be learned from these events.

When the hon. member for Shefford wrote to you to ask that an emergency debate be held, she did so primarily to remind the House of Commons that this tragic disaster is not over yet. Indeed, there are thousands of people who are still without power and who are suffering tremendously from the effects of this terrible ice storm.

• (1920)

However, we also wanted to remind people that this disaster wreaked havoc not only in Quebec, but also in Ontario and New Brunswick. In fact, the riding of Saint John, which is represented by my colleague, was also hit by the storm, as was part of Nova Scotia. In recent times, other regions were also hard hit, including Manitoba, the Saguenay region in 1996—in fact, the hon. member for Chicoutimi lives close to the famous white house that we saw so often on television. Albertans, particularly those living in the Peace River region, also had to face major floods.

We felt that, by joining the other political parties that requested this debate, we would have an opportunity to discuss these tragic events.

First, I would like to make a comment which may seem somewhat unusual. These events remind us that a country is shaped by its history, its culture and its language. A country is shaped by people's memories and common experiences. And hardships are part of these common experiences. It is so true that, when we try to define Canada's history, our common experiences, the two world conflicts are often mentioned first. People talk about major opera-

tions such as Dieppe. Vimy Ridge is one of these experiences that shaped, if you will, our common identity.

Unfortunately, the same is also true of natural disasters, when Canadians have an opportunity to demonstrate the values they believe in. The positive thing in all of this is that, when facing an ordeal, Canadians remember the country they adopted, the country their parents built, this vast land over which we have no control when it comes to nature. We are governed by forces that go way beyond the means of this Parliament. And, from time to time, we have to bow to these forces and admit that we are not as important as we think we are.

Fortunately for us, our solidarity saves us each time something like this happens. Manitobans found in other parts of the country neighbours they did not know they had. People from the Saguenay region also discovered these extraordinary neighbours who lived in British Columbia, in Alberta and in Sherbrooke. And all Quebecers and Ontarians who experienced this recent tragedy also discovered these distant neighbours. To me and to others who witnessed this solidarity, it was a great moment. These people went through tough times, but they were not alone. They had support.

I want to thank all those who took on responsibilities during this crisis because I was impressed by what I saw when I toured the region. Sherbrooke, Fleurimont and Lennoxville, in my riding, were not affected by the storm, but neighbouring communities, like Richmond, in the riding of my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska, were. The ridings of my colleagues from Shefford and Compton—Stanstead were also affected.

I was very impressed to see the importance of local leadership in a natural disaster such as this one. This leadership has to come from people like the mayor, the Knights of Columbus or other people in the community. All of a sudden, the natural leaders among us step forward and take control of the situation. And there was no shortage of leaders in any of the affected communities and in other places where people wanted to lend a helping hand. Leaders were there to organize things and take control of the situation.

The other thing that impressed me was the degree of poverty that we do not always see in our society, even though we suspect it exists. I will give you a concrete example. I think this disaster helped us realize how some people around us live from pay cheque to pay cheque.

● (1925)

In the normal course of events, some people rely on the pay cheque they get on Thursday or on Friday to buy groceries for Saturday and the following days. If there is no cheque, there is no food on the table.

Many of us and of our fellow citizens were probably stunned to see how many people live under such circumstances. When a natural disaster strikes, these people are destitute. They do not

have anything. Without a pay cheque, they cannot buy groceries, period.

This brings up questions about the wealth distribution in our society, the measures we take to help these people out and the day-to-day lives of these people.

I want to thank the public officials concerned and the people who work for the government services. We talked about the premier of Quebec who did, I think, some good work. I also want to mention today that Prime Minister Chrétien also did well, in my view. I think of some of my colleagues. I saw on television members from the Liberal Party as well as the NDP, the Bloc and the Reform Party who volunteered to help victims.

At the risk of sounding somewhat partisan, but because of the stronger ties between members of the same party, we tend to think about our own colleagues.

The hon. member for Shefford got a lot of help from the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche. They knew each other, he called his colleague et sent her I do not know how many cords of wood, a dozen truckloads.

They sent wood from Chicoutimi to every community. I visited several communities. It seemed that every one I went to was receiving wood from Chicoutimi. Do not ask me where they got their wood from in Chicoutimi, but they kept on sending it.

The member for Tobique—Mactaquac was asked to locate a generator, which he did. Again, I am talking about our own members.

I saw the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell with his colleague for Ottawa—Centre. I saw Reformers, Bloc members, NDP members. They all pitched in, and they should be recognized and thanked.

I also want to thank the media. We seldom have the opportunity to do so. But I want to tell them tonight that I do not intend to go overboard. Neither do I intend to make this a habit.

I am thinking about radio stations, especially the CBC and Radio-Canada, and private broadcasters. With TV, it was a bit more complicated. You could see that it was a bit more complicated to cover events. The print media too. I believe that the media in general did a splendid job. They recognized their responsibilities. They deserve our thanks and I take this opportunity to say congratulations, bravo, we recognize the tremendous job you did.

I also want to thank the Canadian armed forces. I met young men and women who naturally and spontaneously came to their country's rescue. They did it without any second thoughts. The prime minister said it well: they did everything and anything. They did not come with a list of things they would accept or refuse to do. They did all the work. I think we are greatly indebted to them.

Mr. Speaker, you are telling me I have about one minute left if I want to share my time.

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I just wanted to draw some lessons. First, we should be able to draw some lessons from these disasters in Manitoba, in Alberta, in Peace River, in the Saguenay, to point out, at the federal level, assistance and emergency problems.

[English]

There are lessons we must draw from the ice storm and from the disasters in Manitoba, the Saguenay and in the Peace River area of Alberta. The Government of Canada should establish a task force or assign this issue to a parliamentary committee to draw some important lessons from what has happened. Surely we have learned a number of things. We should take advantage of this opportunity to learn in order that we may do things more effectively in the future.

Second, if there are going to be programs to help companies, as a condition of receiving that help, those companies should tell us or include some help for their own employees. In certain circumstances their employees suffered a great deal.

[Translation]

If a company wants to receive some kind of assistance, why not give it on the condition that it does the same for its employees? No one expects to be fully compensated for everything that happens, but this would be useful for the company and for its employees, and I think the government would be well justified in saying "If you want the government to give you a hand, we ask you to meet this criterion".

• (1930)

The third thing would be the role of the Canadian armed forces. They played a very useful role. Why not examine that role?

Fourth, I humbly make a suggestion to the Government of Canada. An inquiry will proceed in Quebec on these events. Perhaps there will be others in Ontario or elsewhere. I think the federal government should offer right away its co-operation and its assistance to these commissions of inquiry.

I want to thank the member for Shefford, the member for Richmond—Arthabasca and the member for Compton—Stanstead, who were in the centre of the storm. Congratulations to our colleagues who gave a helping hand. I also want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, as well as the House. I hope to have the opportunity to return and relive these events to draw some lessons from them.

Ms. Diane St-Jacques (Shefford, PC): Mr. Speaker, the ice storm that has struck part of Quebec and eastern Ontario is one of the worst natural disasters ever experienced in Canada after the Saguenay and Manitoba floods.

But this event that had so many negative effects has brought out an exceptional capacity for collective co-operation. Throughout this country and even beyond its borders, human resources and equipment have been mobilized to help the victims of the ice storm.

I would like to mention all those Hydro Quebec and Bell Canada workers and their colleagues who came from all regions and who have toiled under almost inhuman conditions to bring the situation back to normal. I would also like to mention the Red Cross and emergency preparedness personnel, and also all those who, throughout this country, have sent us food, firewood, and basic necessities.

On behalf of those who have experienced such momentous changes in their lives early in the new year, I want to thank all those people, workers and volunteers who did not spare their time or efforts in order to help.

In my riding of Shefford, we have witnessed this impressive show of solidarity at all levels of society, from individuals up to government authorities, including civil, community and private services. All municipal leaders and their employees, together with volunteers, most of whom were affected by the storm, have managed to set up emergency coordination centres in record time to meet the needs of affected citizens. In some communities, all families with wood stoves gave shelter to other people. Local media got involved in a remarkable way by providing the victims with the information they needed in a timely fashion. Finally, all the people did their share by helping each other.

I must not let go unrecognized the spontaneous assistance we received from the members for Madawaska—Restigouche and Tobique—Mactaquac and their constituents, who organized a wood gathering operation in their ridings to supply us with firewood. Two convoys of ten fully loaded 51-foot trucks delivered the wood for free, in spite of the distance, bad weather and treacherous roads.

This generous initiative was followed by the intergovernmental affairs ministry of New Brunswick setting up an emergency assistance centre for Quebec, which was most helpful to us.

Again, thank you to everyone who generously offered and continues to offer to help those affected by the ice storm.

I want to acknowledge the priceless contribution made by the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces; not only did they made us feel safe because of their professionalism but the work they have done made rebuilding the hydroelectric power system much easier.

This great mutual support, the courage and determination shown by everyone in getting organized have contributed to limiting human losses. This kind of solidarity in the face of adversity gives us hope for a speedy return to our normal way of life and recovery of our economy.

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The people of my riding have suffered greatly. Several municipalities found themselves without power, telephone or water overnight. Seventeen of the 20 communities in my riding have been hard hit. Nearly half of the population of Quebec, or 10% of the Canadian population, was affected.

The actions taken by the various levels of government ensured the basic needs of the population were met. The immediate effects of the storm were quickly dealt with, but the damage to the hydroelectric power system was so extensive that many families were not able to return home until just recently, and some are still waiting.

As matters stand, power should be restored to the entire system by February 8. The extent of the damage, with the many forms it took, has been such that we have not been able to make a complete and realistic assessment as of yet. All areas were affected to various degrees, and the victims, whether private citizens, organizations, businesses, self-employed workers, farm producers, processors, maple bush operators, not to mention all the others, are still in the process of taking stock of their losses.

• (1935)

Some have still not got their power back, and still need help. In this context, it is extremely difficult to circumscribe the disaster. The government has taken prompt action to deal with the most pressing needs, but a number of people in our riding do not come under the present programs.

To give but a few examples, let us think of the very small businessmen, the self-employed, the shopkeepers, not to mention the workers who have had to shoulder the loss of two weeks pay.

Often both members of a couple have lost income, and these were people who needed every penny to make it to the end of the week, before the emergency. For these families, we are talking about the loss of a month's income, at a time when there have been extraordinary expenses on top of their regular ones.

What can we say to the fledgling businesses that are still precarious but showed sufficient potential to establish themselves successfully? What can we say to these businesses which, even if they have not had any direct losses related to the ice storm, rely directly on businesses or industries that have been heavily hit? What about a transport company that has nothing more to haul? What about all the people who managed to save their furniture by using their last available funds to rent or purchase those rare yet indispensable generators?

I am thinking about the nursery owners, the pet shop owners, the livestock breeders, the mill owners. Did they do the wrong thing by saving their businesses from certain death? What can we say to the business people who lost inventory and whose customers now have less purchasing power?

What can we say to the restaurant operators in the same situation? What can we say to the landlords who have lost, or will lose, tenants. Every day that passes raises new questions that fall under different jurisdictions. The answers that are, or will be, given represent the sole hope of survival for many.

Assistance centres have been set up to answer these questions, on the one hand, but also to act as clearing houses for all of the needs, to break them down by category and to gain an overall view which will make it possible for us to design concrete and effective solutions to lighten the burden weighing so heavily on the victims of this ice storm, and particularly to avoid any further fraying of the economic and social fabric of our region.

These undertakings need time, and the consequences of the emergency are still there, even if the power is back on.

The short term effects are being dealt with, but the other much more serious effects that will become apparent over the coming months and years require all our attention. Right now, the approach is to make do with existing programs, which will not avert the crisis. What is needed is a series of concerted measures, some of which would be managed by the province, which would enable it to compensate all those left in difficult financial straits by the ice storm.

Could we not also envisage an alternative to EI to make up for workers' lost wages for the first two weeks of work not covered by EI? Could we not grant individuals a tax deduction for repairs not covered by insurance and for the costs of renting generators?

Could we not, as business people and merchants in my riding are requesting in a petition now circulating, examine the possibility of the federal government matching the contribution of businesses, up to \$50,000, and investing the money necessary to get them up and running again?

These emergency funds could be used to cover the additional expenses incurred by manufacturers and merchants, for such things as the rental or purchase of generators, and fuel.

Could consideration also be given to suspending collection of the GST in the area known as the triangle of darkness for a period of three to six months in order to ease the resumption of business, which was hard hit by the ice storm?

Could we not also explore the possibility of creating an emergency fund to which the federal and provincial governments would contribute, for use in getting the economy back on its feet, using solutions suggested by organizations representing different sectors of the retail industry, agriculture, tourism and so on?

Would it also be possible for our government, through FORD-Q, to match contributions from the provincial government as part of its export assistance programs in order to help our export manufac-

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turers re-establish their business contacts and a climate of confidence with their American clients?

Could we not also put pressure on the Insurance Bureau of Canada to make insurance companies aware of our situation and get them to treat claimants in a more open-minded and humane manner?

As I said earlier, it will take time to evaluate the impact of the crisis in all its breadth and complexity.

• (1940)

It is vital, despite the urgency of the situation, to use this time to determine the appropriate measures, which, in the end, will speed economic recovery and keep the social fabric in tact.

I therefore reiterate my proposal for the immediate creation of a fund to provide assistance, which could provide money as programs are created.

The money allocated could, for example, be used to pay the interest on victims' loans. The balance would be kept to meet any similar situation that might develop as the result of other natural disasters.

Beyond our immediate concerns, I think it is time to initiate discussions on a national plan of action in the event of natural disasters. I do not want to take anything away from the fine work done during the ice storm, but we should take a hard look at all aspects of the crisis, at the municipal, provincial and federal levels.

It seems to me that at this point, crises are managed on an ad hoc basis without any specific strategy. The prime objectives justifying such action are as follows. Initially, to study objectively the disasters that have occurred in recent years to identify the measures taken and to delimit the crises. Following this analysis, we would be in a position to identify the strengths and weaknesses of action taken to be better prepared in the event of another catastrophe. Parliament must also be involved in this issue, through a commission or a parliamentary committee, and develop a plan.

I am using this debate to speak to you of a national prevention plan for natural disasters. The plan could contain provision for a special fund in the event of natural disasters. Research could be done to establish the amounts needed to meet the financial costs occasioned by such crises.

We should also develop a strategy, in co-operation with provincial and municipal governments, that would provide functional emergency plans for each municipality, identify the departments likely to be asked to help, and define the organizations that, in the majority of cases, play a prominent role, such as the army, the Red Cross and all the others that I cannot name here because it would take too long.

Alternatives should be considered and, as members of Parliament, we have a duty to offer our full co-operation with any effort aimed at preventing and managing crises.

It is when faced with adversity that we can see the importance of human solidarity and fully appreciate how lucky we are to live in a country such as ours. In the end, this crisis will have shown us that human nature embodies the very best that exists, and we are confident that, together, we can overcome any obstacle that could threaten the lives and prosperity of Canadians.

I would like to conclude by thanking the members of my team, Madeleine De Vincentis and Claudette Houle in the riding, and Anik Trépanier in Ottawa. Their support and presence helped me provide assistance to the residents of Shefford affected by the storm. I also want to tell the people of Shefford that they can count on our support.

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is true that these crises give us the opportunity to see what a true country is about and what the notion of solidarity means within a country.

I remember that, when the crisis began, during the first week, it did not look like such a significant event, given the damages that could be seen. It is only when Thursday came around that we realized that, with the precipitation being forecast for Friday in particular, we were facing a major catastrophe the likes of which we had not seen in a long while.

On that Thursday, the cabinet was in retreat. Mr. Chrétien called Mr. Bouchard to offer him the co-operation of the federal government, and even at that point, the premier of Quebec was unsure of the scale of the disaster. However, the Prime Minister and the premier both came to an agreement so that the armed forces could send out some troops by six o'clock that night. It is only after Friday that we came to realize that 200 or 300 soldiers, or even 2,000 or 3,000 would not be enough, given the extent of damages in Ontario, Quebec and the maritimes, and that we had to deploy up to 15,000 troops. This was for the army the largest ever deployment in peace time for reasons of disaster.

• (1945)

Besides the solidarity issue, I believe it should be noted that disasters are increasing in number. We must now draw a few lessons from this latest one. Among these is the fact that we now know we can and must rely more on co-operation, mutual support and solidarity.

During the disaster, we thought for a while we would have to evacuate large areas of Montreal.

[English]

I think what we have realized is that in fact in peacetime it may be much more important to count on the support of a lot of people. Perhaps a majority of people will not want to leave their houses

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even when there is no power and it is extremely cold. We have to have systems which will permit people either to spend time in their houses and then go to a shelter or which will permit people to have alternative sources of energy so they can stay in their houses.

In a catastrophe people must count on their neighbours and their relatives, on the citizens around them in their municipality, their locality or their city, or they must count on citizens from other provinces. That is one of the important lessons of this crisis. We have seen that in a number of small instances.

For instance, there was a train which travelled from Halifax with firewood. The train stopped at a number of places all the way from Halifax to the blackout triangle in Quebec. It carried wood to give to people at every stop, so that the citizens of the country could give it to their friends, relatives and fellow Canadians who needed it. That is when we realized the fact that we all feel we are citizens of the same country.

[*Translation*]

This was one of the main lessons we learned from the crisis.

Besides the issue of solidarity and the importance of support from neighbours, I believe we also learned that, as parliamentarians, in times such as these, we must be present in such a way that we show we are there not only to learn about people's problems and to help them deal with them, but also to bring them the comfort of knowing they are not alone in difficult times.

On the first Saturday, I flew in a helicopter with the prime minister to survey the situation, especially in Ontario, in your area, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Don Boudria: And in mine.

Hon. Marcel Massé: And in yours; sitting in the helicopter, I was stunned by the extent of the damage. For the first time ever, I saw woods, over 2 or 3 kilometres, where 80% of the trees had snapped, broken, splintered.

We could see that most sugar bushes were devastated, almost a write-off for a great many owners and maple syrup producers.

When we arrived in the southern region, we saw the huge transmission towers that had collapsed one after the other. At one point, we could see 76 of them in a row, twisted on the ground like spaghetti; the impression of a post-war disaster was very strong and I was moved as never before.

• (1950)

We saw how vulnerable we have become. Our energy infrastructure and more particularly our reliance on electricity make us

vulnerable. Electricity has created a lifestyle to which we have become so accustomed that, when the power goes out, we realize that we are almost unable to live like our grandparents and our great-grandparents did. Perhaps one of the lessons this storm has taught us is that we have to learn how to use alternate forms of energy so we can at least heat our homes and feed ourselves during a power outage. It is certainly one of the lessons we have to learn from this crisis.

I want to take this opportunity to say how impressed I was with the good work that was done by the armed forces. Everywhere we went, people told us that they felt safe when our troops showed up. They felt the presence of a well-run organization, an organization that can set priorities, take action and solve problems. I think everybody in the affected areas, regardless of their political preferences, was happy to see our soldiers come to help people in need, whether these soldiers were from New Brunswick, Alberta, Ontario or Quebec.

Finally, I also wish to mention the role played by the media. Maybe it is something that was not emphasized enough during the crisis, but there was an enormous amount of information available on the radio and on television, information which allowed people in the areas affected by the storm to know exactly when they could expect power to be restored and when units from our armed forces would arrive to help them, and which kept people elsewhere aware of what was going on.

Before I conclude, which I must do since I am sharing my time with the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, let me repeat, as a Quebecker from a region that has also been without power, that I was pleased to see that I could rely on fellow Canadians, that in a time of crisis and hardship, I could stand by those around me, and that I could also rely on my fellow Canadians to help me, regardless of political party, language or province of origin.

I will end my remarks with a quote from one of the Prime Minister's statements. He said: "We know that our communities stand together as steadfastly as ever. In times of hardship, thousands of people are capable of a great deal of kindness and generosity between friends or neighbours, and between Canadians from coast to coast." I think that when this crisis is over, this is what we will recall, that all Canadians are friends and stand together.

[*English*]

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, please allow me to start by thanking the hon. Leader of the Opposition for proposing that we have this debate this evening. I think the debate is timely. I am pleased along with my colleagues to accommodate the request. Again I thank him for his suggestion.

*Ice Storm 1998**[Translation]*

We will remember the winter of 1998 for a long time. Personally, I was just back from holidays when the ice storm began in eastern Ontario.

- (1955)

Normally, it is no big deal. After all, we are Canadians and, as mentioned earlier, ours is a wintry country. Sleet and snow are not unusual and it is nothing to get too excited about, except that, this time, it was different.

As I remember, the day after the storm started, the power went out briefly at home. The same day, the power went out at my son's place, and when my wife and I set out to help our son, we realized that the power was out in the whole area where he lives. Later in the day, the power went out in several neighbouring villages. That evening, as I was getting ready for bed, the power went out at our place too.

I was fortunate. At our place, we were out of power for only five days; at my son's, it was six days. I did say that I was fortunate. It may sound strange to those who were not affected at all in other parts of the country but, under the circumstances, being affected during only five days was almost a blessing.

Out of the 100,000 people living in my riding of Glengarry—Prescott-Russell, more than 80,000 has no power. At one point, in fact, no one did, but that was only for a few hours.

[English]

Imagine driving from Ottawa to Montreal. Basically that rural area is my constituency, just east of the city to Rigaud and from the St. Lawrence River to the Ottawa River. To drive those distances without seeing one light anywhere is very strange. It is actually a bit eerie and even scary. But perhaps that is secondary. What is more important is the fact that people did not have that which is required to work and to live to a degree in the modern society in which we function.

No sector of the economy was spared, be it transportation, communications, finance, insurance, real estate. Everything had shut down completely. Farmers were crying on the phone speaking to me when they could reach me to tell me they could not milk the cows, to tell me that they were doing their best to find ways to melt snow to give water to the animals. I am sure many of them stayed hours and hours and perhaps even more than a day without even eating or even thinking of that because they were trying to help their farm animals survive.

To see that people in rural areas and small-town Canada were caught so much off guard by this condition is indeed a frightening proposition. As I was driving from my son's house to our own during the worst of that storm, I could not help but wonder whether

electricity was some sort of a Frankenstein that we had invented and that the monster was eating us.

For a while I am sure many of my constituents thought that the monster had actually won the battle. But the monster did not win the battle because Canadians came to help one another. Canadians came to the help their fellow citizens.

My own staff in my office started to work on the Monday after New Years in January and worked continuously for 19 days. My parliamentary office never closed, seven days a week. My home became a form of dispatch centre for assistance. I put my residential phone number in the newspaper here in Ottawa so that people would know that they could phone and actually speak to us. Virtually all the time either my wife, my daughter or I, in the few hours I was there, answered the phone to try to keep the resources and assistance coming to our area for the constituents.

- (2000)

[Translation]

It has been tough. I would like to take a moment to thank the prime minister. When the storm first started and I saw everything falling apart, poles falling in front of me as I drove through my riding, I realized it was no ordinary storm.

Luckily, there was a cabinet meeting the morning the power went out at my house and I was able to immediately apprise the prime minister and my cabinet colleagues of the situation in our area and to extrapolate from there. It was a storm like none I had ever seen. Of course, I did not know that conditions would worsen in the hours and days that followed.

So, the cabinet, under the direction of the prime minister, saw fit to put the armed forces on a state of alert, allowing them to get prepared in order to be available to assist people in eastern Ontario and Quebec.

[English]

At the height of the storm over three million people were without electricity. In the beginning when I heard about 1,000 military people would be coming I was very glad. I was told that possibly 100 or so would be in my constituency. Gradually some 15,900 members of the armed forces came, over 2,000 of them were in Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. There were villages in my riding where virtually the only traffic we could see were military vehicles.

That was not be surprising for two reasons. First, many of them were there to assist us and, second, they virtually had the only vehicles that could travel in any case.

They did everything. They removed wires. They milked cows. They split wood. They did all those things for all the people in my area. I thank them.

Ice Storm 1998

[Translation]

Since I have only a few minutes left, allow me, on behalf of my constituents, to thank the people who came to help us. I think of the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke who called me, saying he would send truckloads of firewood to my home. The prime minister mentioned that earlier in his speech.

I think of a young man, Denis Séguin, a former resident of my riding, who now lives in Sarnia, who convinced his friends and others to gather up some firewood, load it onto six railcars and send it to my region.

I think of my close friends who decided to come and help me personally, so I could be free to try to help my constituents, since, of course, when I was in the basement of my home, I was not able to do much for others.

I think of the media people.

[English]

I pay special tribute to CFRA and, by extension, to all the others. CFRA became a form of the emergency measures organization. Perhaps I should not use the floor of the House of Commons to put a plug for a privately owned company but I will anyway. It is just the way it was. CFRA and others did a good job. We should all recognize that and I thank them.

I also congratulate those who put together a concert to be held this Sunday in Ottawa at the Corel Centre.

[Translation]

Finally, when we got power back in my region, we decided to give back a little that had been given us. We sent loads of firewood and food to Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and that region. Companies such as Laurent Leblanc Limitée, Pomerleau and others from the Ottawa area lent their trucks for free. We loaded them with wood and I personally led the convoy with my ministerial car.

● (2005)

We went to Saint-Jean, to Saint-Luc, to Noyan, and elsewhere in Quebec in order to try to share a little of what we had received.

I wish to express my gratitude, to the people of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, who helped each other out, as well as all the people of Canada who helped us out.

[English]

It was cold and it was dark but we knew we had the warmth of all Canadians and their enlightened spirit to cheer us up in that great moment of difficulty.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Prince George—Peace River and all future times of members of the official opposition will be shared as well.

[Translation]

My faith in the dignity of the human race, and my feeling of national pride have been bolstered by the testimonials I have heard about Canadians coming together to help their neighbours during the ice storm, a tragedy which left a large part of mid-Canada under a frozen blanket.

This event has demonstrated the strength and generosity of the Canadian people and has given us food for thought. We can reflect on the importance of family and of community, without which still more people would have suffered.

This terrible event has, however, also given us the opportunity to reflect on which it means to be a nation. We have heard the warm praises of our Armed Forces, who provided expertise and manpower during the clean-up stage. I too want to thank them for their good work.

We also heard praise for the public and private broadcasters and the listeners who served as links with the communities hit by the storm. They provided continuous information on when power would be restored, while also giving survival tips.

Community groups and local charities also contributed by donating food and money. Volunteers patiently listened to people who were often scared, confused and lonely. They all deserve our thanks and our respect.

I would like to tell my own little story to the House. Not only did the ice storm bring people from central Canada closer together, it also touched people in western Canada, where my riding is located.

An Edmonton businessman told my office about an idea which shows that westerners were truly saddened by the devastation experienced in central Canada. He wanted to send Ontarians and Quebeckers a message telling them they were not alone in their efforts to survive the storm.

My constituent, who is not a wealthy individual, donated greeting cards printed in French and in English. He owns a marketing company that produces greeting cards, and he thought this was a unique opportunity to take part in the relief effort.

These cards are currently being distributed in Edmonton's elementary schools, and the message printed on each of them is simple and sincere. It reads "Our thoughts and our prayers are with you. We simply wanted to give you a warm thought to help you make it through the winter".

The children who received these cards added their own personal messages. Some of these messages tell the victims not to give up and embrace the good things in life, such as one's family and friends. Others share stories about obstacles that were overcome and send messages of hope.

Ice Storm 1998

• (2010)

It is now my great privilege to deliver these messages of hope to the children in the regions in Canada hit the hardest. The opportunity was given to me by a generous businessman, who is not prepared to sit still and do nothing while people he has never met are dealing with the consequences of this tragic event.

I would like to think him not only for his generosity and his community spirit and not only for giving me the opportunity to provide some help but also for reminding hundreds of children in the schools affected that we as Canadians are a family. Sometimes we argue, but, when the going gets tough, we are always there for each other.

[*English*]

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise tonight to say a few words in this tribute to a disaster which is really a tribute to the thousands and thousands of people who responded to the disaster. People were touched by it all across the nation.

At the outset people might wonder how an MP from northeastern British Columbia was touched by a disaster that took place in southern Quebec, in eastern Ontario and in parts of the maritimes.

Quite possibly no one in Canada was not moved by what happened in January of this year. One thing all Canadians share is the climate and the environment in which we live. As the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell quite eloquently said, Canadians are well aware of adverse weather. We have had to live with it all our lives however long that might be. Whether young or very old, if you have been Canadian you have had to experience adverse weather and the disasters that come with it from time to time.

On a personal note, when I first heard the news I somewhat selfishly thought of my immediate family. I thought of my daughter, Holly, who is presently in university in Ottawa. Although we were thousands of miles away, as concerned parents the first thoughts of my wife and I were about her safety. We wondered how she was making out and if the disaster and the power outage had actually touched Carleton University and the residence where she lives. We were immediately on the telephone calling down here out of concern for her safety.

If it could be known, that same scenario was played out by thousands of Canadians across the land who perhaps became aware of it by watching television but very quickly became personally involved in it out of concern for loved ones, friends and acquaintances who were actually here experiencing this disaster.

I am reminded that the magnitude of the disaster was even felt in the United States, and I would like to share a small story with the House about this because it points to just how large a disaster it really was.

My parents are, I guess, quite normal for Canadians; they are retired now and have become snowbirds. They travel to the States in the wintertime to get away from the terrible weather that we sometimes have to endure in Canada. One of the things they have noted in the times they have been in Arizona for the winter is that they very seldom get any Canadian news on American television.

They called home the day this disaster struck because it was carried on the American news and they knew it had to be serious for it to be carried in the States. Often even elections here are not news there. When they saw that news of the the ice storm was being carried on the American news networks they knew it must be serious. They called home out of concern for the people down there, to get an update and learn firsthand just how bad it was.

• (2015)

I recall growing up on a farm in north eastern British Columbia. Occasionally we suffered power outages there. I think the longest I ever remember as a young child was an overnight ordeal where we had to rely on friends, relatives, someone to put us up for the night.

Mom and dad bundled up all five of us children. We went out into the old station wagon on a cold, blizzard night and off to the neighbours, someone who had some power in their home.

I think Canadians from coast to coast to coast can relate to what happened and to the trauma these people had to unfortunately experience in a very small way. Certainly one night does not in any way allow us the opportunity to share in the anguish, the sorrow and pain and virtually the uncomfortable existence these people had to endure for quite some period of time. It was weeks for some people.

It is a tribute tonight to the resilience of Canadians to endure and to show their best side in a time of adversity. I noted all the speeches tonight, some of which have been excellent. They really relayed to fellow MPs regardless of political party affiliation what these people went through.

Also, not just the victims of the disaster but the volunteers, the armed forces, even the media, everybody played a role trying to overcome this crisis that struck. I am reminded also that in time of crisis, it seems too often we are reminded of the real important things in life.

One of those that came through to me as I watched the stories unfold in the weeks that this crisis occurred was one of the things we overlook most often, family, the importance of family and friends. That came through to me when I watched the stories unfold

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on television. It comes through tonight as we hear the stories from MPs who had experienced it in their own ridings and who had families and friends who experienced this.

It is important that there is strength of family, that there be someone to count on and someone to help you through tough times. Certainly that was my own experience with my two assistants here in Ottawa. I think I could speak for every member in this House in the sense that staff becomes family to us and friends, not just employees.

I think all MPs would have been calling their staffs, concerned about them, certainly understanding that they could not get into work, that roads were treacherous. Many of them had their power out.

One of my assistants lives in Aylmer, Quebec. She was one of the quite fortunate one who lost power only for a brief period of time in her home. She soon found that she was putting up a sister, her family and pets and other people who were looking for a place to weather the storm, as it were, in a time of need.

My other assistant who lives south of Ottawa had it a bit worse in the sense that she was without power for almost two weeks. I asked her about this experience and she says she has a much better idea now of how residents of war ravaged countries must feel when Canadian peacekeepers arrive in their towns or villages.

She related to me how when the military came to her small village south of Ottawa after it had been days and days without power she almost wept. I think the prime minister referred this evening quite eloquently in his speech to the sense that people have that there is someone out there in their time of darkest need when the military shows up to assist them. I think the soldiers' presence made them feel that someone was there for them. For Charmaine and her young family consisting of a one and two-year-old, and for her neighbour's family, it made them feel they had not been forgotten.

● (2020)

It is essential to your emotional well-being to know officials are truly aware of your plight in this type of natural disaster. Whether that awareness comes when soldiers pull into the yard or a hydro truck pulls up or just a mention on the radio in your area, it is nice to know that somebody understands what you are going through and is reaching out to assist you. It think this can make all the difference in the world in a time such as this.

After growing up on a farm and being a farmer for some 20 years, farmers, perhaps more than any other sector with the exception of fishermen, understand how devastating mother nature can be because their very livelihoods depend on the good graces of mother nature.

It seems these past 12 months in Canada have been a series of disasters if we look across the nation. Speaking for my region up in the Peace River country, the farmers there are going through some really tough times with two years of excess moisture, the worst in 50 years, crops still in the field rotting because they were not able to be harvested for the second year in a row. I know there has been a devastating draught in the maritime provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Last spring there was the tragic flood in the Red River Valley.

Looking back on the last 12 months, culminating in January with this tragic ice storm, it seems it has been a continuous series of disasters in Canada. However, what has stood out above all else is the sense that we are pulling together and that we are a unified country. In times of greatest need that is when Canadians will dig the deepest to help out.

There were so many examples of that generosity during this ice storm, whether we watched it on television, whether we were there to experience it firsthand or whether we were there to hear from the people who had experienced it as we are tonight. I think it really points to what a great nation Canada is that we can come through a crisis like this stronger than ever.

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Hastings—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington this evening.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to speak today to praise the fine work of the Canadian armed forces in the recent ice storm.

[*English*]

As Minister of National Defence, this is a proud moment because the men and women of the Canadian forces have been simply outstanding.

The forces do so much day in and day out. They protect Canada's sovereignty, secure our global interests and co-operate with friends and allies in helping to maintain a stable and peaceful international environment. However, as was evidenced by this storm, they also do much here at home. They mounted an operation in recent weeks which attracted the attention of Canadians and I am sure it warmed their hearts.

The ice storm in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick showed Canadians at their very best banding together in times of trouble to assist their friends and neighbours. People worked together to overcome adversity. I think we can all be proud of their efforts.

● (2025)

As government leaders I think we can also be proud of the high level of co-operation between the federal government, the provinces, local authorities, community groups and of course the scores of individual Canadians.

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While the provincial authorities were in the lead, the federal government was there for support where and when it was needed, just like we were able to do previously with the floods in Manitoba and the Saguenay.

I also want to mention one of the unsung heroes of the ice storm and of the disasters in the Saguenay and Manitoba. That is Emergency Preparedness Canada, an agency I have responsibility for. In these emergencies EPC co-ordinated assistance from the federal government departments and agencies beyond the Canadian forces and worked closely with the provinces.

Federal emergency operations and co-ordination groups worked basically around the clock to locate, buy and transport emergency materials such as generators in response to provincial requests for assistance. Situation reports were issued twice daily by EPC for the duration of the crisis. It also co-ordinated public information across all federal departments and agencies participating in the relief effort.

Even as I speak, EPC continues to co-ordinate federal efforts to aid the recovery process. One of its key roles at this point will be in the provision of financial assistance. The cheques may be written by the province to many individuals, businesses and farms, but let me tell all those people that most of the money, as much as 90%, in backing up those cheques will come from the federal government under the disaster financial assistance arrangements, DFAA, co-ordinated by Emergency Preparedness Canada.

But without the Canadian forces these natural disasters would have had even more serious consequences. Let us remember that some 8,700 forces personnel participated in relief efforts in Manitoba and about 450 in the Saguenay floods. Almost 16,000 forces personnel participated in the ice storm crisis. This storm highlighted one of the Canadian forces' most essential roles, protecting the lives and the property of Canadians in times of crisis.

Thousands of uniformed men and women are a sight not very often seen in Canada's urban areas, but there they were during the storm, military personnel from across Canada, from Newfoundland to Quebec to British Columbia. I particularly was pleased to see so many troops coming from western Canada, coming from Edmonton, coming from Winnipeg and helping people in some of the most devastated areas in the South Shore in Montreal in the province of Quebec. That really brought a great many Canadians together from coast to coast.

Operation recuperation, as it was termed by the military, was the largest peace time deployment of the Canadian forces for a natural disaster in our country. At its height, as I said a few moments ago, we had approximately 16,000 men and women deployed from bases across Canada including 4,000 reservists who took time off school or off work to become a part of helping their fellow

Canadians. The number of forces personnel reached a high of almost 11,000 in Quebec, almost 5,000 in Ontario and approximately 400 in New Brunswick. Over 200 units of the Canadian forces contributed.

These are soldiers, sailors, air men and women who directly helped their fellow Canadians deal with this crisis. In addition, there were another 6,000 civilian and military personnel across Canada providing essential support to this extraordinary relief effort. They were packing the airplanes with the equipment. They were helping the forces personnel in their transportation needs. To them we also owe our thanks.

• (2030)

The devastating ice storm left terrible damage in its wake and brought with it unprecedented hardship for millions of Canadians. It destroyed forests and crippled dairy farms and of course we know it downed a great many power lines. The loss of electric power to so many would be difficult to cope with at the best of times, but when it occurs in the middle of winter, that hardship is magnified tenfold.

The emergency was extremely costly in terms of human suffering, property damage and disruption to commerce and industry, and it is not over yet for some. As of this morning just over 300 Canadian forces personnel are still deployed in Quebec. Their priorities remain to help Hydro Quebec in the restoration of power, to support people that are in shelters and assist in local patrols.

As of this morning there are still 7,000 Hydro Quebec customers without power. In Ontario and New Brunswick of course full restoration of power has now occurred.

Canadian forces personnel, I want to add again as I have said on many occasions, will remain in the affected area until the power has been restored. In addition, they remain on alert to respond rapidly to new emergencies.

The ability of the Canadian forces to mobilize such large numbers in a relatively short space of time and sustain this very high level of effort is testimony to their preparedness and their leadership. Our troops helped restore hydroelectric power. They helped local authorities clear roads of fallen trees. They helped set up emergency shelters. They distributed food and equipment, including generators. They cooked meals for those in need. They brought peace of mind and a desperately needed link to the outside world when they carried out their door to door checks on residents.

Their very presence brought comfort to hundreds of thousands of Canadians. They helped people cope with a disaster with added confidence and resolve.

Canada's military has a proud history of responding to those in need anywhere in the world. Now once again Canadians saw for themselves how crucial the forces are to the welfare of the country.

They demonstrated for all to see that they are truly a vital national institution. We owe these fine men and women our deepest and most heartfelt gratitude.

Mr. Larry McCormick (Hastings—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to take part in this take note debate as proposed by the government's loyal opposition leader. I think it is a great idea. It is something we will continue to do on the main streets and in the coffee shops of Canada for years to come.

Canadians from all parts of Canada again displayed their love and their caring for their neighbours and for all citizens of this great country. Again Canadians showed that they knew there is a better feeling, a feeling of giving. The feeling of giving is even better than the feeling you get from receiving. Canadians gave. They gave until they hurt. People helping people, that is what this country is about.

The ice storm of 1998 has again reminded me personally of how proud I am to call this country home. Certainly the spirit of the people who built this country shines through this tragedy. The pioneer spirit is alive today.

People in the central and northern part of my riding told me about the thunderous night when the crowns broke free from the tree trunks and about the devastation they witnessed in the morning. Trees a hundred years of age and more are no longer standing or else they have been severely damaged. Saplings are bent over like the crescent of a moon. Their tips are still frozen in the ice and snow. We are not going to know the extent of this damage for a few years.

• (2035)

People are starting to enter their sugar bushes. It is so risky. The safety hazards are there. The widow makers, those branches that are torn loose and hanging from the trees, have to be looked at and caution has to be used.

Yes, the loss of income to our rural Canadians is very severe. Small business as well as all rural citizens—and farming is a very important business in this country—all these people were affected and people were hurt. Again, farmers were the first ones to share and to care and to look after the people in their communities.

I hope there will be many books written about the human interest stories. I am thinking about one couple, Ruth and Dudley Shannon who are very active in the Frontenac Federation of Agriculture. Like thousands of people in our areas they went around and knocked on the doors of their neighbours' homes. There were no lights anywhere. It was just to make sure everybody was okay. Yes, rural Canadians are very resourceful but people do need water to drink. These people, like many other people, said, "We are dairy farmers. We are very fortunate. In our area we have a generator and there is fresh water in the milk house. We will leave the door unlocked. Come along and help yourselves".

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People were wonderful. Business people in our area displayed no price gouging. People were there to help people. Volunteers came together. Of course we often pay tribute to our volunteer firefighters but we cannot do it enough. These people are volunteers who every day and every week while on these firefighting crews risk their lives.

Of course the minister of defence spoke just before me about the military. It was heart warming to see their response. These people went the extra mile. Around Sharbot Lake, Ontario along the highway between Ottawa and Toronto the helicopters showed up early following the crisis, following the devastation. It is a very rural area but the fact that these birds were in the sky, people knew that there was someone caring for them and it made a big difference in people's lives.

All the municipal workers, the municipal politicians, everyone worked together. Hydro workers risked their lives. There were some tragic events following this. Telephone workers, police, RCMP, people right across the storm's path demonstrated their courage, their generosity and their determination.

I want to thank the Prime Minister who visited the farming community of Wolfe Island which adjoins the riding. People there appreciated his visit. They knew he was concerned. As always the Prime Minister walked down the street and talked and listened to the people.

Immediately after the storm several ministers visited our riding. I was glad to see the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Minister of National Defence. They personally assessed the damage. They had the opportunity to talk directly with the Canadians who experienced the storm's violent intrusion into their lives and livelihood. Their visits were very important to my constituents.

I am proud to have been part of this Team Canada, the internal Team Canada helping to ensure that this is a great country. I also want to say thanks to a few colleagues. We should not list people but the people who phoned me at home around the clock were the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Minister of Health, the President of the Treasury Board, my seatmate the member representing Erie—Lincoln, the members representing Haldimand—Norfolk, Brant and also my colleague from Guelph—Wellington. All these people offered help and assistance and it came by the truckloads.

I especially want to thank the member representing Stoney Creek because the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce sent truckloads, tractor trailer loads of supplies continually into eastern Ontario. It helped and also made our people realize that there are so many people who care.

The federal government will cover most of the storm related costs and that is the way it should be. We do turn the money over to the provincial government. I am very glad to see that the governments are acting quickly because these people need the support now. To date I believe the federal government's contribu-

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tion is approximately \$250 million which has been designated for this purpose.

• (2040)

Canadians can smile and tell stories even during disasters. The military showed up at a home in North Frontenac. One of the senior staff in this Chamber answered the door when this military truck showed up in the middle of the night. A knock came to the door and he answered it. The soldier said, "Sir, you have no hydro". "No," he said. "How are you making out, sir?" This gentleman who works with us here every day said, "Oh, I am fine". The soldier asked, "How long has your hydro been out, sir?" "Well," he said, "for about eight years". He had no hydro. However, people still have neighbours and friends and he invited the military in to have a coffee. His own family was helping in the reserves.

The thoughts and stories of people helping people in this country again I repeat they make me feel so good. My heart goes out to the people who are still suffering from this storm especially in our neighbouring province of Quebec. It is very hard for us to realize the disaster that still exists there today.

We have to learn from this disaster. We all have to work together in this country. I encourage all members of the House to join me in recognizing the volunteers in our community who make this country so great.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving this opportunity, this evening, to pay tribute to the thousands of men, women and children of my riding, who were hit by the worst natural disaster in the history of Quebec.

I also want to pay tribute to the mayors, all elected representatives at the municipal level, and the volunteers. I want them to know that they have my admiration.

I would like to congratulate and thank all those who were involved, like the CLSC, the *Tableé populaire* Drummond, my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois and the Parti Québécois, the people at Alcan, in Jonquière, and all the others who have given us support and assistance. I thank you with all my heart.

The people of the riding of Drummond have lived through this time of crisis with courage and dignity, while showing an incredible amount of solidarity to prevent or alleviate the dramatic consequences we were confronted with throughout this terrible ordeal.

The storm broke out, we lost power, our river flowed over, but not once did we run out of solidarity and mutual support. This ordeal we have gone through together has taught us, in Drummond,

that a Quebecker's heart is stronger than any storm and sturdier than any pylon.

While the power has been restored to most homes in my riding, the crisis is not over. We managed to avoid the worst of disasters, that is to say the loss of many lives, but we are still confronted to the very severe consequences of this tragic episode.

From a public health point of view, there were numerous cases of fractures, respiratory infections due to flu, exhaustion and depression caused by stress. One thing is sure, the consequences of this crisis on public health will be felt for a very long period and will cause additional expenses to the Quebec health system. The federal government, and especially the Health Minister, should demonstrate the necessary openness to accept compensation claims under the financial support agreements in case of disasters and share with the government of Quebec the additional costs incurred by the public health system.

Our area was spared human life losses, mainly because of the efficiency of emergency measures taken by municipal leaders working with scores of volunteers.

• (2045)

During the worst of the crisis, the mobilization of all resources available was necessary and made possible to avoid the worst. However, as the crisis gradually decreases, we can witness the seriousness of human tragedy affecting those who lost their jobs on a temporary or permanent basis.

In the Drummond area, there are about 450 industrial businesses, mainly small and medium-size businesses. Most of them remained out of power until January 26, for a period of three weeks. It is the same for many businesses who have practically lost their January sales. Many businesses have suffered serious damages to their facilities, as well as their equipment and machinery. Industries have lost contracts, customers and markets, mainly export markets, which they had worked many years to secure.

Even if they have resumed their activity, those businesses are now facing a slowdown of their production. It will be weeks and even months before they can regain their production capacity, but some other businesses find themselves in a desperate situation.

Reluctantly, industries have to lay-off some of their employees for an indefinite period. Consequently, this unprecedented storm is transforming itself into a real economic catastrophe for an area such as ours.

In my county where agriculture is also very important, producers have incurred heavy losses, particularly maple syrup producers whose maple groves and equipment have been severely damaged by the weight of ice. Again, there will be very serious economic consequences. Farmers suffered damages to their buildings and machinery. They lost some animals while others are sick. They had

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to throw out milk, and cattle could not be delivered or had to be killed. They lost fruits and vegetables kept in storage and spent a lot of money on generators, gasoline and the like.

Although some means are being devised to compensate farmers for their losses, it will not cover everything and it will leave a gaping hole in the economic activity of the farming industry. This loss of economic activity will come in addition to the various other losses suffered by our regional economy.

As we can see, our regional economy is deeply affected by this tragic ice storm. Without adequate cash assistance, it will be a long time before the regional economy reaches again the momentum it had before the storm. Thus, the federal government must go beyond the compensation for emergency measures which are part of the financial aid agreements in case of disaster.

On behalf of my constituents of Drummond, and the citizens of the devastated areas of Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick, I ask all members of this House to, please, express their solidarity with the victims of the ice storm, the most severely affected of whom being those who lost their livelihood temporarily or permanently.

I ask them to help me convince the Department of Human Resources Development to use the employment insurance account, which it manages not owns, to help the disaster victims who are unemployed, by doing away with the two week waiting period. By adding a special clause dealing with disaster insurance in the employment insurance act, the minister would allow the measure to apply in exceptional circumstances. The minister can count on our full co-operation in getting this amendment through quickly.

Rarely is consensus on an issue reached broadly and naturally. However, this appears to be the case with the use of the employment insurance fund to help workers hit by the storm who find themselves out of a job on the first day not worked.

Employers, employees, unions and management associations have called for it. Municipal politicians, economic development organizations and community, charitable and first aid organizations are calling for it. Editorial writers are writing about it and officials in the Department of Human Resources Development are saying that such an arrangement would be easy to carry out with the full co-operation of employers.

• (2050)

Such a consensus should soften the stand taken by the minister, whose ambiguous statements have so convinced everyone of fact and fiction that our offices and those of the department are still jammed with calls from the public and employers who swear they heard the minister say the opposite of what they have just learned.

If the minister decided to go forward by reversing, I would be the first to understand, support and congratulate him. He would be showing us that he has understood how the government can make fair use of a fund surplus that does not belong to it but rather to employees and employers.

It involves nothing more than a simple operation permitting a healthy injection of funds to restart the economies of the regions hit by the storm. The funds are available and belong to those who amassed them. I hope the minister grasps this.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by saying what a very great honour and very great pleasure it is for me to take part in this debate.

As I heard my colleagues speaking about this terrible ice storm, it brought back memories, some painful of course, but also some highly emotion-charged ones, because during those long days of cold and darkness we experienced a warmth, a solidarity within the affected population, one rarely equalled in the past.

If I may, I will take advantage of these preliminary minutes to salute the populations affected, to salute their courage, their exemplary patience during this emergency situation.

I would also like to salute the volunteers who worked long hours for many days to help the disaster victims, although in very many cases they were victims themselves, with problems in their own homes, collapsed roofs, burst pipes, and concerns about finding accommodation for their own families.

I would also like to salute, to congratulate, to thank, the elected officials and employees of the 12 municipalities in my riding, which I will list if I may: Boucherville, Sainte-Julie, Varennes, Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu, Saint-Amable, Saint-Marc-sur-Richelieu, Saint-Charles-sur-Richelieu, Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu, the villages and the parishes, Calixa-Lavallée, Verchères, and Contrecoeur.

All of us have seen those pictures of the locomotive taken from its tracks and parked in front of the Boucherville city hall in order to supply power to the emergency measures centre. For a few days, this locomotive became the symbol of Boucherville and of the federal riding of Verchères. However, this symbol was first and foremost an illustration of the resourcefulness showed by the people who survived the crisis.

I want to salute the various government officials and my fellow members of Parliament, particularly those of Jonquière, Repentigny, and Kingston and the Islands, who personally contacted me to offer their help.

I also want to salute and to thank Hydro-Quebec workers. In this regard, I would like to recount an anecdote from the Boucherville shelter. In a news conference held twice each day, we provided information to storm victims. At one point, a resident came to the

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microphone and said: "Madam Mayor, from the comfort of my home I did not really know what a lineman was. Now, I can tell you what it is. I can tell you what it is, and I can tell you that they do a darn good job".

• (2055)

I would like to thank the members of municipal police forces who took part in this operation, as well as members of the Sûreté du Québec, the RCMP, and the Canadian Armed Forces. I would like to mention the close co-operation between all these groups, which do not necessarily have anything in common that enables them to work well together but which, on this occasion, showed themselves to be strong team players, demonstrating tremendous solidarity that made them very effective in the field.

I would also like to thank all those who took in friends and relatives or sometimes just fellow victims during this dark period.

I would also like to pay tribute to all the people throughout Quebec, in neighbouring provinces, and in the northeastern United States, who came to help out in the affected areas or who sent supplies, vital equipment, firewood, generators, and on and on.

The solidarity shown during this crisis will forever be a source of inspiration, motivation and determination to us.

At the peak of the crisis, over 75% of the federal riding of Verchères was plunged into darkness. My family and I took in relatives for several days until we too fell victim to the power outage and had to leave our home as well.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay special tribute to the team in my riding office who agreed, in completely appalling conditions, to hold the fort and continue to provide service to the public. I say hold the fort because we have worked under conditions that are almost unthinkable: without electricity, without heat, without running water and with only very limited telephone services. I take this opportunity to thank Gaétane Voyer, Hélène Clavet and Pierre-Luc Vallée, who worked selflessly throughout this difficult period.

I think about all those people who are still in the dark, who are still without electricity at this very moment. We have a tendency to see this crisis as a thing of the past. But there are still people who are suffering in the areas affected by the storm. Such is the case in Drummond, in Verchères, in almost the entire Montérégie and central Quebec region, in a large part of the Eastern Townships and eastern Ontario and in part of New Brunswick. In those regions there are still people without electricity. There are still people who desperately need help.

This leads me to reflect on the debate we are having tonight. When I was told there would be an emergency debate on the ice storm, I was happy. I was excited. I was thrilled because holding an emergency debate made sense to me since there were still people who needed our help. If the purpose of this emergency debate is indeed to find ideas and reach a consensus on how to help those who are affected, then I applaud this initiative.

However if, as I have unfortunately heard to some extent this evening, this debate is merely an opportunity to congratulate ourselves and say we did a good job, everything is fine and we are no longer needed, then you can count me out. You can count me out because I do not think that is what we are here for tonight. We are here tonight to find ways to help the people affected by this disaster.

My colleague from Drummond mentioned the terrible difficulties faced by businesses that lost stocks, that lost clients, that lost profits. These businesses need our help.

• (2100)

I am also thinking about those workers who found themselves temporarily out of work. The possibility of having the waiting period waived so they could be handed a first cheque on the spot was so enticing it was reported in the newspapers. There was also a possibility they would not be asked to pay back the amounts by which they were overpaid.

Of course, it may sound somewhat trivial to discuss whether or not those affected by the storm should be asked to pay back overpayments in EI benefits. But you must realize that any unemployed person who had to contend with the roof of his or her home caving in and pipes bursting, causing untold damage, spent whatever little money he or she had available, including the advance payment cheque. These people are now living in the fear of having to pay back the money they received.

We have to show compassion for those who have suffered and are still suffering. I therefore urge this government, and the Minister of Human Resource Development in particular, to be compassionate in making adjustments to the employment insurance plan, which, I agree, is very strictly regulated. The minister does, however, have the discretionary power to make the necessary adjustments to alleviate these people's hardship.

I think there is every reason to take measures to adjust or relax the various assistance programs to which new money has been allocated because of this emergency situation, including the job creation partnership program, the targeted wage subsidy program and the time sharing employment program.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I urge you and all the members of this House to bear in mind that the crisis is not behind us and that today

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still we must show that we care about those who were and still are affected by this crisis.

I will conclude on this, hoping that my colleagues will take my lead in asking that the government show compassion for these people.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Jordan (Leeds—Grenville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges.

I want to focus on some of the short term and long term effects of this storm in my riding. I start out by saying that while Leeds—Grenville was certainly not the hardest hit, we did unfortunately have three storm related fatalities and our prayers go out to the families of those individuals.

I welcome the opportunity to participate in this evening's discussion. I recognize and commend the co-operative actions of all parties that made it possible.

I will resist the temptation to ramble on about the direct correlation between technological sophistication and human dependence. I will simply point out, however, that as a person in my riding who hooked up a bicycle to a furnace demonstrated, low technology still has its place.

Leeds—Grenville is a rural riding. Loss of power in a rural area results in not only a loss of heat and electricity but also means no water and no telephone, resulting in a situation where communication is difficult at a time when it is most critical.

I make special mention of Mr. Bruce Wylie and radio station CFJR that boosted the power of its signal and served as the primary source of information for the people of its listening area.

Particular sectors of a rural economy face specific problems. Dairy farmers who did not have back-up capacity were faced with immediate energy needs to operate automatic milking machines, to power water pumps and feed conveyors and to ventilate barns.

Interruptions of regular melting cycles can lead to long term production drops. If the delay is more than 36 hours there are serious health consequences for the animals.

The power outage also affected our capacity to process milk and a great deal of product was dumped in the early days of the storm.

Beef operations faced similar problems with water, feed and ventilation but also had the additional risks associated with calving during a power outage.

Perhaps the sector most directly affected in both the short and long term is the maple syrup industry. I do not want to dismiss the

damage to plantations and orchards, but in Leeds—Grenville they seem to have fared a bit better as the trees are spaced to encourage deep root systems and short stocky crowns.

● (2105)

Sugar bushes felt the direct effect of the storm for a number of reasons. Historically these stands of maple trees were left in the areas of the farms that were not suited for regular crops. This resulted in access issues and low levels of topsoil. In many cases these trees were already under stress and an additional four centimetres of ice was more than they could handle.

A sugar maple tree takes anywhere from 40 to 60 years to get to a point of production. Certainly other sectors lost assets but no other sector faces these kinds of replacement issues and costs.

There is also a capacity issue. Large evaporators require large quantities of sap for quality processing. This means that reducing production may just cause further problems.

There is also a critical need for technical information concerning strategies and the implications of dealing with damaged trees. The challenge for maple syrup producers this year will be to get to the trees that can be tapped for the sap is already in the tree.

Pipeline operators will need to replace lines that are frozen in the ground and bucket operators will need help clearing trails. The challenge in subsequent years will be in the quantity of sap as reduced crowns will have a direct effect on the photosynthesis process necessary for sap production and will affect these sugar bushes for many years to come.

Another aspect of the economic impact is the fact that many of these sugar bushes had tourism components which directly and indirectly contribute to a great number of other businesses.

I recognize the efforts of Human Resources Development Canada for making moneys available for local labour market partnership agreements. I am proud the first of these that has been put in place in Leeds—Grenville is to help address the needs of maple syrup producers through the Eastern Ontario Model Forest Organization.

While the retail sector lost income, local businesses opened their doors to people by candlelight. I had a personal experience in Gananoque where a service station was giving gas on verbal credit. Larger companies freed up employees to work in shelters and continue volunteer firefighting activities. In Leeds—Grenville the co-ordinated actions of the firefighters were critical. The custom nature of their equipment did not allow for the use of replacement workers. These individuals and their families endured long hours of stressful, dangerous work.

Both time and knowledge prevent me from thanking all the volunteers, but as MPs from other affected regions have pointed

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out the individual acts of courage and compassion were certainly one of the silver linings to this storm cloud.

Ontario Hydro worked miracles on the operational side, but in the case of rural areas communication was a problem. They are certainly aware of this and I will not belabour the point.

Initial indications are that banks and insurance companies are being creative and flexible in providing much needed assistance. As the crisis evolved in Leeds—Grenville and areas received power, to a person, every mayor and every reeve, there was absolutely no hesitation to redirecting resources to the townships. I recognize the excellent co-operation that I experienced from both provincial and municipal politicians through the United Counties Council. The storm did more to further the cause of municipal amalgamation than any provincial regulation, and perhaps there is a valuable lesson there for legislators at all levels.

I was particularly struck by a call from a mayor from the Saguenay region. The area was sent money from the Brockville area during the flood and he wished to reciprocate.

Emergency measures twinned towns with unaffected regions, and my riding benefited directly from Kitchener and Cobourg. As the storm brought people together, the allocation of compensation has the potential to tear them apart. The need for emergency assistance in Leeds—Grenville is over. I urge the appropriate officials to take the time necessary to ensure that the long term compensation criteria and strategies are both transparent and equitable.

I am particularly concerned about the loss of employment income to families. We went to great lengths to ensure that UI and social assistance recipients were accommodated, but let us not forget that they did not miss a cheque. The real test of the value of compensation is how it will affect the small business person or the family living paycheque to paycheque. Let us ensure that they do not fall between the cracks.

In terms of federal assistance efforts my riding experienced the direct benefit of a number of agencies. The military saved lives in my riding by checking homes on a daily basis. People were reluctant to leave their homes and the military undertook these checks along with community volunteers. As a commanding officer commented, this is the 98% of the military that we have not heard about over the last five years.

• (2110)

The value of the reserves was also evident. The pool of talented reservists was critical. I appeal to all employers to recognize the valuable contribution they made. The local coast guard adopted a whatever it takes attitude and the men and women at the Prescott base worked around the clock. Revenue Canada put emergency

measures in place at border crossings and emergency goods were flushed through the system.

Thanks to the creative efforts of customs officials at both Ogdensburg and Ivy Lea international bridges, truckers were handed maps of eastern Ontario and western Quebec showing shelter locations and drop off points.

Correctional Service Canada supplied provisions from its kitchen and also labour from off duty employees. Health Canada provided cots, blankets and stretchers for the shelters. Public Works advanced grant in lieu of taxes payments to address short term cash flow to municipalities. Agriculture Canada co-ordinated the distribution of generators and struck deals with the U.S. Food and Drug Agency to clear unpasteurized milk for processing in the United States and to relieve or waive the usual agricultural food process permits for feed coming back up. Human Resources Canada was quick to make funds available for clean up.

Much of this government involvement and certainly similar actions that occurred at both the municipal and provincial level were not always a result of policy but of action by ministers and bureaucrats who found creative strategies to meet real needs in a timely fashion.

In conclusion, while the ice storm represented nature at its worst, the response of Canadians represented humankind at its best. On behalf of the citizens of Leeds—Grenville I thank all Canadians for their support and prayers during this crisis.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nick Discepola (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to take part in this discussion—which to me is not a debate—in order to have an opportunity to testify to the courage and solidarity that exists everywhere in Quebec, and particularly to pay homage to the hundreds and thousands of volunteers in the riding of Vaudreuil—Soulanges.

My riding is part of the Montérégie region. Jokingly, people were saying that maybe we should change our name to Montérégie-Nord. We were a bit neglected. It took emergency measures ten days to discover that there had also been an emergency situation in the riding I have the honour to represent.

The region, and the riding as a whole, took charge of things. They gave an example to be followed in future, which I shall explain. All of the stakeholders got together, held meetings to plan how to deal with the problem. This was a disaster, and all the problems that can go along with one cannot be foreseen. One just has to adapt.

I would like to start with heart-felt congratulations and thanks for all of the mayors and municipal councils, as well as the administrations of these 24 towns and cities. Without the co-ordination and devotion of these mayors, these councils, the

volunteer firefighters, we might have seen results far different from the ones we see today.

We came through relatively well in our area because, as a region, we took charge of things, thanks to the concerted efforts of mayors, reeves and all elected representatives on both the federal and the provincial level, regardless of political stripe. The mayors made themselves available, heart and soul, night and day.

I would like to mention two in particular, although I am aware this does a disservice to the others, but they are exemplars of devotion and of how people who were victims of the disaster themselves devoted themselves to their community.

Mayor Richard Leroux of Rivière-Beaudette, in a corner of our riding, right near the Ontario border, was affected himself because he neglected his own home.

• (2115)

His roof collapsed, and the damage was worth between \$7,000 and \$10,000. Also, Michel Kandyba of Pincourt is today facing \$30,000 worth of damage.

We always tend to criticize elected officials, but I take off my hat to the 24 mayors, especially the reeve, Mr. Luc Tison and the mayor of Saint-Polycarpe, Normand Ménard. On Wednesday, day 12, it was nearly minus 20 in the riding. I will not forget that. They were announcing two days of minus 20 and below. There was no wood in the riding. Everyone was busy contacting people everywhere, and the mayor of St. Polycarpe, Mr. Ménard, volunteered to co-ordinate the distribution of wood, thanks doubtless to the co-operation and help of the Canadian armed forces.

We have been talking about solidarity, and in our riding it was exemplary. Not only did neighbours and towns and cities join together, but everyone helped everyone else. This was the finest example I ever saw and perhaps the last I will see as a member of Parliament.

[*English*]

We had to adapt to these changing circumstances. It was almost a crisis and management by crisis and we had to adapt on an hourly basis. However, the mayors, the elected officials and the hydro officials, everyone had one common objective. I share part of my riding, the Soulanges area, with a PQ member of the national assembly and the other part of the riding with the leader of opposition, Mr. Daniel Johnson, and we put aside our differences for the betterment of our citizens. It worked very well.

If I had one recommendation for future plans it would essentially be that the control of a disaster be at the top level but that the dissemination of information has to be at the lowest possible denominator which is at the mayoral level. They are the closest to the people.

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Time and time again I saw examples of how either civil protection people came into the riding not knowing the riding or hydro officials who were brought in from other areas did not understand the needs. However, when they talked to the mayor the mayor was able to tell them who was away on vacation or which house was only a temporary summer home and their hook-ups were not necessary. Their knowledge of their communities was proven invaluable.

We also showed how Quebeckers and Canadians can be ingenious. I would like to thank publicly the officials at Canadian National railways who provided us with a locomotion engine, an engine that we were able to hook up with the efforts of Hydro-Quebec and the co-operation of CN officials. This engine was taken off the railway tracks, put on the side and hooked up to feed 80 homes and 4 shelters. It was a very proud time for us to see that occurring.

I know I only have a few more minutes but I would also like to take the time to thank the many people in the riding.

[*Translation*]

I have already mentioned the volunteer firefighters. They poured their heart and soul into helping and looking after people's safety, sometimes for 18 or 20 hours a day. The Red Cross, the Canadian armed forces, we cannot say enough. I would, however, like to single out three officers. They are, first, Major Wadsworth, Warrant Officer Cooke and especially, a good friend—because we became friends—Lieutenant-Colonel David Fraser, who helped us hugely in our riding. He also spoke French and came from Edmonton.

The employees of Hydro-Québec, the RCMP—520 officers helped with public security.

• (2120)

There is also Correctional Services, the other department for which we are responsible. Do you know that minimum security inmates also helped Hydro-Québec teams remove branches, and so on?

I would particularly like to mention the Verdonck family, with their distribution centre and Belcan agrocentre. This rural business threw itself heart and soul into distributing generators that came from all over the place. Some were even received from the Kitchener and Owen Sound areas. One individual Greg Haney who was especially hard hit and who had been without electricity for two weeks could have taken a generator home with him and hooked it up. Instead, he gave it to farmers and others who were worse off.

I could not have managed without my staff, Monique, Sylvie and Jean. There were also my colleagues from elsewhere, from the Beauce and Gaspé regions, from Kitchener, from New Brunswick, who sent wood during this crisis. I would like to thank my family, and my wife Mary Alice in particular, because they did not see me

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for two weeks, as well as the hundreds of thousands of volunteers. They put their hearts and souls into helping their fellow citizens.

[English]

We always have memories. This is an event in history. We always look back and remember, just like when President Kennedy was shot, where we were.

I have beautiful memories and I have destructive memories of seeing the tree tops and the maple orchards destroyed. It is as if someone took a lawnmower and cut the tops, an estimated seven thousand square kilometres of them.

I have two beautiful memories. One is seeing young children about 10 or 11 years old in Ste. Marthe skating on the ice in farmers' fields waiving to a helicopter from the Canadian Armed Forces, thanking it for coming to help them. The other is St-Télesphore, a very French Canadian village, celebrating and singing in English happy birthday to a nine year-old girl celebrating her birthday in a shelter.

It shows that in times of need Quebeckers, Canadians, come to the aid of each other. I want to salute all these people in the riding of Vaudreuil—Soulanges and, more important, all Quebeckers and I thank all Canadians for their help.

Mr. Rick Laliberte (Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

I would like to congratulate the House for taking the time to reflect on the ice storm of 1998.

I represent a riding, Churchill River in northern Saskatchewan, which was far removed from the present ice storm and the harsh realities that the citizens of Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick experienced.

With the blessings of modern day media we had a chance to see the images and hear the stories of people's daily routine disrupted. Their safety was compromised, their whole educational process put on hold and their health and basic necessities unavailable to them.

I also think of the cause of it. If we look at an ice storm, raining for numerous days in the middle of winter, it is a climate disruption of huge magnitude. The news is quick to say that the intensity of El Nino is blamed for our present day climate disruptions such as forest fires and grass fires at the foothills of Alberta and the rain and the floods which are happening on the coasts of the United States.

If we take a second look at these climate disruptions, just before Christmas we had a major debate and a major international conference in Kyoto dealing with the human effects of greenhouse gases on climate change.

• (2125)

These are the messages. We have to read these. What are we preparing ourselves for?

I am proud to be Canadian when I see all the efforts made by the provinces, neighbours, the communities, the municipalities, the provincial governments in Quebec and Ontario, all putting their efforts into getting the basic requirements back in order.

I had an opportunity after leaving Parliament Hill last night to travel to Montreal and the South Shore. The impact of being without hydro is causing a real struggle. There are still communities and families without power and therefore the basic necessity of heat.

It is now time to pick up the pieces. Members have mentioned the environmental impact with all those trees snapped off at the beginning of their higher reaches. They now have to be cleaned up. Imagine the manpower required to clean the ice off the equipment and get some of the productivity going again on the farms, for the maple producers and the many industries in those regions.

I have taken notes tonight that I will take back to my constituency to try to learn how we would handle a disaster or catastrophe in our area. What would we do?

For example, travelling through St. Jean this morning, family farms all over the place were affected. Family farms are an integral part of the economy of Quebec, the prairie provinces, Ontario. They have become dependent on hydro. Hydro provides heat and light.

A few decades ago the wood stove played a major role. It was a legacy from family to family and from generation to generation. Why isn't the wood stove a basic necessity of a home now? A lot of our young people are moving to the cities. You cannot haul your wood stove into an apartment. Look at the family farm.

Why are we compromising family industries? Let us caution the people in Quebec and Ontario who have been hit hard and are thinking of giving up their farms or businesses because of the effects of this catastrophe. Let us extend what assistance we can as a nation, as a province and as a neighbour.

While sitting in the warmth of my home in northern Saskatchewan watching the daily news report, a constituent walked in and asked how can they could help. I was astounded. I had no network to tap into. The army was moving into the region.

What came to my mind is why do we not have a network of communities in Canada. Why could home town not be paired off with a sister community in Quebec or in B.C.? If we had a hard time as was experienced in this past month, we could reach out for help and safety. If there are hard times in our community some time in the future, we could call on this sister community.

That came to mind when I was in Big River and had coffee with students in a Katimavik program. The students had just moved in to start a new program in that area. There were students from British

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Columbia, Quebec and Ontario. I asked them about the ice storm. They shared stories about phoning home to check on the safety of their people who were in shelters and that the elderly were taken care of. They were assured they could continue.

That was a message for me as well. Katimavik is a youth corps program bringing our youth together to work on community projects. Community projects will be required to clean up the forests and the communities. There are many branches hanging off the trees. If the kids climb those trees, those big branches are going to fall. Safety will be compromised. The youth corps should be looked at in Canada, an environmental youth corps to clean up and give us a support structure built on Katimavik ten times more than what it is now.

• (2130)

The reserves were talked about. There are no reserves in my area. The military is removed from a different sector into another part of the province or the neighbouring province. The reserves should be expanded in this country so that when people are in times of atrocities or catastrophes we can feel a part of it.

A network of experience could be brought together if we could communicate. The CBC News and the CTV News really communicated in terms of bringing the news into our homes.

We have to look at our resources in the House of Commons, in the provinces and in our communities. On behalf of the people of Churchill River, we offer our support if there is any way we can help pick up the pieces at this time.

The ice storm is similar to a fire. When a major forest fire has impact on a province, neighbouring provinces will send fire crews to fight the fire. There are fire crews all along the boreal forest. The crews are outfitted to camp and be self-sufficient. They have communications systems. Why could they not be mobilized into this area to pick up the pieces of the ice storm of 1998?

That is what I offer. Thank you for this opportunity to listen, to gain from the knowledge and to take the experience back to the region I represent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are here this evening to talk about the hardships experienced by residents of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick during the terrible ice storm that hit in January. We are here to pay tribute to the millions of Canadians who were without power for several days or even weeks and, in some cases, for over a month.

This evening we heard several stories of courage displayed by storm victims, that is men, women and children who, in difficult circumstances, showed such great human qualities as sharing,

compassion and patience. It is often said that we now live in an individualistic society where personal interests take precedence over collective ones. It was clearly not the case during the ice storm.

Thousands of Canadians united their efforts to ease the suffering of residents of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick whose lives were totally disrupted by the terrible storm. We witnessed tremendous efforts in the communities that were affected. People came from neighbouring cities and provinces to prepare meals, share food, lend generators or donate firewood. This generosity reflects the very best in what we think of as Canadian values.

In my riding of Acadie—Bathurst, hundreds of volunteers co-ordinated their efforts to send money, wood, food and other resources to storm victims. Thanks to the co-ordination provided by the municipalities and community groups, these resources got to those communities where they were needed in no time.

I would like to thank all the people of my riding, who, like their fellow citizens across the country, have shown a great deal of caring for those in need.

A word of caution, however, about the genuine generosity shown by Canadians. Some of my colleagues in this House have used this generosity displayed for Quebecers to raise the national unity issue. The people who gave their time, their resources and their money did not do so for political reasons; they acted out of sheer generosity. To come and colour their noble actions by playing politics is insulting.

I drove in the triangle of darkness and saw the electrical poles that had fallen in the streets, in the fields and even on houses.

• (2135)

Town after town, village after village, I saw the darkness so many Ontarians, Quebecers, Nova Scotians and New Brunswickers had to face. We have never seen the likes of this crisis in Canada. Unfortunately, we were not prepared for it, and now it is our responsibility as legislators to ensure that the infrastructure is in place in the future so we may quickly react to an emergency.

In my province of New Brunswick, victims suffered longer in the dark because of jobs lost due to cuts in transfers to the provinces. Fewer workers were available to react immediately to the power loss. It is pretty straightforward. If there are fewer workers, there are fewer people to repair the damage caused by the storm.

[*English*]

The cutbacks at NB Power have meant that people in south New Brunswick had to wait longer in the dark. It is yet another example of how the Liberal cutbacks have hurt Canadians. Larry Calhoun, business manager for the International Brotherhood of Electrical

Ice Storm 1998

Workers Local 1733, and John Cole, business manager for IBEW Local 2309, had this to say about the recent storm:

In all fairness, it wouldn't matter how many line workers were standing by; in a storm like this one it's going to take a while to get back to normal.

Now, having said that, let us say as well that there is absolutely no question that in New Brunswick, the reduced NB Power workforce resulted in citizens being left in the dark longer than would have previously been the case. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to understand this. When the lights go out, it's because power flow has been disrupted. When that happens, crews are dispatched to find the source of the problem and fix it. In a storm like this one, the problem is often a tree which has toppled onto a line. Finding that often entails driving along a road until you see it. The fewer crews you have doing the hooking, the longer it's likely going to take to find it.

[Translation]

With the reduction of the debt and the deficit at the top of the legislative agenda, we forget that government cuts directly affect people's lives. Our job is to find ways to improve services to consumers, to reinvest in jobs that will ensure better support in such situations.

At the provincial and municipal levels, we must develop a specific strategy to ease suffering at critical moments. The Quebec government stressed the importance of establishing a plan for emergencies. Yesterday I got a letter from a constituent suggesting such a plan. I will read you a few lines from the letter, which underscores the lack of preparedness.

She writes "They have been holding meetings for years about emergencies, but there are no generators, no place to take in people, no food reserves in a handy place, no little stoves that could be set up homes that still have fireplaces. This is all discussed within the family, because you have to think and act rapidly. You cannot know what is going to happen".

She continues, setting out a concrete strategy to minimize people's suffering, while creating jobs at the same time. "There are people who heat with wood, but have no firewood. So many unemployed and so many people I know who have not had work for three years should have had the right to cut wood on crown lands to stockpile for use in an emergency. Those people should have had a chance to earn and to accumulate unemployment insurance stamps so that they could live too".

That suggestion is only one of many we now need to look at. With the emergency situation lifted a bit, efforts must now be focussed on reconstruction of devastated areas. Along with these efforts, a strategy needs to be developed to ensure that we are as prepared as possible for a similar situation in future.

Canadians have shown incredible courage and generosity during this disaster. Now it is time to ensure that we do everything we can

to put the necessary resources in place for a better response to this type of crisis. Canadians deserve that, at least.

[English]

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly a privilege to make some comments tonight on the ice storm of 1998.

• (2140)

I was a farmer for many years, actually for 25 years. I farmed right up until I came to this Chamber in 1988. I am no stranger to some of the ups and downs that are part of the business of agriculture but I do not think any of us were prepared for the crisis that mother nature dealt much of eastern Canada in the early part of this year.

When the ice storm hit and the lights went out, rural areas were particularly hard hit. I am not diminishing the problems and the realities of the urban areas, but the rural areas were hit hard as well.

Indeed almost a month later as we stand here tonight there are people still without power. It is my understanding that the lights will be on by the end of the week. I sincerely hope they are and that that is a reality.

In the week following the several days of ice, I visited many of the affected areas as the minister of agriculture and rural development for Canada. I visited many of the areas in Ontario and Quebec at the time of the crisis. I visited with farm leaders, the Prime Minister and with several of my cabinet colleagues.

I witnessed firsthand the devastation. Not a utility pole was standing for miles along the concessions. Transformers were on the ground. As hard and as good a job as the television and the newspapers did and as hard as they tried, they did a great job but they could not give us the true picture of what it was like.

The destructive forces of mother nature were unbelievable. It is humbling to see those huge transmission towers on the ground like a heap of spaghetti. I spoke with farmers who had already endured the blackout for a number of days. Some of them had their power back on after seven or eight days which most of us would think would be a long time without electricity. And it is, no question.

I also spoke with farmers who were still struggling to keep their generators and their operations going. They were sharing generators. I know in one case an individual was taking a generator to nine different dairy farms. Twice a day the individual made the circle around until they could find enough generators to help.

I used to have one of those generators. They are called stand-by generators. They are built well. There is no question that they are built well, but they are not built to run 24 hours a day for five, six, seven, eight, ten, twelve, fifteen days or whatever number of days they had to run.

Ice Storm 1998

I saw producers who were hurting and producers who were tired. Their animals were suffering and yes, some of their animals were dying. Some were forced to dump the milk from the dairy operations because the delivery system, the pick-up system, et cetera, just could not work.

Rural businesses were shut down. There are more businesses in rural Canada than just farms. I am not diminishing the inconvenience, the problems and the hurt on the farms but there are a lot of rural businesses out there.

Rural businesses, suppliers to their customers and their communities were spending hundreds of dollars a day. I am not exaggerating. They had generators so that they could provide feed to the livestock operations.

We talk about the just in time service in much of our industrial areas. There is just in time service in poultry operations as well because of the fresh feed that is brought to the farm every two or three days. Those feed manufacturers had to be there.

Residents were taking in neighbours in the urban parts of the communities up and down the concessions. I must say that one of the things that impressed me so much was the sense of humour and how everybody kept their chin up.

I am not being flippant about it but I had a couple of people say that there will not be a family reunion this year. They had 15 or 20 members of their family in their home already for six or seven days and they probably will not need a family reunion this year.

The people did rally around each other, not only neighbours but friends, family, volunteer firemen, service clubs, church, municipal governments, provincial governments, the federal government as well as people from communities across the border.

I saw utility crews from Massachusetts, Connecticut, Detroit and I could go on. There were a number of them. There were hydro crews in Ontario from all over the province of Ontario. There were hydro crews in Quebec from all over the province of Quebec. Everybody converged there to help.

I have to talk about leaving my riding on the Sunday night at the end of the storm. I was driving out of the city of Belleville and my wife asked why all the trucks were at the hotel. I drove there.

● (2145)

I am not embarrassed to say that tears ran down my face. I counted 100 utility trucks from Detroit Edison in that parking lot. They had already driven 375 miles and they had to drive 200 miles more before they got to the ice storm. That was hands across the border.

I took the opportunity a few days later when I had a meeting with my counterpart in the United States, Secretary Dan Glickman, to

thank him not only for that but for the co-operation between the people in our department of agriculture and our food inspection agency and the USDA and the U.S. Food and Drug Agency. Within hours they took action to make arrangements for milk to go into the United States to be processed there and come back into Canada as a processed product. Milk was also moved into the maritimes and into other areas of Quebec and Ontario.

I have admiration for the perseverance, for the resourcefulness and for the community spirit and pride. It is something we can all be proud of.

The disaster assistance arrangement with the provinces will go a long way. I point out that it has to be kicked in by the provinces and that is happening. Our department is working every day with the provinces. We talked every day from the Tuesday when the ice storm started with the people in the UPA in Quebec, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture in Ontario, the Quebec ministry of agriculture and the Ontario ministry of agriculture to do all we possibly could.

The hurt is not over yet. We know that. It will be there for a while. The worst is over but the clean up is yet to come. For example, the Ontario Maple Syrup Producers Association estimates that in eastern Ontario where the storm hit between 50% to 90% of the sugar maples were damaged. In the province of Quebec over 30% were damaged. I saw maple syrup bushes, and I am not exaggerating, where the trees were only utility poles. That is all that is left. I know that mother nature is a great healer. Time will tell whether mother nature can bring those trees back.

Just this morning I am sure a number of us heard a couple of maple producers on CBC talking about their having to figure out how to deal with the aftermath. There are a lot of specialists out there and everybody has come forward. A lot of livestock died but numbers do not tell the story.

People came together. We drove over 3,000 kilometres encouraging people and thanking people. I stopped along the road to thank utility crews from Pennsylvania as well as our own army for helping with community activities. In one small town there was a Salvation Army disaster unit at one end of the street. There is one in Toronto and one in Montreal. This one was from Toronto. The volunteer firemen and the army were there. They were feeding people in the shelter. It was absolutely heart warming to see.

Communities will be stronger after this storm. I think our country will be stronger. As I said a number of times it is not the method of choice to get stronger but our country will be stronger.

I was touched. Each day I talked with my family back home. The storm only missed our riding by 50 miles. I saw militia people with pick axes and sledge hammers breaking cables out of the ice so that the utility crews could put them back up a little faster.

Ice Storm 1998

I have another lighter story which I am sure some members have heard. When I was with the prime minister in Winchester, Ontario, a dairy farmer told him that a member of the Canadian army helped him do his milking. The soldiers had brought the generator to the farm and had to wait so that they could take it to another farm. One of them said "I am not doing anything right now while I wait. I might as well help you do your milking". Our military is there whenever and wherever we need them. I am proud.

As I close my comments tonight I say a great big thanks. There is no way we can stand here and thank everyone. I thank the people for being patient. I thank the people for being understanding. I thank them for keeping their chins up. I thank the people from all over Canada.

• (2150)

I take this opportunity tonight to thank the people in my riding of Prince Edward—Hastings. As all Canadians did in the Saguenay situation and during the Red River flood, we opened our hearts, as Canadians know how to do, and our pocketbooks. We provide hard goods, soft goods, food and prayers for people in such situations when needed.

I give a big thanks to everyone. It will take a while yet to get over it, but with the determination of me, my colleagues, the House and all other Canadians we will do it.

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly very appreciative of the minister of agriculture for sharing his time with me. I am sure some of our viewers are wondering why the member for Durham would be speaking on the ice storm but it has affected me and my riding in a multiplicity of ways.

When the ice storm first struck I immediately received a phone call from friends and associates living in the Winchester area. The minister just talked about Winchester and the devastation of the storm there. The call was that they needed generators and generator capacities.

We have an agricultural community in my riding, a dairy producing area. The call went out to ask some of our constituents if they could find generator capacities to share with these people in eastern Ontario. I am very proud of the people in my riding who immediately rose to the call. I was fortunate enough to take a truck and to have the local chamber of commerce provide a trailer. I took my staff and we went into the area of Winchester to drop off a number of generators.

It was my good fortune to go to some of the farms affected by the storm and physically take these generators off the truck and install them. It was not so much the mechanics of all this but the human interest.

I remember a particular dairy farming operation in a place called Moose Creek. I drove into the driveway. The house was totally in darkness. Little children were looking out the drapes. This was their first contact with the outside world for over a week. Just the smiles on their faces and the fact that they knew other people cared about their problems were certainly uplifting for me. It was uplifting for all the people in my riding and others who tried to help and create those bonds which make us a truly great nation.

I said that the storm had affected me in a multiplicity of ways. I mentioned the hamlet of Moose Creek in the riding of one of my colleagues, the member for Stormont—Dundas. I went into its local community centre which was being used as a shelter and talked with the people there. There was a lot of anxiety. These people had been without hydro for about a week. As a matter of fact, by the time this had culminated we had about 30 generators in the area under my control or under the control of the people of Durham. It was interesting to talk to some of the people in the shelter and to hear about what they had gone through and their anxieties.

We live in a so-called modern world and we take a lot of things for granted. We will go home tonight to sleep in a nice warm bed. We will get up in the morning and turn on the lights. This is what we expect. All these things had been taken away from these people which caused a great deal of anxiety in their lives. The connection was the human beings who tried to reach out and make a difference. There were military people from the regular forces in Petawawa in the community centre. They told me how they were trying to pump out people's basements that were full of water because their sump pumps had failed to work. They were making a tremendous commitment.

• (2155)

I have two sons in the reserve forces, one with the Cameron Highlanders in Ottawa. I lost track of him for over a week. They were down in Maxville and Vankleek Hill doing the same thing I was trying to do, but they were doing it a lot more effectively and efficiently than I was. I was allocating generator capacity between households by moving one generator between six households. We had to move it every two or three hours so all the houses could have a bit of heat.

This all seems rather absurd as we approach the 21st century. I am sure people will look after the fact into how we could have handled things differently. We could have had manual overrides on our furnace systems to prevent such occurrences. The fact is that people were thrown into the situation. As we speak here tonight many people are still without hydro.

My son was involved in the command operation in Maxville. People were suffering. A fellow named Richard who was helping him said that it would be nice if Maxville had new Canadian flags.

Ice Storm 1998

A lot of its flags were old and tattered. They felt much more a part of the country than they did before this happened.

The Reform Party often criticizes our flag campaign. I was very pleased to approach the Minister of Canadian Heritage to say that the people of Maxville needed 20 flags. I asked her to give us 20 flags to make those people feel a little happier about being part of this country. I am happy to say she forwarded them to me and they are now in Maxville. It made them feel very much part of this great country.

The minister of agriculture said that it was almost over in the sense that people being reconnected. It is not over as far as the hurt, the anguish and the pain that have been suffered and will be suffered by these people. A small business operator who lost a month of income but has a mortgage suddenly has a significant problem on the doorstep to meet that mortgage payment.

Consider the insurance business. Many of these things were considered to be acts of God. Many were uninsurable. Our government and the provincial governments are attempting to deal with disaster relief assistance. In reality, when the smoke clears, these people will have major financial difficulties. There will be a grey area in which insurance companies will question the insurability of events.

Maybe a big insurance company or a big bank with lots of assets can be very generous. However situations will arise in which smaller insurance companies and financial institutions will not be so generously inclined. Suddenly these goal posts about what is claimable and what is not or how to assist a business person or a person who is making a car loan payment will become big problems.

• (2200)

I am very happy to say that the caucus on this side of the House has provided for a number of these organizations to come and visit us tomorrow. I want to give a personal appreciation for the Conference Board of Canada, which is going to appear before our caucus tomorrow; the Canadian Bankers' Association, which is going to provide members in the relief areas; the Caisse Populaire of Quebec, which is coming here to say how it is going to deal with these problems; and the Insurance Bureau of Canada, which is sending all its representatives to tell us on this side of the House at least, as parliamentarians, how they are going to deal with these people not only today but in the future and solve some of the problems that are going to exist.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Government House Leader said that it is a terrible thing to lose power. Our party has experienced that and it is actually something unpleasant. But what is even more difficult is to

lose electrical power, and that is what happened to people in Quebec, in parts of New Brunswick and in Ontario.

We are holding a special debate tonight. People always say that whenever someone has a good idea, the same idea also appears elsewhere. Last week, the Conservative caucus decided to propose a special debate on the ice storm in Quebec and our reformist friends had the same idea. It is very encouraging to see that bright ideas cross the mind of people quite rapidly.

Of course, the present debate is an occasion for gratitude and thanks. Therefore I would like to thank the government, particularly the Prime Minister, but most of all the minister responsible for Human Resources Development in Canada. I must say that my colleague from Shefford and myself have had to contact the minister on a regular basis and he often returned our calls a few minutes later.

I would also like to recognize the work of the President of the Treasury Board. We have not seen him often on the front pages of newspapers or on the television, but he was present.

I also would like to mention all the leaders of the parties represented in this House, MPs, MNAs, elected representatives at the municipal level, especially in my riding of Richmond—Arthabaska which I am honoured to represent.

However, I have a slight problem with what is going on tonight. I feel people are a bit too quick to pat one another on the back. It seems to me people are taking for granted that everything is back to normal in Quebec and Ontario, which is not really the case. One should be cautious. In an emergency debate, one has to carefully weigh one's comments. True, people did a tremendous job, the armed forces were absolutely stupendous, but my riding was outside the infamous triangle, and it was the mayors of towns and villages who had to clamour for help. Even today, there are still some villages that have been forgotten.

What is obvious is that following the natural disaster which hit the provinces of Quebec and Ontario, and parts of New Brunswick, the human tragedy is far from over and the economic tragedy is getting worse. I believe we should not be blind to this. It is not right for us to behave this way, going around patting one another on the back, saying what fine people we are et thanking everybody when there are people in the province of Quebec who cannot watch us because they are still without power. There are people who cannot pay the banks, either because that have not worked or because their business has been closed. We must be cautious.

There are many flaws in the system. We talked about the banks earlier. At the beginning of the ice storm, several branches did not co-operate with storm victims. These people will have to lodge complaints against Canadian bankers. After, the situation changed, thank goodness.

Ice Storm 1998

There is a problem with insurance companies too. This is not covered by wage insurance or mortgage insurance. Unfortunately, now that the holiday season is over, people have received their credit card statements, municipal taxes will soon be due. So people have a problem.

• (2205)

We must admit there was some confusion. We realize that we were in an emergency situation, but there was confusion. Earlier I had some kind words for the minister of Human Resources Development, and I stand by them. Nevertheless, there again, but certainly not consciously, there was an incredible confusion. I would say that it was total chaos. People did not know whether or not they were admissible to employment insurance.

Nothing is settled yet. Some people applied for employment insurance, but later received a phone call from a federal official saying: "We are sorry, you should return the money, you were not entitled to it". There are situations like that in Quebec. The problems created by the ice storm are far from over, but we will have to work fast to deal with them.

There are different categories of disaster victims. There are the residents of the infamous triangle. There are the victims of my riding and there are what I would call the "indirect" victims, those who were lucky enough to have power but worked for a company which, on Quebec Hydro's request, had to stop its operations. These people did not get any pay.

As the hon. member for Sherbrooke and my colleague from Shefford were saying, we tend to forget these people. We must learn from all this. Hundreds of phone calls were received by the constituency offices located in the affected regions. What could we say to these people? We were trying to help them, but the answer we gave them were often inconsistent and unclear.

Yesterday, the human resources development minister tried to clarify the situation and I must tell you that, in my riding, it is even worse. What is clear is this: to get employment insurance, you must wait at least two weeks, you must have stopped working for two weeks, otherwise, you cannot get anything. Is this clear? It is clear. You will get a cheque faster, but your waiting period of two weeks will remain. The message is clear.

This does not solve the problem. The solution that was suggested does not apply at all.

Also, my colleague and I, with, of course, the hon. member for Sherbrooke, who was asking daily about the situation, tried to see what was coming. We knew that power was coming back, but not the money, not the solutions.

We talked earlier about small businesses. Programs must be set up quickly. Some people tell us that all the investments Hydro Quebec will make will revitalize the economy, but, unfortunately,

small businesses, those that create economic growth in Canada, will have some difficulty pulling through.

The working capital of these businesses is affected. Working people are no longer motivated. We see cases where people have to negotiate, have to work on weekends and have to do unpaid overtime. There is also a matter of human dignity in this. No rule has been established.

I must tell you one thing. People were comparing the situation with what was going on here in the capital. Thank goodness, public servants have a good collective agreement. People were asked to stay home, but they were getting paid. In my own area, in the riding of Shefford and elsewhere, people were asked not to report to work, but they did not have any money to get by.

Canada must be ready to cope with such disasters, but it was not. Although I am sure everyone did their best.

The finance minister's prebudget consultation document contains a resolution to maintain a balance. And the last resolution in the document says everybody should be aware of the need for emergency preparedness. The government has to realize that we need a special fund with a specific set of rules for natural disasters. The document mentions earthquakes, but it might as well mention floods, ice storms, and so on.

The time has come for the government to implement its own recommendations and be aware of what is going on. People in my party and probably all hon. members in this House are in no mood to hold another emergency debate next year over another ice storm, drought or flood elsewhere. We should move quickly to remedy this situation. We should pass legislation and heighten public awareness of this issue.

Let us talk about insurance companies, for example. I mentioned that a moment ago. Why did we overlook that? It should not be that costly. It is simply a matter of amending policies to get limited coverage of mortgages and salaries. Nobody ever thought about that.

• (2210)

There is a whole structure we have to put in place. We never thought about it but, after three disasters within two or three years, I think it is time to stop talking. We must stop patting ourselves on the back and try to find real solutions. Whether the reason is El Nino, greenhouse gases or anything else, or whether it is punishment for our sins, who knows, we will have to find real long-term solutions for those who are suffering tremendous hardship.

I ask the members of this House to show solidarity and the government to see that solutions can be implemented quickly so that, in the event of another natural disaster, people will never have to go through what they did during the ice storm.

Ice Storm 1998

Let us try to always remember one thing: it is the most vulnerable who suffer the most. We hope the government will heed our call. Once again, I thank all those who gave a helping hand and I hope the next step will be to take concrete action, pass legislation and set money aside to help those in need.

Mr. David Price (Compton—Stanstead, PC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for sharing his speaking time with me.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the people of my riding, Compton-Stanstead, the people who gave their knowledge, their equipment and their time to help their neighbours during the crisis.

The riding of Compton-Stanstead came out a little better than other ridings in the Eastern Townships. I want to tell this House about the people from our area who got together and formed groups to load trailers with wood and drive to the stricken areas.

The municipality of Compton alone took in 60 people and fed and housed them for almost three weeks. And I want to take a moment to talk about the La Branche family from Saint-Isidore. They wanted to help. So what did they do? They gathered 25 people and went to cut and split wood. They had with five pick-up trucks and two logging trucks. In one day they went through 10 of those files that are used to sharpen chainsaw chains and, in fact, they went through 15 chainsaw chains. In one day.

They got back home at 9.30 at night, rested for a little while, and when I called looking for some volunteers, Marc-André La Branche and his wife got in their logging truck and drove 350 km. They arrived in Saint-Hyacinthe at 3.30 in the morning to unload five truckloads of wood that had just arrived from the riding of my friend and colleague from Tobique-Mactaquac, in New Brunswick.

This is a story about people wanting to help people, not asking for anything in return, but just helping their neighbours.

In fact, the help that came from Tobique-Mactaquac included donated wood and truckers who donated their time. The gas too was donated. So Canadians from areas that were not as badly hit came to help other Canadians.

I want to thank everybody who helped with these donations and donations of food, wood and generators and opened their homes to the victims.

I want to thank the Canadian forces personnel who gave people a sense of security—that they were going to make it through.

I also want to thank the municipalities in the region who sent their staff to help. The municipality of Coaticook had a hydro crew there every day all through the crisis.

There was major damage to the riding's sugar bushes. In fact, one of the most terrible things, one of the saddest things to see in

the aftermath of the ice storm was the tops of the maple trees broken off. When spring comes and the thaw starts, those trees that are alive today will bleed to death.

I travelled all through my riding and, like everyone who saw the ice storm first hand, witnessed some savagely beautiful sights. It was beautiful and yet unbearable.

• (2215)

[English]

The damage is so extensive that many areas have not made an accurate evaluation. All the areas that have been hit and the victims, whether they are individuals, groups, organizations or businesses, are still figuring out what they are going to do.

Some of them do not have power yet and still need help. The government has taken measures to react quickly and respond to the biggest and most obvious needs. For some, it is very hard to find closure. The crisis is not over.

Existing programs are not enough to solve the problems. What we need is a series of measures supported by the province and by Canada to help all those who find themselves in a difficult situation.

Municipalities should, for example, have a plan in place for emergency situations and the province has a role to play ensuring that municipalities are ready in time of need. When I say a plan, I mean a realistic plan that takes people into account because a crisis like the one we went through in Quebec is not about governments, federal, provincial or municipal. It is not about money or insurance. For some the end of the day has not yet come and the lights are still not on, but at the end of the day, the crisis like the one we went through is about people. People count and we owe it to people of our ridings to do what we can to see that everyone is better prepared.

How can we do this? First, like I mentioned, there needs to be a physical plan. Second, and this takes foresight, this government must establish an emergency contingency fund. This fund must be established and allowed to grow.

If we think Canada will not see any more natural disasters we would be irresponsible. For that reason we must establish an emergency fund that can be accessed in times of crisis.

Third, there must be a clear appeal process that is outlined and in writing. There are thousands of victims of this ice storm who still do not know how they will come out of it and how it will affect them. They are waiting on governments to let them know how they will fare. That is unacceptable.

Ice Storm 1998

There should be some mechanism somewhere that tells people exactly what they can expect to see in the way of aid or compensation. It must be clear and it must be consistent.

Before I close I want to say another word about the Canadian forces who did such an incredible job during the ice storm and who invariably come to the aid of the government in times of need. I want to thank the men and women who instilled confidence in the communities just by being there.

Is it not a shame that this government does not give the Canadian forces the same confidence and support that the Canadian forces give their government? It is a shame that since 1994 Canadian forces have been cut by 23%.

This government does not properly equip our forces. This was demonstrated most clearly when we had to ask the United States to lend Canada cots and generators. How long can the Canadian forces be expected to perform their jobs so admirably when the government does not treat them with the respect they deserve?

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all those who helped out.

[English]

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Charleswood—Assiniboine.

I am very pleased to join my colleagues this evening in this special debate arising from the ice storm and how Canadian it really is to have a special debate based on the weather.

Noted journalist Robert MacNeil of the famous *MacNeil-Lehrer Report* wrote in a short article on his native country: "Unconsciously Canadians feel that any people can live in a land where the climate is gentle. It takes a special people to prosper where nature makes it so hard".

This January Canadians were reminded of the challenges that we face as a nation in mastering living in this harsh environment. In this time of need for a country and for its people, Canadians have responded with courage, generosity and determination.

At the peak of the blackout, more than 2 million users in Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada were without power. Property damages resulting from the storm have been estimated to be in the range of \$500 to \$700 million and the economic costs of lost production run as high in estimates as \$5 billion.

Economic impacts are only part of the story. It is harder to measure the discomfort, stress and pain of the tens of thousands of people who were forced to abandon their homes and businesses for days and weeks.

• (2220)

I want to talk briefly about the people in my riding and how they were challenged by the storm.

The community of Ottawa South was hit by the storm in much the same way as were others in cities across eastern Ontario, Quebec and parts of Atlantic Canada. Many experienced the loss of power. Many spent nights sleeping in front of fireplaces to keep warm or sought refuge in shelters. Many lost branches and trees to the thick, heavy ice.

In my riding the area of Alta Vista was particularly hit hard, with many trees in the neighbourhood falling victim to the storm.

Of course, we consider ourselves to be lucky, especially in comparison to those in rural communities who have suffered extensive damage to their homes and properties. Our hearts and thoughts continue to be with them as they start the process of attempting to salvage their livelihoods. I encourage everyone to continue to do their part to support our rural neighbours.

I had my own firsthand experience seeing the level of damage in the rural areas across eastern Ontario in a Department of National Defence helicopter with my colleague, the Minister of National Defence. I visited several rural and urban communities to survey the devastation in my region.

During the fly-over in eastern Ontario I was struck, in particular, by the sight of broken telephone poles, trees bent to the ground, branches strewn across the snow.

[Translation]

We went to several towns and cities, including Metcalfe, Brockville, Kingston and Perth. In every community, we were welcomed by the local MP, the mayor and the city councillors, and everywhere we went, representatives of the Department of National Defence briefed us on the situation in the area.

In Metcalfe, I met an employee of the National Research Council, which comes under my department. He was working as a volunteer, cutting firewood alongside members of the Canadian forces. In Kingston, where the storm really wreaked havoc, the city hall had been turned into a shelter and the council room into a communications centre.

During our helicopter tour, we saw one of the most upsetting scenes at dusk, where only a few lights glimmered here and there in the dark, while whole communities were getting ready to spend another night without any heat.

[English]

Anyone who passed over or through eastern Ontario or Quebec could see the enormity of the problem we were facing, but I was heartened during my trip by the evidence of the different levels of government working together to solve problems. I want to thank, in particular, Bob Chiarelli, the regional chair of the municipality

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of Ottawa-Carleton, for his quick action and decisiveness in acting on this issue.

At the regional headquarters of the Red Cross I observed the volunteers and staff undertaking a number of different tasks. There was a Radio Net centred there which allowed the Red Cross to keep in touch with people working in the field throughout eastern Ontario. The headquarters was also acting as an inquiry centre, taking requests for firewood, for food and for generators.

During the first four days of the ice storm they distributed over 1,500 blankets and fed 3,600 people each of those four days.

The Red Cross also acted as a match-making service of sorts, linking people who needed things to people who were able to donate them. They made over 500 of these matches. They found people willing to provide shelter for others, cook meals for people, and even those who were willing to provide milking cows and hay for horses, or take strangers into their homes.

People in this community have also helped financially. The Red Cross has raised locally in Ottawa around \$500,000 from third party contributions. Money was raised separately from a 1-800 line. Money was raised by people taking contributions at Senators games, at local malls and at community centres.

I want to thank and acknowledge the volunteers and the staff for their hard work during this period of crisis.

During my visit to the Red Cross headquarters I was struck by the number of people who were volunteering their time to help their fellow citizens.

The Red Cross registered 1,200 people to volunteer to help in just the first two days of the storm. I am happy to say that my own teenagers and their friends joined in this effort.

- (2225)

I would also like to mention the individuals, businesses and other organizations in our community and across Canada who contributed to the relief effort. From individual acts of kindness to neighbours, to cash or in kind donations they have all been instrumental to the effort that has gone into helping Canadians through this crisis.

I also want to mention the few, and it is a very small number, who used the crisis to take advantage of others. Through Industry Canada's competition bureau consumers who believe they have been victims of price gouging have been calling and reporting their experiences. We will provide consumer organizations with the intelligence gleaned from this phone line so that consumers can be better informed of who to look to for support and who to avoid giving their patronage to.

I am proud to say that my industry portfolio worked on many fronts to help Canadians meet this challenge. Throughout the state of emergency Industry Canada, along with other federal departments, provincial authorities and the telecommunications industry, contributed to the support of telecommunications operations and to maintaining the telecommunications infrastructure. This effort included co-ordinating the deployment of generating sets, including four giant generators transported from Vancouver to Montreal, enhancing the reliability of vital cellular sites and supplying fuel for telecommunication systems.

In addition to authorizing the use of microwave links by Hydro-Quebec, Industry Canada authorized more than 50 radio channels for use by DND, the Sûreté du Québec and the Montreal urban community police.

Industry Canada worked with utilities and Revenue Canada to expedite the passage through Canadian customs of essential equipment imported from the United States, for example telephone poles coming in from Alabama. Industry sector branches monitored the storm's impacts on their industry clients on a daily basis and provided support by tracking sources of essential equipment.

[Translation]

In Saint-Hubert, the head office of the Canadian Space Agency became an emergency shelter where people could spend the night, get a warm meal and take a shower. All in all, the agency welcomed about 4,500 people, 350 of whom slept there and more than 4,000 people showed up to warm up, take a shower or get a warm meal.

The Canada-Ontario Business Service Centre and its Quebec counterpart called Info-entrepreneurs used their 1-800 numbers to provide businesses with information about the help available to them.

Today, my colleague, the Secretary of State for the Federal Office of Regional Development-Quebec, or FORD-Q, announced a series of measures to help things get back to normal in the areas devastated by the ice storm. Businesses who deal with FORD-Q will be able to postpone the reimbursement of the contributions they received as part of the department's programs.

[English]

The Business Development Bank of Canada announced flexible repayment arrangements for small business clients in eastern Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces who experienced severe ice storm damage.

Four weeks later we continue to see the images on the news of significant challenges, in particular in Quebec on the south shore where there remains much to be done and there are still many people without electricity.

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The examples that I have given today and those that I have heard from members who preceded me in this debate demonstrate a very positive story, a story of Canadians from coast to coast rallying to help their neighbours in a time of dire need. It is a story of individuals, businesses, communities and governments pitching in to help Canadians through a very difficult time.

Modern technology has brought many benefits to humanity. It has made life in this harsh northern climate comfortable if not easy. But the events of the past month have afforded us a salutary reminder of the power of nature and our vulnerability in relying on technology for our most basic needs.

I am happy to add that the difficulties we have endured together have also reminded us that we are members of a large and generous family. Like any family, we have our share of differences, squabbles and jealousies, but when times are difficult it is good to be part of a big family whose members are willing to come to one another's aid.

• (2230)

Mr. John Harvard (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join this debate on the federal role in helping people who were hit hard by the recent ice storm. I am proud that the federal government was quick off the mark in getting the ball rolling and working with the provinces and Canadians in the affected areas.

Once again the people of Canada have rallied around and helped their neighbours. We have seen this spirit three times in recent years; first with the flooding in the Saguenay region of Quebec, then last spring with the Red River flood in my home province, and now this ice storm.

Manitobans were extremely grateful with the help they received last year and I am proud of the way they have responded to this crisis. For example, Manitoba Telecom Services sent people and equipment to help restore telephone lines. Manitoba Red Cross helped gather supplies and money for storm victims. The Mennonite Central Committee and the *Winnipeg Free Press* started collections for money, blankets and clothing. Banks and credit unions were also at the frontlines of assistance.

I could go on, but to be brief, I would like to thank Manitobans, indeed all western Canadians for their support to the communities hurting as a result of the ice storm.

The federal government also reacted quickly. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada was one of the departments whose proactive efforts played a key role. The department started by taking steps to help prevent further damage and to help those in crisis. It followed up by working with provinces, industry organizations, banks and others involved in the crisis.

The most immediate concern in the early hours and days of the storm was getting power to farms, dairy, hog and poultry. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada staff worked closely with the generator committee established by Emergency Preparedness Canada to track down and assure the distribution of generators in both Ontario and Quebec.

As well, the department provided and moved generators from its research centres in St-Hyacinthe, Ottawa and southern Ontario.

The second biggest concern was getting the dairy processing capacity back on line. The department worked with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Canadian Dairy Commission and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to get temporary authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to export unpasteurized milk to the U.S. for processing and return it to Canada.

In all, 1.35 million hectolitres of milk were moved to Michigan and some milk was also moved out of Quebec to New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Unfortunately about 13.5 million hectolitres of milk had to be dumped because the trucks could not get to the farms to pick it up, or if they could, there was no power to run the pumps.

Thankfully these efforts and many others are now largely complete with the return to more normal operations throughout the regions affected by the storm. However, we cannot forget that there are still thousands of people without power.

These storms affected a massive area with a huge concentration of food production. At the height of the crisis, one-third of Canada's milk supply was affected. In Quebec alone, 50% of milk, 40% of hogs and 60% of the maple industry were affected. Based on the 1996 census of agriculture, there were 10,471 farms in the area of eastern Ontario affected by the ice storm.

To date, much of the concern is focused on damage experienced by dairy and maple producers. Approximately 25% of all farms in this area raise dairy cows and 5% have taps on maple trees. Other major commodities produced in the region include beef and poultry with 44% of farms reporting beef cattle and 11% reporting hens and chickens.

One of the more pressing concerns is getting the maple sugar industry up and running again. We have only four to six weeks before the sap begins to run in March in eastern Ontario and Quebec. Some of the affected trees will produce sap this year and then die. Some have been destroyed already and some will only recover over time.

• (2235)

In the interim the Minister of Human Resources Development recently announced measures to help the maple sugar industry.

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Producers have already begun to sign up and are being encouraged to apply to their local HRDC offices.

Federal emergency assistance to hire labour for clean up is available now under existing programs, including up to \$40 million under the Employment Insurance Act for targeted wage subsidies and job creation partnerships and up to \$5 million under youth initiatives.

I referred earlier to the disaster financial assistance arrangements. It is important to understand that under DFAA it is the provincial and territorial governments that must first develop and implement disaster relief measures. They must indicate what they consider to be eligible and make the compensation payments to individuals and communities.

The minister issued a news release on January 21 that outlined some of the damages that could be claimed under the DFAA guidelines if provinces choose to cover them. The following would be eligible for cost sharing with the provinces if the provinces cover these costs: asset losses such as livestock; costs incurred by farmers who had to dump their milk during the crisis; reimbursement of the value of milk; costs of renting generators and other storm related costs such as diesel fuel, repairing assets damaged by the ice storm like barns or lost inventories because of power outages, animals that died as a result of the storm; and costs associated with moving agricultural products out of affected areas for urgent processing.

All those affected in rural communities are eligible for compensation under provincial programs. Again it is up to the provinces to decide what is covered and to do the actual compensation. We will share the cost. Federal departments quickly initiated the ongoing discussions with the provinces.

From the beginning Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has been in constant contact with key farm organizations and remains in contact with the Quebec and Ontario ministries. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has been in touch with his provincial counterparts, ministers Julien and Villeneuve. I assure the House that relationships with and among the provinces are very positive. Regular contact is being maintained at the officials level with Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

It is this government's objective to ensure interprovincial equity by gathering information on what each province is planning to cover. The provinces decide on the level and type of assistance to communities and individuals. Officials from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada have met and remain in contact with the provincial ministries of agriculture in the affected provinces. They are providing assistance to the provinces regarding DFAA and possible subsidiary agreements. The federal government continues to work

with the provinces to identify gaps in the assistance provided by DFAA to small businesses impacted by the ice storm.

Quebec has experience with DFAA and the negotiation of subsidiary agreements as a result of the Saguenay flood in 1996. Ontario is inviting Quebec to meet and to share this knowledge and experience regarding the DFAA and subsidiary agreements. The federal government encourages the provinces to work together.

The full nature of the damage by the storm has still to be tallied. It will take some time to do so but the federal government will continue to work closely with the provinces and farm organizations much as Canadians from across this country did to help those affected by the storm.

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time, as will all other members of the official opposition from here on in.

I am pleased to continue the debate regarding the ice storm that severely damaged eastern Canada including eastern Ontario, Quebec and so on. It has been a tragedy of monumental proportions. It is only appropriate that we in the House of Commons take time to recognize the difficulties and the duress that many people in this part of the country have been operating under. At the same time we recognize how the country and the nation as a whole rose to the occasion to deal with the issue, and to deal with it in a wonderful Canadian way so that we could all stand up afterward and be proud of the way we tackled this natural disaster that befell this part of the country.

• (2240)

As someone who represents a riding in Alberta, St. Albert, it was hard to appreciate the difficulties that were building here as the rain and ice continued to build up and the damage continued to get worse and worse day by day.

I happened to be visiting Colonel Selby at the Edmonton garrison on the day they received the order to move the troops. At that time I started to appreciate the magnitude of the disaster which had developed over a number of days in this part of the country. It made me proud that the soldiers who reside in and around Edmonton, many of whom reside in the city of St. Albert, were moving out at a moment's notice to go to Quebec, Ontario and other eastern provinces to lend their assistance, talent, expertise and hard work to ensure that Canadians would suffer as little as possible during this tragedy.

I would like to pay tribute to all the military personnel who participated, especially those from St. Albert. They loaded all kinds of equipment on trains and aircraft and willingly came here at a moment's notice.

I remember watching on television how some members of the military were helping hydro workers put back the power lines.

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They said they did not have the expertise to go up the poles to connect the wires but they could do whatever was required on the ground to ensure that every available technician and qualified personnel could get up the poles to restore the power.

It was wonderful to see Canadians from all across the country, the military from western Canada, the lines men, Quebec Hydro and Ontario Hydro, working together to do their best. They worked around the clock in many cases. They worked until they were exhausted to ensure their customers were well served and to ensure that they were doing their best to bring heat, light and power back to Canadians across a very large area.

We saw how difficult it was for the old people, and the young too but especially the old, to leave their homes, but they had no choice. It was cold and they were freezing. It must have been very difficult for them to go into the shelters. My heart goes out to them in their time of difficulty and for the trauma they went through. We see it on television, people around the world having to go into shelters because of natural disasters and civil disorder, but we do not see it often in Canada. My heart goes out to them, especially the old folk. They were trying to do the best they could in these shelters, while at the same time recognizing that many, many people gave of themselves. They set their normal work aside, they set their normal lives aside to pitch in.

My staff in Ottawa phoned me to say the office on Parliament Hill was closing down because of the ice storm. I said, "Good, get out there and do some good. Help your neighbours. Do what you can". When I give speeches back in the riding I tell people it does not matter what you do for your community as long as you do something. I can assure you that there was no end of things that people could do during the ice storm here in Ontario and in Quebec to alleviate the problems they and their neighbours had.

I would also like to recognize the farmers. They had a very difficult time. They had milk cows that needed to be milked. As someone who grew up on a farm many years ago, I remember how it is to milk a cow by hand but that is not the way it is done today. We need electricity to keep the machines running. The poor cows suffered and the milk industry suffered and the farmers suffered. They suffered not only the physical hardships but they suffered the economic hardships too.

I am glad to hear the Minister of Industry talk about the programs that are being made available to them, to other people and to other industries that will allow them to get their lives back in order.

• (2245)

The worst weather can bring out the best in people. I think I mentioned earlier that we heard stories of how communities helped communities and how neighbours helped neighbours. It was just

wonderful to see Canadians pulling together as a nation and as a community. Would it not be wonderful if we could have that attitude prevail over all times so that we do not fight among ourselves, we do not squabble among ourselves? We should work as a community and as a neighbourhood.

Far too often we act as little islands unto ourselves. We go to work and we go home. We ignore our neighbours. We do not even know our neighbours. But when disaster strikes it brings out the best in people and they pull together.

Those people across the country who were not affected gave of themselves. They gave materials and money. They made donations to try to make the problems less difficult for those in the storm areas. I would also like to pay tribute to those people who gave generators, money and clothing. That was important. We all pulled together.

I was talking to the hon. member for St. Catharines today. He told me that when the ice storm hit this part of the country and farther east generators were sent from St. Catharines. Then it was hit by the ice storm and had to import generators from the United States. Many people pulled together to help each other.

It will take a long time for some people to recover. We have heard that the maple industry has been very hard hit because the trees have been destroyed.

I arrived here for the reopening of Parliament a few days ago and I could not believe the devastation in and around Ottawa as I was coming in from the airport. Trees were broken. Some of the younger trees were bent over. The tops of them were on the ground. Perhaps they will never recover. Broken trees were everywhere. I was quite startled at seeing the extent of the damage.

I cannot imagine how difficult it must have been for the people to live through the tragedy of the ice storm of 1998.

As we put our lives back together, as the communities heal themselves and as the trees grow back, the ice storm of 1998 will be something that people will speak about for generations to come. The young people of today will be able to tell their grandchildren how they participated. As time goes by the difficult memories will erode and the memories of how people came together will come to the fore. They will look back at the ice storm of 1998 and say "I was there. I worked hard. We as Canadians pulled together and did a wonderful job for the country."

My heart goes out to those who suffered. I also pay tribute to all Canadians who participated in helping this country survive the ice storm. It was a wonderful day for those who participated. I believe that Canadians will move forward from here, having learned a bit about themselves, and that will be for the better.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of pleasure that I join the debate tonight.

The winter of 1997-98 is not one we will easily forget. Mother nature has reminded us of her tremendous power and of the importance of men and women reaching out to each other on an individual, community and national basis as we struggle to rectify what nature has done to us.

The winter of 1997-98 has shown in its wrath extreme conditions, from the out of control prairie fires in Alberta to the severe ice storms in Ontario, Quebec and the maritimes. It is somewhat of a story of fire and ice.

To what do we owe these natural disasters? Some say it is El Nino. Some say it is man made, something we are doing to our ecology, that the equilibrium is out of whack. Whatever it is, one thing we must all agree on is that we showed once again what Canadians can do together in the face of diversity.

We witnessed courageous acts in the last couple of years during the floods in Manitoba and Quebec. People were helping people with time, food, shelter, medical help, supplies, money, the list goes on and on.

• (2250)

When the ice storms of 1998 hit, the courage and determination of our fellow Canadians shone brightly against the vast blackness in powerless towns and cities. The ice storms of 1998 reminded all Canadians of how dependent we have become on the comforts of modern day living but, more important, of how much we have come to depend on each other.

I would like to talk a bit about what happened in southern Alberta in my neighbouring constituency of Macleod. A fire came raging out of the foothills, swept out across the prairies and devastated over 100 square kilometres of ranch land. It took out homes and buildings, it destroyed livestock and wildlife, it destroyed the feed supplies of all the ranchers in the area for the entire winter and for the years to come. It destroyed miles and miles of fence. It did this with a fury that few people have ever remembered. It burned to a black ash an area that was once green and vital. There were no feed supplies. There were no homes for some. Buildings were gone. There was livestock lost. Wildlife was gone. There was a bleak and disturbing sight left.

The next day as I toured the area the dust had already started to blow off this fragile environment. The wind continued to blow, the dust blew and it looked very much like the 1930s. One day the air was black, the next day it was brown. This reminds us how fragile this world is.

After the shock had worn off and the people had started to pull together, it was amazing to look back and see what had happened, all the municipalities that had pulled together, the neighbours who had come in to fight the fires. Strangers came from miles to help. That continued from the day of the fire on and on. I am sure many of these stories have been repeated in this area during the ice storms of this winter.

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There are pictures of a gymnasium in Grantham full of clothes and food and supplies donated from all over the country. People like Joey Hurlburt from Fort Macleod organized relief measures. The community of Claresholm raised over \$100,000 in one day by sponsoring a dance and an auction in a community event. I know many of these stories will be repeated again and again in this part of the country when the ice storm of 1998 is remembered.

Just this week we toured an area of some sugar bush out at McDonalds Corners. It was shocking to see the devastation of the maple trees and the rest of the forest and the economic impact this is going to have on the woodlot operators, the farmers in the area and certainly the maple syrup industry.

I would like to thank the room full of Wheelers for hosting us, the room full of tired people who have been working steady during the storm and since to try to replace their lives and their way of life.

In Canada we are kind of spoiled by the bountiful fruits of our land. In the maple syrup industry every year there is a harvest which seems to just flow and is always there. But unlike other crops, it is going to take many years to rejuvenate, as it probably will for the scarred landscape in southern Alberta. Given some time and some loving care, this can be replaced.

I have been encouraged by the support I saw when we were out at McDonalds Corners and I have been encouraged by the support that has been shown in southern Alberta, private industry, governments of all levels, municipal, provincial, federal, coming together to help.

The minister of agriculture told a rather stirring story earlier when he saw 100 trucks lined up after the ice storm to help repair the damage here, and they were all from across the line in America. This truly was an international effort to help out what has happened here. To those people who continue to suffer our thoughts and our prayers certainly go out to them.

The immediate life threatening crisis is over and one of my colleagues compared it to a funeral in a family where everybody comes around to be with you at the time of crisis. A few days later you are left alone to deal with your own thoughts and your own problems.

• (2255)

This is one thing that we have to guard against, that we do not forget that this has happened. We have to continue to help these people with the right amount of supply and effort going to them to help restore their lives and to help them cope with this terrible situation.

At this time I would like to extend heartfelt praise to our military, to the troops who worked so hard and so unselfishly to help out the people. The hydro workers worked day and night, seven days a week until they just dropped in their tracks, along with the people who came from across the border. It was an

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incredible sight to witness. It certainly shows what people can do when they get together and put forth effort.

Once the extent of the damage was realized, action was taken and the donations started pouring in. There were emergency shelters, food, donations of time and effort. There were people delivering generators.

In our area of southern Alberta I know people would be leaving the next day after the fire to go out to try to take care of their livestock and to assess the damage. They would come home and there would be a truckload of feed there for the livestock. They never knew where it came from. It was not asked. No one wanted to be recognized.

These are the kinds of stories that Canadians are famous for. Canadians can support one another in times of need and never ask for anything in return.

It is with deep empathy that I say to Ontarians, Quebeckers, maritimers and those in southern Alberta that throughout their ordeals we in western Canada watched the dread of the storm and of the fire as they ran their course. As always, our prayers and our thoughts were with them.

Our prayers are with the families as they try to cope with lost loved ones. We can heal the wounds of broken power poles and destroyed homes and grow new trees but we cannot replace the people we love who were lost. Our hearts go out to them.

It is moments like these when the generosity and kindness of Canadians helping Canadians from coast to coast to coast knows no bounds that leave me feeling very proud to live in this great nation and very proud to be a Canadian.

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing that we have a debate about the ice storm tonight when in fact my view is that this debate should be about electricity.

If we did not lose electricity in eastern Canada perhaps we would not be having this debate at all. The loss of electricity has caused most of the problems we are faced with.

It is incredible that electricity can be the cause of so much happiness in our society. It helps us to refrigerate food in the summertime. In the winter we cook with it. We use it in order to shave, drive cars, trains and so on, but it can be the cause of much misery once electricity is not around. It is an extremely addictive source of energy, happiness but at the same time a source of sadness.

I grew up in a home where we did not have electricity. We did not have fridges. We did not have stoves. We did not have televisions and we did not have electric shavers or cars. We managed.

That was about 35 or 40 years ago. When this ice storm hit, the first thing that came to mind was what happened 35 years ago. It hit me. I said, my God, no way in this day and age would I be able to live like I was living 35 years ago.

I woke up and felt that something really needed to be done. I do not want to congratulate the government. I do not want to congratulate any department of federal, provincial or municipal government because frankly we are each doing our job. We are doing what is expected of us as elected officials, as levels of government, departments, ministries and municipalities.

• (2300)

I congratulate ordinary people who came together to do extraordinary things. On the very same day that the ice storm hit and the electricity disappeared, a radio announcer indicated that my office was receiving blankets to assist one of the outlying areas. Within minutes of the announcement a car pulled up in front of my office and a lady walked in with a blanket she had in her trunk. She wanted to do something.

This story repeated itself over and over. In a matter of three and a half days or so we had in excess of 23 trucks, vans and car loads of contributions from people throughout the community who wanted to help those in need. They filled my small office on Booth Street. In excess of 250 volunteers phoned my office from eight o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock at night to give their names. They wanted to assist.

Those are the people I want to thank. They made a difference in our community, in our regions and in our country. This is what I call a true Canadian. The devastation ranged in the hundreds of millions of dollars. I said to myself that it would take months and months before all the poles would be repaired and electricity restored.

I have seen devastation in other countries. I know the time and effort it takes to reconstruct damage done by man or by nature. I was extremely proud of the speed and the way in which individuals in different departments and at different levels of government came together to respond to the needs of the people and to reconnect the electricity in our region and in other regions across the country. This made me proud of the country and the people who live here.

Rather than talking about the ice storms and what nature has done we should be celebrating the fact that in times of crisis Canadians have passed the test and communities have come together to make it happen.

I want to thank some individuals such as the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. He did an exemplary job in pulling his people together. He tried to do everything he could, day in and day out, to make it easier for the people of his riding.

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In my constituency of Ottawa Centre there were problems. Our electricity was restored in a few days. My heart went out to the people living in the outskirts. Some of them are still suffering the consequences of the ice storm and lack of electricity.

In closing, I thank my staff, Liz Johnston, Tim Sen, Paula Franco, Alison Deakin and Shari Duffin. They are ordinary people who have done extraordinary things during a time of crisis in my constituency. They manned the office seven days a week to assist people in my constituency, in the city and in the outskirts of our region. I thank them publicly.

• (2305)

I also thank every person who made a difference, in particular Mr. Bob Chiarelli and his staff, the people at the region, the municipalities, the Ottawa police, other police forces, hydro workers and our neighbours to the south, the Americans. At the time when they had a crisis in New York State it was moving to see them coming here to give a hand to people in eastern Canada, Quebec and eastern Ontario. I thank them publicly for their assistance as a neighbour in time of crisis.

I am proud to be a Canadian and I am proud to live in and to represent such a wonderful community.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, true, we in northern Quebec, in Abitibi, were not affected by the ice storm, but I must tell you that when I got back to my Val-d'Or residence last Saturday, January 10, around 11 p.m., after an evening that my wife and I spent with the people of Barraute and Senneterre, I noted several phone calls on the device next to my telephone.

In fact, I took note of all the calls I received Saturday night, and on Sunday morning, January 11, around 8:30 a.m., I was back at my rigging office in Val-d'Or. I took the time to immediately call back some numbers and after dialling the first one, that is, 824-3326, I recognized the voice of somebody I know very well, that is, Réginald Béland, from Val-Senneville, who is a fabulous volunteer of the Val-d'Or area and who told me of his concern to help the ice storm victims.

Together with him and on his advice, I immediately took action, Sunday morning, around 9 a.m., I called Jean-Marc Lavoie, of Domtar Corporation, at his Val d'Or residence. Further to our discussions and at my request, Mr. Lavoie called me back to confirm that Domtar in Val-d'Or was giving the people of the south 8 to 10 vans filled with 2 by 4s, that is, dry wood for the people of the south—some kind of firewood. These vans were 46 feet long.

So, on Sunday morning, thanks to quick decision making by Domtar executives in Val-d'Or, we were ready to help the people affected by the storm.

It is true that we live in the North and that we were spared, but we made it a priority to ensure the security and protection of the people in southern Quebec. As we know, in an emergency situation, municipal governments are on the front lines and we immediately noticed the work done by the Vallée-de-l'Or and Abitibi RCMs.

Many Abitibians were part of the solidarity movement. They may live far from Montreal and the St. Lawrence River, but they nonetheless felt affected by the disaster that hit further south. In no time, people from the Abitibi came out in droves to help their fellow citizens.

Several municipalities and organizations released their employees and sent volunteers to help collect and ship non-perishable food, firewood, generators and other essential items. Besides municipalities and community organizations, several companies from Abitibi also did their part by providing services, sharing their expertise, transporting goods, making donations, etc.

The Val-d'Or ham radio club launched its Operation Chaleur to collect funds in collaboration with area firefighters. Hydro-Québec sent 57 people, or almost all its linemen from Abitibi and James Bay, to areas without power.

Techno Lignes Abitibi of Sullivan sent eight work crews in the Laurentian region to assist Hydro-Québec. Eighteen workers from Barraute, Amos and Val-d'Or worked on the construction and maintenance of power and telephone lines.

• (2310)

The people of the federal riding of Abitibi answered massively to the ice storm operation launched throughout Quebec by the government of Quebec and Premier Lucien Bouchard. There is one fact that must not be kept unknown in Quebec: it is the agreement passed with the management of various companies.

I wish to mention in particular the general manager of Képa Transport, Mr. Gilles Lapointe. It must be mentioned that, in cooperation with the Chisasibi Crees, this company owned by the James Bay Crees sent a 46-foot trailer loaded with 45 cords of firewood to the Saint-Hyacinthe area, over 4,000 kilometres there and back—2,000 kilometres each way—, free of charge, just to help the people.

I would like to thank the James Bay Crees as well as the Chisasibi, Mistissini, Waswanipi and Oujé-Bougoumou Crees for the help they gave the people in the south.

As for the sponsoring by the Vallée-de-l'Or regional municipality, the firewood blitz started immediately on January 12. Loading points were set up in Val-d'Or, Senneterre, Malartic, Rivière-Héva, Dubuisson, Vassan and Val-Senneville, thanks to the excellent co-operation of Louis Bourget, director general of the Vallée-de-l'Or RCM, and Yvon Frenette, member of the Val-d'Or city

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council. We can report tonight on the results of Operation Ice Storm in Abitibi.

The Val-d'Or area of the Vallée-de-l'Or RCM sent more than 80 volunteers, 39 46-foot trailers full of firewood, one ten-wheeler and one other truck. Domtar, which had told me on Sunday morning that it would provide eight to ten trailers, ended up providing 19 46-foot trailers to help people in the southern part of the province. It was all good, dry firewood. From the Senneterre area, 12 trailers; from another area of the region, eight trailers; and from Val-Senneville, one trailer.

According to the reports from the municipalities served by the RCM and from Domtar, that firewood was delivered to Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Venise-en-Québec, Hudson, Rougemont, Granby, Vaudreuil, Dorion, Saint-Polycarpe, Carignan, Beloeil, Chambly, Mont-Saint-Grégoire, Farnham, Saint-Hyacinthe, Saint-Athanase and Iberville.

We can also mention that, throughout Operation Ice Storm, we had extraordinary companies who gave volunteers free meals all week long, namely Rôtisserie Saint-Hubert, Val-d'Or Pizzeria, Métro Supermarché Pelletier Inc., Cafétéria chez Vic, Tim Horton, PizzaBella and Brasserie Le Pub.

We also received donations from everywhere. The volunteer work that was done and the help that was provided are also worth mentioning. A trailer cannot go anywhere without a tractor. The following companies provided trailers and a driver, free of charge, to deliver firewood to the areas affected by the storm further south. There was Cabano Kingsway, Papineau Transport, Kepa Transport, Transport Maybois, Transport du Nord-Ouest, Transport Bergeron, and R.S. Métal. Tractors were provided by the following companies: Entreprises René Paré et fils, Excavation Émilien Fournier, Transport René Hardy de La Morandière, Construction Val-d'Or, and Alain Guillemette.

Chapter 2218 of the Knights of Columbus from Amos, a town in the Abitibi regional county municipality, also participated in Operation Ice Storm. They sent some 900 cords of firewood to the southern part of the province. Four generators were provided. Donations totalling \$20,850 were made. A whole trailer and 169 boxes of non-perishable food were sent. That is 65,000 pounds or 33 tons of food.

I also wish to thank the media, both print and electronic, for their unconditional support. Without them, the relief effort resulting from all this publicity would not have been possible.

Citizens, along with several organizations and businesses from the Abitibi regional county municipality, were actively involved and many donations were made.

• (2315)

It is an honour for me to thank the people of Abitibi, those from the municipalities, the health sector, the regional county municipalities, the Crees of James Bay, Air Creebec, Transport Canada, who throughout the ice storm and its terrible aftermath, worked relentlessly to help with wood, lodgings, donations, food and equipment.

A big thank you to all the volunteers, transport companies, Hydro-Quebec and Télébec workers, and all those who unselfishly gave their time and efforts. I thank the people of Abitibi whose generosity reminds us of the strength and beauty of the solidarity of Canadians in Quebec.

The people of Abitibi are sending a message to their neighbours to the south. They want to tell them: "Congratulations for your courage, we are thinking of you, all our best".

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing the time allotted to me with my colleague, the hon. member for Châteauguay.

Quebec is going through the most serious socio-economic disaster of the century. The media provided steady coverage during the worst part of the crisis to show the solidarity displayed for Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick, the three provinces that were the hardest hit by the storm.

At this time, I would like to thank the major leaders who distinguished themselves during this crisis. First and foremost, Premier Bouchard of Quebec, who has shown outstanding leadership in co-ordinating all emergency and solidarity operations.

I also thank also Hydro-Québec chairman André Caillé, who, with his team, provided Quebecers with hourly updates on the situation, while looking after those affected by the storm and immediately taking the necessary steps to have the Quebec hydro-electric power system repaired and rebuilt.

I thank the mayors, who, while unprepared, brilliantly rose to the challenge, those in charge of the Quebec emergency preparedness organization and the many public health workers.

I also want to mention the massive involvement of police forces—the Sûreté du Québec, the RCMP, municipal police and Canadian Armed Forces—in providing assistance and, more importantly, a sense of security to the victims.

I would like to mention the immediate response of employees of American hydroelectric companies, who did not hesitate to come and help out Hydro-Québec linemen. They were impressed by the warm welcome they received from storm victims, and especially by their great understanding in the face of the crisis.

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As well, I was deeply touched by the gestures of solidarity from Quebec, whether they took the form of collecting wood or food supplies or responding to the numerous requests from the Red Cross and emergency measures organizations.

I pay tribute here to the initiative taken by the people of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. The images transmitted on national television showed us the great generosity that characterizes this lovely region of Quebec.

I would now like to give you a few examples of solidarity from the riding of Lotbinière. More than 1,000 cords of wood were collected in one week. And here is an interesting anecdote. On Sunday, January 18, under the direction of mayor Jean-Guy Bergeron and police officer Gérald Laganière, dozens of volunteers turned out to collect 1,200 pounds of meat in 90 minutes at Laurier-Station. Now that is something.

Another example of generosity was the 86-year-old woman who handed over the contents of her pantry to a volunteer. She said: “Tomorrow I will be going shopping again, I have the means and, above all, I have electricity in my house”. These generous actions forged new ties of solidarity. A ceremony will be held next Friday evening to thank all these volunteers from the riding of Lotbinière for their exceptional contribution.

However, although the media have focused during the last few days on the number of subscribers to whom power has been restored, we must not forget the impacts and consequences of this ice storm that have not yet all been tallied up, although we know that they could reach hundreds of millions of dollars.

• (2320)

If we take a more rational look at such a crisis, we can divide it into three phases. The first one is the reaction phase, which is the one we have been witnessing since the crisis began, and which hon. members have been describing since the beginning of this special debate.

We have now reached phase two, which is a more in-depth assessment of the situation. The comments we hear and the news reported by the media are just the tip of the iceberg.

In this sad assessment, we must not forget the businesses which have been paralysed since the beginning of the crisis and which are on the verge of bankruptcy, as well as the thousands of workers who are not working.

The Montérégie and central Quebec regions are currently going through harrowing times. Hundreds of people wonder whether they will still have jobs tomorrow.

Moreover, we must not forget other businesses located outside the triangle of darkness. I am referring to those businesses and their employees who, following Hydro-Quebec's requests, closed their operations for one, two and even three weeks, thus incurring major losses.

The full evaluation of this catastrophe is not yet completed, but we can already start thinking about the third phase, which has to do with the measures necessary to provide greater assistance to storm victims.

Even if negotiations are already under way, storm victims are anxious. They are eager to find out about turnaround times and, more importantly, about the new moneys to be allocated to deal with the crisis.

The ice storm is not a regional or provincial problem, but a national one. It is, therefore, time to make major decisions of solidarity which must involve both the federal government and the governments of the three provinces affected by this national crisis.

Now we come to some solutions and suggestions for the federal government. First of all, we repeat our request to the Minister of Human Resources Development that he clarify, for once and for all, his position with respect to the waiting periods for employment insurance and the payments in advance which his department has promised to make. Even after his statements this week, even here in the House, the ice storm victims still have trouble understanding the minister's logic in the situation they are experiencing.

The maple syrup producer assistance program, which will hire the unemployed for pruning and replacement of the collecting tubes in the maple trees, is not sufficient. The minister would need to make this program more flexible so that more skilled and more efficient labourers could be hired so that better work would be done in storm-ravaged areas.

In the aftermath of this third natural disaster, the federal government now needs to give more serious attention to the greenhouse effect, which constitutes one of the determining factors behind this country's climate changes.

It is time for it to respond to the insistent calls for action from the environmental groups. Experts had warned us of the dangers of these climatic changes. We have borne the brunt of them, we have experienced them.

On behalf of the population, I am therefore demanding that the government be more stringent when this entire matter of greenhouse effects is debated. The federal government must take stronger action.

In closing, I again congratulate all those who took part, at home in Quebec, and throughout the country, in the finest undertaking of solidarity of the 20th century.

Mr. Maurice Godin (Châteauguay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this special debate on the ice storm for a number of reasons. First, I myself suffered the effects of the storm for seven days; five days in my office, and in the riding between 3 and 28 days. I will therefore speak about the riding of Châteauguay.

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I will give my impressions of the storm as it unfolded, the strengths I noted and the areas we will have to improve for the well-being of the population in the future.

There are, in my riding, three agglomerations that also form a triangle. To the west, Châteauguay, Léry, Mercier and Saint-Isidore; to the east, Saint-Constant, Sainte-Catherine and Delson; and to the south, Saint-Mathieu, Saint-Rémi, Saint-Édouard, Saint-Michel and Saint-Jacques-le-Mineur.

• (2325)

Although the Châteauguay-Ste-Catherine points of the triangle were without electricity, the major damage to Hydro-Québec's systems was in the municipalities of the St-Rémi point of the triangle, and it was these municipalities that were without electricity the longest. I therefore pay tribute to the mayors of the riding of Châteauguay, who worked tirelessly for their municipalities.

I sympathize with all these storm victims. I found seven days without electricity long and difficult. I therefore have a great deal of respect for those who lived with this problem for four weeks and longer.

On behalf of the constituents of Châteauguay, I would like to extend my sympathy to the families in Quebec and in other provinces who lost loved ones during this storm through illness or accident. I would also like to thank all the volunteers, often without power themselves, who directed operations and brought assistance to the most disadvantaged in our community in the large shelters.

Thank you to both levels of government for quickly putting disaster funding in place. Thank you to the army, to police forces, to municipal councils, to performers, to people from other areas, and also to the employees of Hydro-Québec. Having worked with that organization for 35 years, I know first hand what motivates these people: pride in serving their fellow citizens. Rebuilding a network covering several kilometres in a few weeks calls for determination, courage, hard work and pride. I remember the smile on the faces of these two linemen, Messrs Laberge and Marien, and their pride at having restored power to my home, at 5.30 a.m. on Tuesday.

I thank the people in charge of communications, Messrs Crête and Hébert, for their availability and for patiently hearing my demands. When power was restored, my staff and I acted as liaison between the victims and Hydro-Québec and we visited every affected site as well.

In 1962, I had seen another ice storm, as an employee, but it was not as bad as this one, because the transmission systems between the distribution centres had not been affected. So, I knew that, however extensive the damage to the network, Hydro would act methodically and diligently to restore power to all users.

Hydro-Québec chairman André Caillé and Premier Bouchard were great at reassuring the public with their leadership and control over the situation. This was a serious situation, but at no time did these men let on that there was any doubt in their minds. We can say that, when Quebec is allowed to make its own decisions, it produces excellent results. This is a most interesting finding, given the major decisions that lay ahead.

The municipalities have done a great job, in spite of the fact that their emergency plans were not always up to date. Emergency planning was deficient in some instances, but one would have had to work miracles to respond to requests for assistance from 300 municipalities all at once with a staff of only 40 or so employees.

In the future, responsibilities in that area should be devolved to the RCMs. The fact of the matter is that those municipalities that had first line equipment and whose emergency plans were up to date made it through pretty well.

It is too early to assess the cost of the losses in the riding of Châteauguay; estimates are currently being made. One thing is sure however: almost no one was spared by this disaster. I am thinking of employees, farmers, businesses, sugar bush operators, greenhouse growers and the municipalities in particular.

• (2330)

Let us hope that the programs the government is proposing will respond to the needs of the people without too much delay, that the 1998 budget surplus will be used to compensate losses and not to create new health and education programs. The people need it.

Unfortunately, the federal-provincial accord on disaster assistance was not the only official voice for these programs throughout the crisis. In recent days, a number of federal ministers have felt the need to propose assistance programs to the public that do not always meet a need. Their guidelines were very muddled or did not reflect the remarks of their officials, such as the employment insurance program on the subject of the grace period and the waiting period. The members of the Bloc Québécois will draw this to the attention of the minister tomorrow at noon.

In closing, I want to tell the people in my riding that they may contact my riding office for further information. I will be happy to give them all the support I can in solving their problems.

Quebec will come away enriched from this exercise of fraternity, generosity and solidarity. To the great builders, many thanks, the future is ours.

[English]

Mr. Clifford Lincoln (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to give notice that I will share my time with my colleague from Nepean—Carleton.

*Ice Storm 1998**[Translation]*

Despite the late hour, I wanted to share in the discussion of this motion on the ice storm. I wanted to express my profound gratitude to the people and the officials of my riding for their devotion and their remarkable community spirit through these difficult days, which forced so many people to leave their homes for shelters.

The fact that we overcame this crisis in each of our regions in total harmony and discipline is thanks to the values of generosity and mutual support in our communities.

[English]

I would like to pay a very special tribute to all my fellow citizens of Lac-Saint-Louis, but above all to our mayors without whose leadership, commitment and efficiency the hardship suffered by so many would have been far more significant. May I express my profound thanks to Mayors Malcolm Knox of Pointe Claire, Peter Yeomans of Dorval, John Meany of Kirkland, Roy Kemp of Beaconsfield, Anne Myles of Baie d'Urfé, Bill Tierney of St. Anne de Bellevue and George McLeish of Senneville.

[Translation]

I would also like to thank Marcel Morin, the mayor of Pierrefonds. A small part of this city is in my riding, the largest part being in the riding of my colleague from Pierrefonds—Dollard.

[English]

May I also thank all the city councillors in all our towns and municipalities, the city managers and their staff, all of whom carried out sterling work. I do not want to forget our firefighters, our police men and women and all those officials who performed so tirelessly and courageously in extremely difficult and often dangerous conditions.

May I say a very special word of thanks to the thousands of volunteers all across our cities and towns who helped to make their fellow citizens safe and comfortable. They deserve our immense gratitude.

[Translation]

I visited several shelters in my riding, and the spirit of co-operation and generosity that I saw there was remarkable. Everybody seemed patient and cheerful despite the inconvenience.

I want to mention the remarkable work done by our hospitals. Having spent some time at the veterans hospital in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, I was able to see how the staff and volunteers reacted to this crisis with compassion, dedication and efficiency. An entire wing of the hospital, which had been closed up to that time, was reopened and reequipped to receive senior citizens from several regions.

● (2335)

A shelter was set up for veterans and their families who were driven from their homes by the storm. Some staff members worked close to a week without respite. The hospital, which usually serves about 2,000 meals a day, served more than 5,000 meals a day during the crisis.

One evening, I talked to three Hydro-Quebec workers who told me they had worked 16 hours a day every day under virtually impossible conditions. All these hydro workers from Quebec as well as from other provinces and from the United States deserve our gratitude.

[English]

The Canadian Armed Forces performed way beyond the call of duty. All the mayors in my riding had only effusive praise for the tremendous dedication and efficiency of all the members of the armed forces. On behalf of the citizens of Lac-Saint-Louis may I thank them most warmly as I do the Prime Minister, the Minister of National Defence and all the ministers and their staff for their contributions to the substantial federal effort.

[Translation]

Next Monday, I will attend a meeting with provincial MPs and the mayors from my riding to review the crisis in order to see what can be learned from it and to make recommendations that I will pass on to the ministers concerned.

Among the suggestions that we will be examining is a possible governor general citation that could be awarded to volunteers and other individuals who distinguished themselves through their contribution during the crisis.

[English]

It would be an excellent idea also if through Trees Canada young trees were provided by the federal government to the municipalities for distribution to citizens for reforestation. It seems that among the deciduous trees, white oaks and lindens resisted the most strongly to the ice storm.

Many lessons will result from the ice storm. Municipalities which were well prepared with emergency action plans, with trained personnel and with adequate emergency equipment coped with amazing efficiency despite the tremendous hurdles and difficulties. However in outlying areas and small municipalities the crisis caught many unprepared.

We came out of this experience with the realization that we have a considerable task ahead so as to fully prepare our communities for a sudden emergency and to maximize the co-ordination of our efforts.

[Translation]

We must certainly plan a greater diversification of our power grid and support systems in case of a crisis.

*Ice Storm 1998**[English]*

Climate change and El Nino are not a myth as the ice storm and the recent severe weather disruptions in California and Florida have shown. We have no choice but to be fully prepared for the worst. Serious difficulties and crises have a way of bringing out the very best in all of us. Suddenly we are all human beings and fellow citizens sharing a common cause facing the hardship. Gone are the quarrels, political and otherwise, which tend to divide us so often day in and day out.

So amid the discomfort and hardships suffered by so many, let us remember the moments we have shared in mutual generosity and friendship. Let us celebrate our communities and the remarkable community spirit which inspires them.

The crisis has shown me that the great values that make Canada a special country are there to the fore.

Mr. Speaker, may I once again thank all the volunteers and all those who helped to make our lives so much better during the crisis.

Mr. David Pratt (Nepean—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly very pleased to participate in the discussion this evening on the ice storm. It is an event that few of us who were close to it will ever forget.

I am sure my riding of Nepean—Carleton was like many others that were hit. Some areas in Nepean got away with a power interruption of a few minutes or hours. Other areas, like the rural southern part of my riding which contains the townships of Osgoode, Rideau and Goulbourn, were down for more than two weeks.

• (2340)

The ice storm was a rather graphic lesson for all of us about the power of nature. Just when we think we have a measure of control over our environment, along comes a storm like this to drive home the message that our systems are not fail safe, that we are vulnerable and that we better have a healthy respect for mother nature.

The evidence of the devastation wrought by the ice storm was very much apparent with hydro poles that had snapped off and trees that were bent and broken. I counted 10 to 12 hydro poles down on a short stretch of Donnelly Road in the southern part of my riding. On the southeastern corner around Marionville the steel towers carrying high voltage lines had crumpled into heaps of twisted metal one after another after another.

Inasmuch as the damage was clearly visible by day it was only really at night that one got a full appreciation of the problem. I can clearly recall driving out of Barrhaven in the Nepean area on Thursday, January 8 to visit a friend in Manotick and to make a few other stops in the rural area. This fellow had sent his family off to a hotel and was hunkering down with a transistor radio, numerous

candles and a wood stove. He was determined to make sure his pipes did not freeze and to maintain a vigil on the home front. He was not unlike many others who were beginning a routine like that.

Driving south in my riding that evening was extremely eerie. Everything was in darkness, no street lights, no traffic lights and very little traffic. The odd candle could be seen but even these were few and far between. I thought one soldier who had done a tour of duty in Yugoslavia summed it up pretty well when he arrived on the scene. He said that the place looked just like Sarajevo without the bullets.

During the course of the ice storm I made it a point to travel around my riding. I visited the shelters and worked with municipal officials wherever I could to provide assistance and information. In the face of all the hardship and destruction, it was encouraging to see so many people demonstrating strength, resourcefulness and generosity all the while maintaining a sense of humour.

On one of my road trips to the southeastern corner of my riding there was a banner up along the main street of the small village of Kenmore which read "10 days and counting, never surrender. The Kenmore Quilting and Chainsaw Club". I saw a lot of people with a lot of spirit during the ice storm but the people in Kenmore definitely take the prize for originality and good humour.

It was the average person who really made the difference in the aftermath of the storm. These volunteers did an absolutely incredible job. They were the unsung heroes of the ice storm. I saw them in the shelters cooking and serving the meals, washing dishes, tidying up, comforting the elderly, playing with kids who were getting a little stir crazy and who just wanted to go home. Volunteers were out transporting large generators from farm to farm and hooking them up, making sure cows would be milked and watered.

There were those who organized neighbourhood watches to ensure people's property was protected. There were those who checked on elderly people and delivered firewood and those who made sure basements did not flood by providing small generators for sump pumps.

In the little village of Vernon there were people like Roy, Bill and Jeff Porteous, Cecil van Wylick, Roy Mills, Tom Dalglish and Hubert Bray working away in the kitchen of the Vernon Community Centre where people like Heather Bellinger, Carol Acres and Kay Porteous were preparing thousands of meals.

The same situation with ordinary people rising to the challenge, pulling together and helping each other was played out day after day throughout my riding in communities like Richmond, Munster Hamlet, Ashton, North Gower, Kars, Burritts Rapids, Osgoode, Greely and Metcalfe.

Not only did neighbours help neighbours but communities helped other communities. Barrhaven, which was an area relatively

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unscathed by the ice storm, mobilized. The Cedarview Alliance Church set to work preparing meals for hydro crews and ended up shipping canned goods and hot meals to shelters in Kars, Osgoode, Vernon and other places. A number of people working in the shelters made it a point to say to me, "David, when you get back to Nepean, be sure to thank those people in Barrhaven for us".

The people at the municipal level in my riding really excelled during the ice storm. As I am sure is the case elsewhere, each municipality in our area has an emergency preparedness plan. During the 10 years I spent in municipal government our emergency preparedness plan spent a lot of time collecting dust between periodic and infrequent reviews. However, it was nice to see that when a real emergency hits, these plans generally work pretty well. They definitely are not absolutely perfect in every respect and I anticipate there will be some fine tuning with some of them, but generally they did the job that they were intended to do.

• (2345)

I would be remiss if I did not mention some of the people at the regional and local levels who put in very long hours, working around the clock in some cases, and who did exceptional work. Bob Chiarelli, our new regional chair, and his chief administrative officer, Merv Beckstead, were first rate. Doug Thompson, the mayor of Osgoode, and his CAO, Moira Winch, were superb. In Rideau township Mayor Glenn Brooks and his CAO, Gary Dillabough, were excellent. Mayor Janet Stavinga and her CAO, Bob Townend, did a fabulous job. Finally, in my own municipality of Nepean, Mayor Mary Pitt and her CAO, Bob Letourneau, also did a great job.

I know it has been mentioned before in this discussion but I will mention it again. The personnel of the Canadian forces made us truly proud and they have our profound gratitude. Brigadier General Hillier, who was co-ordinating the military effort of the region, sensed the level of appreciation when he said that while he recognized that the people of Ottawa—Carleton were becoming attached to his troops, he wanted to caution us that they were not available for adoption.

The troops were everywhere, in trucks, in helicopters and on foot. They cleared debris, worked alongside hydro workers and police and provided a level of comfort and security that people desperately needed. More than once I heard people say thank God for the army.

When Major Bernie Derible of the Royal Canadian Dragoons packed up his troops and left the village of Metcalfe there were people on both sides of the street waving emotional goodbyes. The local firefighters and the Dragoons changed colours and then the firefighters lined the street to give them a salute as the army trucks rolled by. They were given a send off befitting an army of liberation. Their work, their energy and their enthusiasm certainly did not go unnoticed in my riding.

While life has returned to normal for most people, for some the nightmare of the ice storm continues. One of my constituents, Mr. Peter Raats, had his four year old barn collapse on January 23 from the combined weight of ice and a new accumulation of snow. His insurance company refuses to cover his loss. During the storm he milked 200 head of cattle by hand until he got a generator and even then it only worked for one day before it broke down. Mr. Raats' latest setback occurred on Sunday. While tearing down a part of the collapsed barn he fell through the roof and broke his hip.

In ice storm fashion, his neighbours have rallied to his side. Led by a local RCMP officer, Gary Clements, a special support fund for Mr. Raats has been set up at the Royal Bank in Metcalfe. For those who might be interested in helping out with a donation, the account No. is 5012976. I should add that the fund will be independently audited and any donations exceeding the target amount of \$200,000 will be turned over to the Red Cross. Donations of voluntary labour to help rebuild Mr. Raats' barn are also certainly welcome.

In closing I would simply like to say a sincere thank you to all those both inside and outside my riding of Nepean—Carleton who assisted in the relief and reconstruction effort. The response of Canadians from coast to coast was absolutely magnificent. I know that the sense of community in my riding was strong before the ice storm. I can assure this House that it is even stronger today.

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House today to talk about the issues that have arisen as a result of the ice storm.

It was my privilege to go to the county of Lanark, south of this city and a little east of Ottawa, and look at the devastation the ice storm had caused in the maple sugar bush country. It was heart rending to see what had happened to the trees in that area. In some cases the tops of the trees were broken off and in other cases huge branches had broken off. The extent of the damage was absolutely phenomenal in certain areas. It was tree after tree after tree. I compared it to some of my experiences and observations in Alberta when a tornado went through and the tops of the trees were broken off. In this case the ice had broken off the tops of the trees.

We went through this area and asked ourselves what was so significant about what happened there. The tops were broken but was that all that had happened? The sap flows up and down the trunk of the tree, of course. It became clear to us as we went through the various tours. We went to one sugar bush farm, right to the trees and began to look at the branches.

• (2350)

The operator told us very clearly there were tiny little branches on which the leaves form that were broken off. Fifty per cent or more of the crown of that tree was gone and if the branches do not generate leaves, then indeed the life of that tree is in jeopardy.

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Nobody knows at this point how many of those trees will survive this storm.

We looked at the trees but what really hit home were the people. We saw the people meet at a place called Wheeler's Pancake House. We met in a big assembly room. About 75 or 80 maple syrup farmers were there.

It became painfully obvious that these people are suffering. They are suffering today. There were many who were inconvenienced. There were many who suffered while the electricity was off but these farmers are suffering now because their livelihood is in jeopardy.

We ask ourselves what is being done. What can be done now? I want to pay tribute as well to the armed services and other personnel who helped to bring the power back into the lines. The issue now for these farmers is what do we do now to take care of the problem they have.

There are three kinds of problems identified. Many of these farmers have a network of pipes along which the sap is collected to a central spot and there the water is boiled off and the syrup or sugar is made.

Many of these pipes are covered with ice and snow. Because they froze and the ice is there it is very difficult now to take it off these pipes. These people need help to get the pipes out of the ice and snow and there may not be enough manpower to get this done before the sap starts flowing within the next three or four weeks.

Also, they need money to put the taps into the trees and to make sure it is possible to get that sap when it comes. They need to get to the trees. When we looked at the way the branches had fallen down between the trees, it became very obvious it was almost impossible for the farmers to get to the trees in order to tap the trunks and to do the work that had to be done without removing the branches that were in the way.

Clearing needs to be done. There are three problems with this. There is money needed along with machines and manpower to do the job. What will happen to these people?

We need to go beyond this as well and ask ourselves how long it will be before the income they are losing this year will be replaced. In some instances, if the trees die, it will be between 40 and 50 years before they are restored to the stage they were at.

We need to look at this and ask ourselves what happened, what has been demonstrated as time goes forward. This illustrated that people get together. We saw 75 or 80 people come together in a group, not asking the government to help them but what they could do to work together to solve the problem.

I forgot to mention that I am splitting my time with the member for West Kootenay—Okanagan.

The Ontario Maple Producers Association was represented at this meeting, the local chapter. The one thing that impressed me with this group was that its members clearly articulated the problem. They took responsibility for trying to solve that problem. They knew what should be done. They had asked themselves what should be done, what the cost would be, who was the most in need and how they could go about solving the problem.

Of particular significance was that they said they had all kinds of administrative creations done by federal governments, provincial governments, municipal governments and so on but wanted to distribute the funds and assistance given to them themselves.

• (2355)

They felt they knew who the people were who were applying for this assistance, who needed it the most. They were not going to use this money for administration. It was going to go to the people, the farmers who really needed the help.

I commend these people at the grassroots level who came to us with specific reasons why this should be done this way. They told us what needed to be done, how much money it would take and how best to solve this problem. They came up with a rather creative solution, one which I wanted to pass to the minister of industry just a moment ago.

This farmer said "We need the money now. We haven't got time to go through all the red tape that is necessary. We need that money today and tomorrow. How would it be if we got an indication from the government that this kind of help will be available through various disaster funds and between now and then some bridge financing might be created as an interest free loan for that time period?"

These are the kinds of suggestions these people came up with. They do not want a handout. They are proud people. They want to help themselves.

What have we learned from this disaster? I think we have learned that Canadians care. People care for each other. There is compassion. There is a love for one another. That has been demonstrated clearly and powerfully.

The other thing that has happened that I am proud of is that these people have demonstrated very clearly, without a shadow of a doubt, that the strength of Canada does not lie in its ability to generate electricity or its ability to apply the various technologies. What it has demonstrated more clearly than ever before is that Canada's strength lies in the willingness of the people to care for one another from one end of Canada to the other.

In Kelowna, for example, the Flightcraft people donated a huge Purolator courier service aircraft filled with containers of relief goods for the people in Ontario. That is what happened. A bond developed among Canadians that will make Canada stronger. There was a strong demonstration of intellectual ability, skill and the

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ability to be motivated as well as a spiritual quality that binds us together.

I hope this disaster which hurt all of us, some very much more than others, will bind us together and make us a strong nation.

Mr. Jim Gouk (West Kootenay—Okanagan, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, much of the presentations this evening focused on the devastation of the recent ice storms and of the hardship that its victims have had to endure, and rightly so.

Whenever Canadians are subjected to such overwhelming difficulties, their stories must be told. This is true no matter where in this vast country this occurs, be it Ontario, Quebec, Atlantic Canada, Manitoba with the floods, Swift Current, the Peace River country, or in my riding where last year's flood caused millions of dollars in damage as well as the loss of life of a resident.

There is another side to these stories of devastation, a warmer and more encouraging story of one part of this country reaching out to another.

Nestled near the geographic centre of my riding of West Kootenay—Okanagan is the town of Grand Forks, British Columbia. Grand Forks has a population of about 4,000 in the city and another 3,500 in its rural area. It is set in a valley surrounded by forested mountains. It sits right on the American border approximately half way between Vancouver and Calgary.

Grand Forks' principal activities include forestry and farming. Grand Forks is not a rich town. Unemployment is around 11 per cent and forestry based employers are looking at layoffs due to major provincial problems in the forest industry. However, Grand Forks is very rich in one ingredient that surpasses all others, open hearted generosity.

An idea began with one teacher from Grand Forks secondary school. Emilie Belak had been following the story of the ice storm and its tales of hardship endured by those who had lost their power, heat and water. She proposed that some of the students from the affected eastern area be invited to Grand Forks.

• (2400)

Others added to and promoted this idea which ultimately resulted in 74 students from the hard hit area of St-Jean-sur-Richelieu, many of whom were reduced to the point of living in rescue centres, being hosted by the Grand Forks community. Thus began what was dubbed "Operation Freeze Lift".

Many people were involved in making this possible. Transportation was made possible by the generosity of Canadian Airlines and

Air Canada, with much of the initiative in securing this again undertaken locally by B.C. forestry dispatcher Cindy Munns.

With much prompting by school principal Denny Kemprud, the B.C. provincial education department contacted Quebec's deputy minister of education who delivered the Grand Forks offer directly to a candle lit meeting of South Shore's Monteregie school division.

Many other people were involved in making this event possible, far too many to name in the time allowed for this presentation. In actual fact the entire town was involved in making it possible. In excess of 200 families offered to take students in and many businesses generously offered gifts and services throughout the students' stay.

In all, 74 students and their teacher-chaperons arrived in Grand Forks mid-January. These people travelled to Grand Forks anticipating their first regular access to power and hot showers in two weeks. As stated by one of those involved, they were not prepared for the overwhelming generosity and friendliness of the people of Grand Forks.

The students attended classes at the school and when they were not in class they were taken skiing, hiking, shopping, to movies, sports and other special events. These activities were done as a group but there were also many other individual activities provided by the host families.

Last Friday the teachers, students, host families and others who had played an important role in making this all come together were guests at a luncheon hosted by local Russian Doukhobor Society members who make up a significant portion of the population. I attended that luncheon and listened to visiting students talk, tearfully at times, of their gratitude to their hosts and to others in the community.

Politics were not part of this visit. Although the national unity situation may well have been on some people's minds, it was rarely raised. Even though it was not discussed, the impact of this western generosity will be felt for many years to come.

One of the teacher-chaperons who teaches art and religion stated that Grand Forks is a lesson plan for a school course in values, ethics and morals, and she now plans to write that course.

Another of the teacher-chaperons stated that it would be hard to leave such a remarkable town which was so sincere and so generous. She had no doubt that most of her students would leave with a different view of the west.

One of those students best summed up this opinion by saying "When part of this country is in trouble, that another part would help is something" and then after a moment's thought he added

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“strengthening”. It is an example of one member of the Canadian family helping another member of that family when they are in need. Like in any other family there is a time to pursue individual needs and there is a time to pull together.

Grand Forks made this great gesture solely out of its natural generosity, but it is a prime example of how we are part of a national family. Family members can be independent without rejecting the family they belong to.

This wonderful small British Columbia town should serve to inspire all Canadians to recognize that despite whatever differences we have we also have common bonds.

I and all of my constituents in West Kootenay—Okanagan offer condolences to all those who have suffered as a result of the ice storm. I am sure all of my colleagues in the House join in offering our heartfelt thanks to the generosity of the people of Grand Forks.

Mrs. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Mississauga South.

The ice storm of 1998 will go down in history for many reasons. It truly was a disaster of historic proportions. To the people who experienced deprivation and loss inflicted by the storm I extend my sincere sympathy.

There remains much to be done to restore full power and to recover from the losses to person and property, especially in the rural areas of Quebec and eastern Ontario.

• (2405)

In the face of a natural disaster of such proportion immediate and targeted action is required. I am proud of the speed with which the government mobilized operation recuperation. Over 15,000 regular and reserved troops went to assist those communities affected. This is the largest peacetime mobilization of soldiers in Canadian history.

An army of hydro workers from Quebec Hydro and Ontario Hydro came to rebuild the power lines of a system devastated by ice and the elements. It is work that still continues.

I commend the partnership of local levels of government and the provincial governments which have acted decisively in providing leadership to recovery efforts.

Helping hands were extended from across the nation and across the United States border to help in any way they could, from providing the much sought after generators to volunteers who staffed mobile kitchens and cleared away debris.

It is difficult not to be overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of this event. However, individual Canadians reached out to fellow

Canadians to offer help and demonstrate sense of community that exists in the country. The efforts ranged from donations of money to actually travelling to the devastated regions.

In my riding of Kitchener Centre help was focused on two Quebec ridings and one in eastern Ontario. The local media played a key role in alerting the community to specific items such as wicks for kerosene lamps and baby diapers that were in short supply. Kitchener firefighters used a centrally located station as a collection depot. The food bank of KW and the local Red Cross collected food items and supplies. The Indian Canadian Association of Kitchener—Waterloo raised several thousands of dollars when a young man from that community asked his father “what can we do?” The KW Humane Society travelled to the affected areas and brought back animals for shelter and adoption. Grant Transport shipped large quantities of heating oil and chain saw oil which was donated by Monarch Oil. Erb Transport sent daily runs of trucks containing supplies into Montreal for distribution to outlying areas.

These are just a sampling of the initiatives that were carried out by my community, a demonstration of the concern and goodwill that the people of Kitchener feel for their fellow citizens who were affected by this disaster.

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude and acknowledge the hard work and dedication of everyone involved, including especially members of my staff. I am heartened by their action and humbled by the generosity.

The devastation caused by the ice storm of 1998, the damage to the landscape and the loss of property which continues to still be tallied will take years to recover from. The turmoil in human terms and the loss of loved ones are emotional issues that will only be dealt with by individuals with the passage of time. However time can never dim the individual acts of heroism and the collective goodwill and charity which Canadians extended to fellow Canadians.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just a little over six hours ago the House adjourned its proceedings to conduct this special debate on the ice storm, Canada’s greatest, largest, natural disaster in its history.

Having listened to the eloquent stories and speeches by cabinet ministers and members of Parliament on all sides of the House, Canadians might be wondering why this debate is being held. It is important that we reflect a bit on the purpose of the debate.

There is no question from the comments that have been made before the House already that this is the time to recognize and acknowledge the performance of governments and agencies at all levels; the federal government, all its departments and all the different things they contributed; members of Parliament in their various ridings; provincial governments, MPPs and their agencies; regional governments; and municipal governments. There is no question that the performance was exceptional. They are to be thanked and recognized for the assistance provided to Canadians in their time of need.

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• (2410)

It makes me think that in Canada we have a diversion in which we like to jostle elected officials. At a time like this Canadians will recognize that all levels of government performed exceptionally well at a time of great need.

The debate is also about recognizing volunteer organizations and the unsung heroes, the individual volunteers we have heard about today. They rose to the challenge and did not wait for the invitation. They did some exceptional things.

Today I heard stories that I want to remember. I know Canadians want to remember them too. They are about young children who were sending in their allowances to assist with the financial aid and about people who stopped their lives, their businesses, and brought truck loads of goods, supplies, wood and equipment. These stories are very important to remember.

I think about organizations such as the Red Cross which has gone through a very difficult time. Yet it was a leader in providing and co-ordinating assistance and aid to Canadians in need when they needed it. They were there and the Red Cross should be thanked.

I think about our military. The Minister of National Defence spoke very eloquently about the special contributions, the experience, the expertise, the calming influence and the controlling influence they brought to the situation to make sure the job was done well. We know that the military has gone through a very difficult time as well in recent months. However today we recognize, acknowledge and celebrate the fact that we have one of the best military forces available for Canadians when needed.

There are two other reasons I believe we are having this debate. It is very important for Canadians to understand that as long as there is one Canadian that still has need related to this tragic disaster the job is not complete. The support will continue. All levels of government and all Canadians will continue to provide support for the needs expressed by people who are affected.

There will be scars and lasting damage. It will take decades for some things to be repaired and there are some things that will never be repaired. However Canadians are moving on. We are getting the job done and we are doing it well.

If Canadians want to help there is a way that they can do so. The Red Cross is still raising financial donations to assist with relief for those in need. If Canadians would like to make a contribution they can call 1-800-850-5090. They can also contact their local Red Cross agency or even their own member of Parliament who would

be more than happy to make sure their contribution gets to the Red Cross to be used to purchase the things other Canadians need.

The final reason we are having this debate concerns the chronicling of history. As I said, this is the largest natural disaster in the history of the country. It not only demonstrates the character of Canadians, the preparedness of Canadians and the will to care and to be there when others are in need. It has a lot to do with defining Canadians.

Many years ago there was an effort to try to define what is a Canadian and what are Canadian values. One of the conclusions was that Canada was so diverse in its geography, its people and its cultural heritage that it was very difficult to put into words and capture the essence of Canada.

• (2415)

Events like this, events such as the Saguenay flood, events that took place in the Peace River, the floods in Manitoba and this tragic ice storm that affected much of Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick, those are the things that show what Canadians do when there is a challenge. Canadians rose to that challenge. They came forward and demonstrated Canadian values.

We define Canada not in words. We define Canada by our actions. We are chronicling those actions in this debate so that we will never forget how important this country is and how proud we are today, as we have been time and time again, of the way that Canadians have responded to the needs of their neighbours, friends and fellow Canadians across the country from sea to sea to sea.

When I saw members of Parliament come here and talk about the individual stories, it really touched me to hear how they wanted to say thank you to the people in their communities for those special things. We are here to say thank you to individuals, to organizations and to all Canadians for their caring. Whether they could participate in the relief effort or not, the fact is that Canadians right across the country demonstrated their concern for their fellow Canadians. That is what this is all about. We are defining Canada, not in words but in the story of the heroic actions in Canada's greatest time of need.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if I may, I will share my time with my distinguished colleague, the member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve.

I would like to join with all the speakers who have taken part in this emergency debate on the ice storm to thank and congratulate

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people who had to deal with what could be called a historical storm, the storm of the century.

I am thinking especially about the Premier of Quebec, Lucien Bouchard, the president of Hydro-Quebec, André Caillé, the head of public security, the Prime Minister of Canada, the leaders of the Canadian army, all the mayors in areas hit by the storm, who without any training whatsoever were able to deal with this storm the extent of which could not be properly assessed, even from the air, in a helicopter or otherwise. One could only have a limited view of things. Nobody in this House is yet aware of the real impact of this ice storm.

I would also like to congratulate people in my riding, volunteers for collecting wood, of course, and money, but also for the love and caring they were able to show for those hard hit by the storm.

I am thinking especially of teachers in the Amiante regional school board who, without a word of protest, agreed to have scores and scores of children from the infamous "triangle of darkness" come at a rate of one or two per classroom, to take French, history, maths and English. They did not look at their collective agreement. They just said: "Welcome in our classroom".

● (2420)

I would now like to deal mainly with the problem of our maple producers, since there are some 2,000 in my riding, with between 1,000 and over 100,000 tapholes. I had the chance to take part in two meetings with major groups of maple producers. The first meeting, organized by producers themselves, was held at Stornoway, at the junction of roads 108 and 161, where demonstrators symbolically barred traffic on both roads to raise the awareness of both levels of government. The second meeting took place on my initiative in Thetford Mines, where over 150 maple producers gathered to get some information.

I would like to ask the federal and provincial governments for some financial support that could compensate our maple producers for the loss of their working capital. An example. In an egg producing farm where, for example, 20,000 hens had suffocated to death as a result of the power failure, there would be a compensation for the loss of these 20,000 hens that I would call working capital. The maple producer who has 20,000 tapholes and whose maple trees would be to all intents and purposes dead within a year or two could not be compensated since this is not considered as working capital in the same sense as the animals that would have died as a result of the ice storm.

I recall a case that I think would be worth sharing with my colleagues who are here in this House. A couple from Sainte-Cécile-de-Whitton who sold their dairy farm, their quota, to go into maple production, own over 100,000 tapholes. If you do some

quick calculations, you will find out that at a minimum of \$20 per tap you get a fair amount—100,000 times \$20; you do the mathematics. This couple estimates that the syrup production in their maple bush will be down by 40 to 60 per cent. They are finished if they do not get any help.

Worse yet, our maple producers are very often in debt to the federal government, through the Farm Credit Corporation, or to the provincial government, through the *Société de financement agricole*. Some will have to file for bankruptcy. Therefore the Farm Credit Corporation will have to assume ownership of a maple syrup operation which is no longer profitable. Or, if the money had been provided by the *Société*, it is the government of Quebec which will have to deal with the bankruptcy. You understand that.

Therefore, I think it would be wise to help the maple producers financially. One of my constituents showed me a video. He filmed the situation in the farm he was preparing for his retirement. He would have cut some 25 or 30 cords of wood per quarter, just to add some income to his pension, and would have lived happily, doing what he enjoys.

● (2425)

Unfortunately, all the deciduous trees, or at least 80 per cent of them, because it is difficult to say 100 per cent, are doomed.

My second plea for help is directed to the minister of Human Resources Development. Through his partnership program for job creation, he proposed \$25 million for Quebec, but the program applies only to people presently receiving employment insurance or who received it during the last 36 months. Within the "*Granit et Amiante*" regional municipality there is clearly a lack of trained manpower to work in maple bushes and pull the plastic tubing from under the ice and the fallen branches.

There is a staff shortage and I am waiting for an answer, but time is of the essence. The sap should start flowing within three weeks, or a month at the most. If we miss that date, maple syrup producers will obviously lose money.

I will conclude by simply saying that I deplore the attitude of certain petty politicians in this country, who took advantage of the situation to score political points. I am thinking, among others, of the member for Bourassa, and the Ontario premier, Mr. Harris, who, during the South American trip with the Prime Minister, took advantage of Mr. Bouchard's absence, who had his hands full managing the crisis in Quebec.

Again, congratulations to all those who did such a good job of managing the crisis. Polls conducted in Quebec clearly show that Lucien Bouchard, André Caillé and the armed forces are the three big winners following this crisis, the likes of which we hope never to experience again.

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Thank you for your attention. The hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve will use up the rest of the time allotted to me.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague who described the situation in his riding with all of his well-known sensitivity and eloquence.

The months of January and February will be forever remembered in our history as times of almost exceptional solidarity.

To really understand the true nature of Quebeckers, the way they react as one and their natural generosity, one should thoroughly analyze this crisis.

The public shelters set up by the emergency preparedness organization, often with the help of municipalities, were not where most people in trouble gathered. It is interesting to see that, when Quebeckers realized they needed help, their first reaction was to go to their neighbours, their friends and relatives, to seek shelter in their basements or houses and some sense of solidarity.

The solidarity shown at the height of this rather unique and remarkable crisis that is the worst disaster our seniors can remember is quite extraordinary. It is also interesting to note that Quebeckers never lost heart. They rolled up their sleeves and showed an almost unprecedented level of solidarity.

Of course, everyone was called in to help. I want to tell you what happened in Hochelaga—Maisonneuve. As we know, Montreal was not the worst hit area, but several of our fellow citizens were without power for several days.

• (2430)

This is what happened. Michel Allen mobilized his employees and volunteers, who have been extremely helpful, at the Pierre-Charbonneau Centre, a city facility. For a few days, people who could not be taken in by neighbours, relatives or friends stayed at the Pierre-Charbonneau Centre and the Olympic Stadium, in the riding of Hochelaga—Maisonneuve.

Another very moving initiative in Montreal is what Mr. Duchesneau, the chief of police of the Urban Community of Montreal, asked of all his police officers. All the police officers in Montreal, together with volunteers, systematically did what members of Parliament are used to, that is go door-to-door.

It is very comforting to think that in an emergency situation such as the one we experienced in January, all Montreal homes were visited. Police officers and volunteers knocked on every door to make sure people were not having problems, suffering from the cold or in need of food. If they did, the relevant services would be called in. What a nice speedy and generous collective response.

I would also like to talk about another very moving story that is worth mentioning. It is about a youth centre at the corner of Adam and Saint-Clément, right in my neighbourhood. This institution called Escale Notre-Dame welcomes people who have had drug problems in the past, and it is run by the Christian Brothers. These young people gave their time. They took turns, day and night, to provide entertainment and support in the Pierre-Charbonneau Centre.

I want to thank them because they have their own problems and are undergoing rehabilitation so they can reintegrate society. Through this experience, they could realize how great and generous they can be through involvement and dedication.

I would like to name these ten or so young people, and I hope my colleagues will join me in expressing their thanks and appreciation to them for their dedication and involvement. I am thinking of André Larose, Florian Lebreton, Steve Gravelle, Rahid Amlabid, Sylvain Décosse, Philippe Paradis, Robert Desrochers, Réjean Hogue, Roger Boucher and Stéphane Lessard, who are all 20 to 25 years old and who put on a show at the Centre Pierre-Charbonneau and did it of course with all the generosity, serenity and courage required in the circumstances.

It is because a series of factors that we all came out of this the better for it. First, of course, we were able to fall back on the community networks. Also, as my colleague, the member for Frontenac—Mégantic, mentioned, we were able to rely on the strength of the public sector. In a city like Montreal, needless to say that the CLSC was called into service. I am thinking of the CLSC Hochelaga—Maisonneuve and its manager, Mr. Leguerrier as well as the CLSC Olivier-Guimond, in the east of my riding, that rapidly organized relief efforts and took especially good care of our seniors.

It is well known that everyone cannot react with the same speed in an emergency when we must mobilize. I must say that the authorities in my community, particularly the health care system which must be the closest to the people, and our frontline health services, the CLSC, took specially good care of the elderly.

We know it was important to do it. Often times, the elderly tend to be afraid of bothering other people, of asking for services, and to wish to take care of themselves in their natural environment. We were afraid seniors would put their safety in danger by not asking for help even if they needed it.

• (2435)

The worst was avoided because public authorities did the right thing, because the CLSC and its staff got involved.

I would also like to mention the recreation organizations which are very important resources in a community like mine. I particularly want to underline the work done by Jeunes Sportifs d'Hochelaga. That social club sent volunteers to help police go door to door

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in my neighbourhood and to make sure that all the people likely to need help were reached. Furthermore, a telephone network was set up in three days. Three times in three days, the network was used to reach everybody. The fact that it could be set up—and you can imagine the tremendous effort involved—and that all our people were reached is due in large part to the volunteer work done by Jeunes Sportifs d'Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, along with Pierrette Demers with her husband Robert Demers, who have run this association for over 15 years.

I close by thanking the Canadian Armed Forces as well. You know I have always felt and have argued in my party that in a sovereign Quebec we should have a civilian protection force. If there is something which was eloquently demonstrated, it is that all societies need organizations to protect people. I think we need a civilian rescue organization made up of people who are absolutely dedicated and whose role is not questioned so that they can reach out and be of service to people.

We express our gratitude to the Canadian army because it was not an issue of partisanship. When people do some good within a community, no partisanship scenario can stand and I know I speak on behalf of my fellow citizens when I rise in this House to pay tribute to the Quebec military and reserve forces who did a truly extraordinary job.

To conclude, I want to thank all those who transformed an ordeal into a great moment of solidarity. I believe we can truly say that we have all come out of this crisis better persons, different in some ways. I know we are equipped for the future, ready to face not only any danger but any possible scenario of general mobilization.

To all the volunteers, to all my colleagues in the House, I say thank you. I believe we have all been changed greatly by this crisis.

Mr. André Harvey (Chicoutimi, PC): Mr. Speaker, first, let me thank you for recognizing me at this late hour. I also want to mention that what you said last week about wanting to celebrate Quebec culture as one of the great human foundations was well received by a lot of people. I encourage you to try and share that new way of seeing things with all your caucus and I wish you luck.

First, I want to commend my colleagues for Shefford and Richmond—Arthabaska as well as our leader, the hon. member for Sherbrooke, for insisting on having this debate on the serious crises we have experienced over the last year and a half, particularly the recent ice storm.

I am very happy to have been able to come back to this Parliament if only to thank all our fellow Canadians who have helped us a lot during this extremely difficult period. The people of Chicoutimi and of the beautiful Saguenay—Lac Saint-Jean region know very well how desperate and frustrated you can be when nature wreaks havoc.

• (2440)

You saw the pictures at the time, a year and a half ago, of the area in the heart of the city of Chicoutimi called “Le bassin”, and what they called the little white house, which survived the wild and impetuous torrent. I am telling you tonight that this is the old section of Chicoutimi, my neighbourhood, where I grew up and where I was re-elected. I am very proud of it, and that period was a very difficult one.

At the time, we were all struck by the courage and the serenity of the victims and by the extraordinary spirit of solidarity among the people, first in the region, then in Quebec and then throughout the country.

It unfortunately takes a crisis of such magnitude to eliminate political partisanship, ideologies and racial prejudice. It is kind of crazy. Sometimes it looks like nature is taking revenge. Sometimes nature appears to be setting new priorities, because when everything is going well, both individuals and countries take the lazy approach. Laziness is sometimes called the mother of all vices. So nature sometimes decides to remind us of the real priorities and the basic necessities. I hope that all we have faced in the past few years will provide some inspiration for the future.

The great floods have left an indelible mark on our collective unconscious. I am sure that the constituents represented by my colleague, the member for Brandon—Souris, and others who have lived through events as serious as ours, and neighbouring ridings in Manitoba, share these same sentiments.

Yet, throughout these great and terrible tragedies, people's noblest qualities come through. Solidarity, compassion, mutual support, sharing and the desire to serve all flourish and make us proud to belong to the great Canadian family.

In my riding, people took charge immediately, when the gravity of the situation became apparent. People met and organized the distribution of essential supplies. We saw municipal councillors, to whom I wish to pay tribute this evening, Carl Savard and Jacques Bouchard, who directed the delivery of firewood. We know that firewood is a key element for survival in the dead of winter when you have no fuel.

While on this particular topic, I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague from New Brunswick, the member for Tobique—Mactaquac, who telephoned me at the height of the crisis, having heard that we in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean had organized the collection of firewood. He called me and told me he would have a dozen truckloads of firewood. He asked me to help him direct this contribution that he wanted to send. I found that quite exceptional.

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Naturally, we must take this opportunity to congratulate all the volunteers in Quebec and throughout the country who played a role, out of view of the cameras. We must also pay tribute to the work done by all our mayors, elected officials and municipal government employees. I think that the last crisis we have been through will certainly provide us with an opportunity to thank and congratulate the people who helped us survive in our region.

I am thinking of our mayors, among others. The mayor of Chicoutimi at the time; the mayor of La Baie, Claude Richard; the mayor of Ferland-et-Boileau, the municipalities that were almost destroyed, Léon Simard; the mayor of Saint-Félix, Jean-Marie Claveau; the mayor of the very tiny and now famous municipality of Anse-Saint-Jean, Laurent-Yves Simard; the mayor of Petit Saguenay, Hervé Lavoie; they all worked very hard; and the mayor of Rivière Éternité as well.

• (2445)

Interestingly enough, there are no sovereignists and no federalists when disaster strikes, only people who want to help one another. We should learn something from this. We witness this kind of solidarity only in times of crisis.

When there is no crisis, we go back to our collective passivity, to the same old arguments that may not always be a priority for our fellow citizens.

The lesson we should learn is this: Elected representatives should be able to present a constructive agenda to the whole country. We have been going on economic missions abroad. I have nothing against this. I am trying to find out the concrete results of this, and I may be able to come up with specifics in a few weeks. The first mandate for Canada, if we are to promote solidarity among Canadians, is to set up a Canadian economic mission.

I look forward to business people from Chicoutimi meeting with their colleagues in Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver. I know for a fact that good trade relations between business people in different regions will have a major cultural impact.

Since we have to deal with new natural phenomena, piecemeal emergency preparedness is not good enough. We need a Canadian plan to support the provinces. We need all the elements, federal and provincial. It is wrong that the Canadian Forces should not be officially part of the emergency preparedness scenarios in Quebec or Alberta. We have to wait for a request from the provincial government to deploy the young men and women of the Canadian Forces. In the future, they must be included in the emergency measure plans, because we are likely to be faced with other unusual weather phenomena.

We will need different strategic plans. Our forces should also be provided with more modern equipment. I think that from now on we will be less fearful of investing in more sophisticated, more

modern equipment for our forces, in order to make them more responsive and more efficient.

I think that the cooperation between the federal and provincial levels of government must also extend to unified emergency plans. Because of all the crises we had to manage during the last year and a half and the ones we can expect in the years to come, we have to opt for a more continuous type of consultation. We can no longer manage these crises at the last minute.

I think that all of the stakeholders would agree that everyone did their best. Things did not go perfectly well, and lessons have to be learned here.

For example, my area was hit a year and a half ago. Some of the smaller municipalities still have huge credit lines. I am thinking in particular of a small village. It has a credit line of \$2.4 million since the flood a year and a half ago. That cost them \$90,000 in interests last year and it still comes to \$12,000 a month in interests for a small village that has yet to receive any compensation. So, there are still problems out there. There are problems because we are not well prepared for these types of emergencies. We have to do better.

This will give the provincial and federal governments a great opportunity to pool their resources together to further help our fellow citizens in times of need.

We cannot have gone through three crises in the space of a year and a half and still think that it will not happen again. These phenomena are something new in our lives. We have to be better prepared.

I am pleased to give my colleague from South Shore the opportunity to talk about these new phenomena and the extremely serious crises we have gone through these last few weeks and especially this last year and a half.

[English]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, it was not my intent to speak this evening. I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Chicoutimi for allowing me the time to speak this evening and the opportunity. I would also like to speak to the patience of the rest of the members of this Chamber who are waiting to speak at this late hour and congratulate them on the fact that they are in this Chamber and prepared to speak on this important issue.

There are a couple of important things that we should recognize. Number one, we are here late at night discussing an issue of national importance. I am not going to try to add to the eloquent statements that have already been made by many of the members who have been here this evening. I think most of it has been said. However, I have sat through this debate and I would like add a few things to the debate.

Ice Storm 1998

First, I was able to look at much of the damage up close and was shocked and appalled at the extent of it. Frankly, I was amazed at the extent of it. We drove from Montreal to Sherbrooke in darkness. You could see the flashing lights on the electrical trucks as far as you could see. There were not five or six, there was not a dozen. There were literally hundreds of them. You had to be there to understand just how bad it was.

The natural resources, the farms, the forestry resources of eastern Ontario and southern Quebec are not only damaged, much of them are devastated. The magnitude and the scope of this damage I don't think parliamentarians, our provincial people or our municipalities have fully understood yet.

Quebec produces 80 per cent of the maple syrup produced in Canada. Ontario produces another 10 per cent. Where are we going to make up that loss? How are those farmers going to put those trees back into production? The tops are broken off the sugar maples, the limbs are stripped from them. Unfortunately I do not think they will ever come back. When the sap starts running in March, we will have an industry that will be lost and completely devastated.

One of the reasons I wanted to stand tonight to speak on this issue is that there has been another area that has been overlooked. The forest resources are going to have to be harvested in much of eastern Ontario and much of southern Quebec. The sugar maples will need to be harvested. The bush without question will have millions and millions of cords of wood that if we don't do something with will be a fire hazard and will be a complete loss.

If we face a summer in 1998 like we faced last summer, we can expect rampant forest fires in all those areas affected now. The woods are dangerous to walk in, dangerous to work in and they are almost impossible to work in. Somehow we have to look on a national scale at some type of a salvage project for these two areas.

The other point I would like to make which everyone else has made this evening, and I will not take much time because there are people waiting to speak, is that we understand the hazards. We understand the dangers. We certainly understand that we have the ability to rise above that.

I think that speaks to the resilience of communities, of municipalities, of provinces and certainly to the resilience of the nation of Canada. Most of all, and I would like to close on this note, I think the events of the past months have spoken to the resilience of the Canadian people.

• (2455)

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I thank all the officers and employees of this Chamber for being so patient with some of us who must seem terribly long winded. It is an important gesture that so many members have been willing to

speak to the devastation that so many millions of our fellow citizens have recently experienced.

While I as an Albertan did not have any direct experience with the devastation of the recent ice storm, I want to add the voices of my constituents in solidarity with those who were so deeply devastated by the adversity of ice storm and its consequences to the many eloquent speeches this evening. I represent some 75,000 people in Calgary who live in a part of the province that has been fortunate enough not to experience natural disasters of this nature. When they see a disaster occur in another part of their country they feel affected by it. Many of my constituents expressed to me their desire to assist in any way they possibly could.

My home parish, St. Bonaventure parish, managed to establish a charitable relationship with the St. Thomas More parish at Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu which is in the middle of what was called the triangle of darkness in order to raise the necessary funds to support the people in Saint-Jean who have lost so much and are still just recovering.

My only experience with the storm was indirect in that I was supposed to be in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu to attend the Centre d'immersion de la Chambre des communes for French instruction. But on the day I was planning to leave the news of the storm came through and I was unable to travel to Saint-Jean. The Collège militaire, where the immersion centre operates, became an emergency centre for the people of that area. I would like to put on the record our thoughts for the staff of the House of Commons at the immersion centre in Saint-Jean, namely Elizabeth Gervais and her colleagues who are very dedicated servants of this place. I know they have no doubt been deeply troubled by this disaster.

Members of my party often criticize government. We are often characterized as being enemies of government, but one of the things we saw in this storm was the need for government. We saw government at its very best serving the people. We saw local, provincial and federal levels of government working together, marshalling all their resources, as other members have said, putting partisanship, ideology and politics aside to serve their people in their most urgent need.

We have learned many lessons about how we must be better prepared for such emergencies in the future. This demonstrated to those who are cynical about government that government can and must be a force for good in particular when it is so urgently needed at moments like this. That comment is no more clearly applicable than to our military, an institution which for too long in this country has been allowed to decline and dissipate in its strength and resources. For various reasons we have chosen not to invest in the resources needed by our military forces. Now we see how necessary they really are to people when it counts.

More important, the response to the recent adversity really demonstrates what Canada is all about, not government but civil

society, community in the most authentic sense. It is about neighbour helping neighbour. It is a cliché but it is profoundly true. We saw the same kind of response to the floods in the Saguenay and the floods in the Red River Valley. We see it whenever Canadians are confronted by adversity.

• (2500)

The history of this country is one of carving out an existence in an intolerably cold and difficult land against the forces of the elements. Sometimes, such as in the last month or so, we find that the elements are stronger than we are. But by gathering together and through the power of synergy that we find in community and civil society and voluntary institutions, it is amazing what can be done to relieve suffering.

Finally, the last lesson I take from the recent adversity is one I learned in the only natural disaster I lived through, which was the terrible devastating earthquake in San Francisco in 1989. Several hundred people died in that city as a result of a huge earthquake in the bay area in California where I was going to college at the time.

I was sitting in a class studying Thomas Aquinas, the doctor of theology. The lecture was about Thomas Aquinas' writing on the grandeur of God and his dominion over nature. Just as we were discussing this rather prescient reflection by the great medieval scholastic, the world began to shake underneath us. I even wondered for a moment whether we were going to fall into the Pacific Ocean and whether it was the big one.

What flashed through my mind at that time which has stuck with me ever since is that no matter how pompous we are about our own powers as human beings, we are brought to the realization from time to time that we are really not in control of our own circumstances, that we are at the mercy of much greater powers than we can ever imagine. I think that was no doubt an emotion and a sentiment experienced by so many of the hundreds of thousands who struggled through this adversity.

I want to close simply by reiterating what some other members have said in their remarks, that financial help is still needed. For those who may be watching these debates, if they have not yet found a way to assist those who have struggled through the ice storm, they can still do so through the good offices of the Red Cross which I understand is still distributing funds to those in need. The Red Cross can be reached at 1-800-850-5090. I understand the Red Cross is still taking financial contributions and distributing them where those resources are most needed.

I want to commend all the other members of this place who have spoken so eloquently and our fellow citizens who have shown us what it really means to be a Canadian.

Ice Storm 1998

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud and very happy to rise in the House to take part in this debate on the ice storm that hit a large part of the eastern part of North America. Also, this is my first speech of the year in the House, and it is a privilege to make it in these remarkable circumstances.

The ice storm that hit the south shore of the St. Lawrence River had repercussions also in the riding of Trois-Rivières, on the north shore. Indeed 150 disaster victims answered the invitation made by the Sélect Hôtel Le Baron of Trois-Rivières which decided, on its own, to offer 50 rooms free of charge to South Shore disaster victims. One hundred and fifty people accepted the invitation. The hotel also put at the people's disposal an assembly room, as well as a room that was used as a volunteer centre. One hundred and fifty people coming from 19 municipalities located on the South Shore, including the most important that were the subject of many news reports, such as Granby, Saint-Hyacinthe, Drummondville, Saint-Jean d'Iberville, accepted the invitation, and this complicated things somewhat at times administration-wise. I will come back to that later.

• (2505)

One hundred and fifty people: families, couples, elderly people, teenagers full of the vim and vigour they are known to display at times, children, seven infants—one of whom was only four days old when he arrived at the Sélect Hôtel Le Baron, in Trois-Rivières.

These 150 people had to leave their home, afraid, at night apparently, in a scene straight from hell, we were told; 150 people isolated in trois-Rivières, but who eventually were able to rely on the arrival of volunteers who, over several days, came on their own, in a spontaneous gesture, and took it upon themselves to make their stay in Trois-Rivières as pleasant as possible, the least inconvenient, and tried to comfort them.

I am going to name these volunteers, knowing that I will probably forget some of them because I am not aware of absolutely everything that went on, and I was not able to meet all those who contributed to this splendid event. I apologize beforehand for any oversight. Moreover, there are some activities I did not witness from beginning to end.

First of all, I would like to congratulate and thank the Sélectôtel Le Baron and its manager, Mr. Gilles Blais, who did a remarkable job and displayed tact, calm and patience. I also want to congratulate Gisèle Caron, who co-ordinated all volunteer work and was there for 15 days, showing determination and persistence. There is also Soula Pelletier, already mentioned, who is of Greek descent and is very well integrated into Trois-Rivières community. She was kind enough to invite me personally to meet victims and volunteers.

Ice Storm 1998

Nicole Blanchette was there to give personal comfort to the victims. Carol Chiasson and Réjean Normandeau, from Collège Laflèche, put their experience and their professional expertise at the disposal of the volunteer centre. They were assisted by a small group of students from the Collège Laflèche, a private school. The victims benefited from their skills and their energy.

The Trois-Rivières CLSC, managed by Laurent Paré, who came in person to the volunteer centre, sent four employees to the centre. They were Martin Foisy and Denise Brouillette, who are nurses, and France Pouliot and André Plamondon, who are social workers.

I contacted the local emergency preparedness organization and it officially recognized the Sélectôtel Le Baron as a shelter despite the fact that this was a rather unusual situation. That allowed Trois-Rivières to get involved right from the start. The city paid the meals then sent the bill to the Quebec government, as is the normal procedure. Second, it was able to proceed with the registration of people, to communicate the information to emergency preparedness, to get the cheques of \$10 a day, \$70 a week to people who had no money.

Then, there was the availability of buses, which allowed people to travel to Trois-Rivières, to go to a ski resort in Mont-Carmel, which offered a free day of skiing and outdoor activities, to go to the Island of Saint-Quentin, to go to the pool at the university and the cegep, all this with CITF buses. There was also the emergency preparedness organization in Trois-Rivières that provided and ensured safety for disaster victims during their stay.

There were also the Chevaliers de Colomb, who gave a considerable amount of money, which was used as petty cash, to buy little things that disaster victims needed.

There was Claude Bolduc, a professional radio host on CHLN, in our area, who volunteered almost every evening, after work, to come and emcee the shows. In the evening, there were shows at the hotel to entertain the people. He came as a volunteer. The same goes for Steve Normandin, an accordionist who organized a dance party to entertain the victims.

I want to mention that Gervais Morissette, the chief executive officer of the chronic hospital Le Trifluvien came to tell the volunteers that if they ever had no other solution than to come to the hospital for meals, he was going to offer free meals to the victims until the end of their stay among us. That clinched all our efforts.

Claudine Alarie, the political assistant to our MNA and minister, Guy Julien, had many contacts and took frequent action so that the operation could go as smoothly as possible for everyone involved.

• (2510)

In particular, I would like to mention the co-operation, solidarity and friendship demonstrated by the Greek community in the Mauricie region, especially in Trois-Rivières. I told you earlier that it was Soula Pelletier, originally from Greece, who contacted me to invite me to come and meet these people.

It was explained to me that people had run out of money and may have had little to eat for several days. Sometimes we have good ideas in this kind of situation. I decided to contact my friend, Kostas Dimitropoulos, president of the Greek association of the Mauricie region and owner of the Bravo Pizzeria restaurants.

I called my friend Kostas at his home around 8:30 on that Friday night. I explained the situation to him, told him about these 150 victims of the storm who had run out of money and had had little to eat for several days and I asked him and his friends in the Greek community to feed these people—we know how powerful and competent they are in the restaurant business—until the public authorities took charge of the situation. Mr. Dimitropoulos immediately asked me how many meals and at what time. The next night, a Saturday, 150 meals were delivered, and they even had more than they needed. The day after that, Sunday, once again there were meals for everybody.

On Monday, the vice-president of the association, Ilias Soilis, owner of the restaurant Le Sieur de Laviolette, opened his doors to all the nearly 100 storm victims who had accepted the invitation. He not only served them his famous buffet, but also included little treats such as beer, wine, drinks for kids, etc., all free of charge. This gesture deserves to be mentioned and praised, because it reflects the solidarity, friendship and affection between the Greek community and Quebec society, as they themselves like to point out.

This reminded me of a comment made by René Lévesque on November 15, 1976, which made a big impression on Quebecers like me. I hope that all those who came to Trois-Rivières will have fond memories of their visit and that they had a good trip back. But to use René Lévesque's line, in such circumstances, we may be something of a great nation.

[English]

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the people of Surrey Central, British Columbia and all Canadians to participate in the ice storm debate.

On Monday all members of the House supported the Reform Party's motion to set aside some time today to discuss the ice storm and pay tribute to the Canadian men and women who survived it and those heroes who helped make the survival quick and effective.

Ice Storm 1998

I join my colleagues in the House in extending my sympathy to those 20 persons who lost their lives in the storm, to those who lost those near and dear to them, to all those who suffered pain and sorrow, to all those who suffered loss of livestock, farms and businesses, and to all those who suffered from the cold and lived without heat and water. All Canadians from the other parts of Canada were with those who suffered during this natural disaster. Let me say, we share their frustration, anger and exhaustion.

I join my colleagues in this House from all political stripes in saluting all those heroes, all those brave men and women from our armed forces, the firefighters, police and paramilitary and those in the technological services who protected life and property and restored the services in the storm hit areas. My heart goes out to them with my admiration, pride and thankfulness.

There are some people who still do not have power, heat, water and other necessities in life. They cannot watch us on their televisions. I thank them for their patience and courage. Folks, help is arriving.

• (2515)

I pay tribute to all the churches, hospitals and other organizations, all Canadians and our neighbours from the south who participated in helping the victims.

During the storm an old lady in my constituency of Surrey Central called my office and said that she was desperate to send help to all the victims who were suffering. That shows that people from every corner of Canada care about the people who suffered during the storm.

My younger son, Livjot, who is in grade 7 but very much a politician, watched with dismay as hydro towers and wires fell under the weight of tonnes of ice. He was so touched by the disaster that he checked with me many times to see if my staff and other people I knew in Quebec and the affected areas of Ontario were all right.

As an employer my thoughts went to all the people I knew, particularly my assistants in my House of Commons office. I phoned each of them at home to find out how they were doing and how their families were coping. I assured them that the people of Surrey Central for whom they work in Ottawa were offering their sympathy and prayers.

One of my assistants, Mrs. Dee Spiegel, reported to me that she had opened up her home to a family of five people who had lost their electricity, water and heat. She and her husband generously housed the mother, father and the little children for three days and three nights until they could return to their own home. Everyone was warm and fed.

My other assistant, Mr. Dan Wallace, though his home was not affected, reported to me that his parents who live near Perth, Ontario, were in very bad shape. My assistant was terribly

concerned about his mother and father who were bravely fending off the ice storm, remaining in their home with determination, armed with only a cellular phone, a gigantic field stone fireplace and their mastiff dog.

I felt it was appropriate and I did not hesitate to assure both of my assistants that they should take whatever time they needed to do whatever they could for their families, their neighbours and their communities in dealing with the ice storm.

There are countless stories of suffering and hardship resulting from the ice storm. Many people had to work hard to save their lives, their families' lives, the lives of their livestock, their businesses and other things.

This is the first time in this parliament when members from all parties have looked through the lens of issues rather than the usual lens of their political stripes. I shall expect this trend to continue in the House.

All of us in the House should learn a lesson from the ice storm tribute today. We should strive to work together in a spirit of co-operation. It does not matter what part of the country we are from. It does not matter what ethnic background we have, what languages we speak, what religion or culture we have. We have one similarity and that is that we are all proud Canadians.

Another lesson we can learn from the ice storm is that we must be prepared for any disaster. Last year it was the floods in Manitoba and then it was the ice storm. Who knows what it will be next?

The ice storm shows us how vulnerable Canadians are to the elements of our homeland. Some parts of Canada are located on fault lines. My constituency of Surrey Central and neighbouring areas in the lower mainland and the islands are among areas prone to major earthquake. Our memories have not yet faded of the earthquakes in San Francisco and Japan.

At present, my province of British Columbia is left without emergency preparedness. It is a serious matter. Despite warnings municipalities are not ready. The provincial government is not ready. Above all, the federal Liberal government is not only but has closed CFB Chilliwack.

• (2520)

British Columbia is left without reasonable emergency preparedness. My constituents tell me if B.C. is abandoned or unattended by this government, scientists say a big earthquake may hit at any time. If we have not learned to believe politicians yet let us believe the scientists at least.

The nearest Canadian Armed Forces base which can provide emergency help is based in Edmonton, Alberta. Assuming that the roads and bridges will be operating, common sense can tell us how long it will take before the first help may arrive to the people who are suffering.

Ice Storm 1998

If the earthquake is strong, the CFB does not have the necessary logistics to airlift the supplies to be made available to those victims. What if the airstrip is not there for relief supplies to land? What will happen to those injured, buried or trapped children, women and men among fire and floods? Who will be there to hear their cries?

The government should not play political football with CFB Chilliwack or with the rescue helicopters. Closing CFB Chilliwack is clearly a political decision, not a logical one.

We should learn lessons from one suffering or one disaster and prepare for the next.

As I am about to close, I would like to bring two more quick points to the attention of the House. Let me first appreciate the kindness of all those who generously donated truckloads of wood, food and clothes to the victims. During the ice storm most Canadians were generous and helpful to each other. However, there were a few complaints that some unscrupulous businessmen were profiteering by selling gasoline, batteries, et cetera at much higher prices than normal. The Minister of Industry acknowledged this and has said that it was not illegal in Canada.

As parliamentarians we should work to prevent profiteering, at least during any disaster. I am prepared to present a private member's bill to this effect later on in the House.

I would also like to mention that another precious commodity we lack in our country that may be the most needed during any disaster is human blood. We often hear that the Red Cross is out of stock. We should be generous in donating blood and maintaining a reasonable stock of blood. Again, we have to assure Canadians and win their trust in our blood supply being safe.

I conclude my remarks by acknowledging on behalf of the people of Surrey Central the courage of our eastern country men and women in facing the ice storm. We pledge to learn from what has happened to them. We pledge to ensure that these lessons are not lost on the federal government.

Congratulations to all those who survived this disaster. I would also like to thank all those volunteers who worked tirelessly throughout this disaster.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): It being 1.24 a.m., the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

This House stands adjourned until later today at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 1.24 a.m.)

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