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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, April 21, 1999

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 21, 1999

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

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

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

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

ST. JOHN AMBULANCE

Mr. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today marks the 900th anniversary of the Order of St. John founded in the 11th century with the establishment of a hospital for Christian pilgrims in Jerusalem.

First aid became an integral part of the work of the order in England during the France-Prussian war in 1870. The humanitarian work of the British branch of the St. John Ambulance spread to Canada in 1882-83 when first aid classes were organized in Quebec City and Kingston.

We should all recognize the importance of the St. John Ambulance in providing first aid training to Canadians therefore enhancing their ability to save other lives and to improve the quality of those lives.

We thank them for their dedication and for their spirit of volunteerism. May they continue to serve us long.

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ST. JOHN AMBULANCE

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, during the 11th century, pilgrims to the Holy Land could find treatment in a hospital run by Benedictine monks in Jerusalem. In the year 1099, the Order of St. John from which the modern St. John Ambulance grew was eventually formed.

At 900 years of age, St. John Ambulance is the oldest voluntary health and welfare organization in the world. In Canada there are now over 25,000 volunteers, including over 12,000 uniformed brigade members who donate 2 million hours each year to community service and treat approximately 20,000 casualties, all free of charge.

Over 7,000 first aid instructors teach over 800,000 Canadians annually.

Today we celebrate and congratulate the accomplishments of St. John Ambulance for its public service. On this 900th birthday, we wish it success as it goes into the new millennium.

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TONG SUN LOUIE

Mr. Ted McWhinney (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Tong Sun Louie, who has died in Vancouver at the age of 102, was born in Canton and emigrated to Canada 90 years ago, establishing himself as a prominent Vancouver businessman and philanthropist and a founder of the Chinese Benevolent Association. His family includes university professors, medical practitioners, accountants and financial advisers, all leaders of the Chinese-Canadian community.

The Chinese-Canadian community in Vancouver encompasses a wide diversity in language and culture, places of origin within China, and actual years lived in Canada. Tong Sun Louie's long life reaches back to the historical origins of British Columbia, and he may certainly be considered among the early founding fathers of that province.

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[Translation]

ST. JOHN AMBULANCE

Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, St. John Ambulance is celebrating 900 years of community service. The white cross of the Order of St. John was first seen in the Middle Ages, and has since become a symbol of devotion and support, both in times of peace and in times of war.

Since its inception, St. John Ambulance has saved millions of lives, and an equal number have been saved as a result of its training, prevention and consciousness-raising efforts aimed at the general public.

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Every year, close to 800,000 people in Canada and Quebec receive St. John Ambulance training. In other words, millions of people could some day save lives.

We have all seen this great humanitarian organization in action, as we are familiar with its trained first-aiders, therapeutic canine hospital visitors, CPR courses, and ski patrollers.

The Bloc Québécois wishes to express its thanks to all St. John Ambulance volunteers. Their generosity and commitment merit our admiration.

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[English]

ST. JOHN AMBULANCE

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the NDP and in the context of National Volunteer Week, I rise to pay tribute to St. John Ambulance, one of the oldest charity and volunteer organizations in the world. St. John Ambulance is celebrating its 900th anniversary, a landmark in history that is unmatched by any other charity organization.

The Order of St. John, from which St. John Ambulance grew, dates formally to the year 1099 and traces its roots to a hospital run by Benedictine monks in Jerusalem.

The NDP gives thanks for the 25,000 volunteers and youth members and for all the ways in which St. John Ambulance contributes to the well-being of communities in every part of Canada.

The first aid training, the first aid treatments offered at large public gatherings and other services provided by St. John Ambulance make Canada a safer place for Canadians to work and play. Each year over 800,000 are instructed in first aid and over 200,000 Canadians are treated.

May I also take this opportunity to personally recognize two constituents of mine, Mr. Dan Trochim, who recently received the Serving Brother Award for his St. John Ambulance work, and Mr. Bill Bihun, my father-in-law, who was a first aid man in his workplace at the CNR and who served many years as a St. John's volunteer at public events.

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ST. JOHN AMBULANCE

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, in 1882 the St. John Ambulance Association took root in Canada. Over the years, this ever-vigilant community service group has grown to become a large family with volunteers numbering 25,000 nationwide. In 1099, the Order of St. John, an order of Benedictine monks, ran a hospital in Jerusalem caring for those in need. From this history comes our modern St. John Ambulance Association

and Brigade. After nine centuries of helping others, the St. John Ambulance Association has become the oldest charitable and humanitarian organization in the world. They are committed to enabling Canadians to improve their health, safety and quality of life by providing training and community service.

On behalf of the PC Party of Canada, I would like to thank Mr. David Johnston, Chancellor of the St. John Ambulance Association of Canada, the workers and the volunteers, and I wish them all a wonderful year of celebration of 900 years of community service.

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NATIONAL ORGAN DONOR WEEK

Mrs. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is Organ Donation Awareness Week and tomorrow is National Organ Discussion Day. As a member of the Standing Committee on Health, I have had the opportunity to learn a great deal about organ and tissue donation in our country.

Each year in Canada, approximately 1,500 people die who could be potential donors, yet only 400 individuals actually donate. These statistics are startling.

In Kitchener Centre companies such as the Mutual Group and organizations such as the Kidney Foundation regularly work to raise awareness about donation and transplantation.

While the word is spreading about the importance of organ donation, more needs to be done. In 1996 a Mutual Group survey showed 54% of Canadians did not know if their family members wished to donate their organs.

I am pleased to be able to participate in the Kidney Foundation's Celebration of Life event tomorrow. This event will not only help raise awareness, but honour local recipients and donors.

I encourage all members of the House to participate in this meaningful week and raise awareness on this important matter.

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FORUM FOR YOUNG CANADIANS

Mr. Janko Perić (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, each year the Forum for Young Canadians brings more than 500 high school students from across Canada to learn first-hand how government works.

Through presentations on the role of MPs and cabinet and simulations of an election, a cabinet committee, a question period and a federal-provincial conference, these future leaders gain a deeper insight into governance in Canada.

This year Andrew Rennie, Kathy Swan and Kneale Turner from my riding of Cambridge are taking part in this important learning experience.

I join all members in welcoming these young Canadians to our nation's capital and I wish them success as they discuss and debate our system of government.

* * *

● (1405)

NATIONAL ORGAN DONOR WEEK

Mr. Reed Elley (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, this is National Organ Donor Awareness Week. This is a time when we remember the role organ donors play in many people's lives. In Canada today over 3,000 people are waiting for life-giving organ transplants. Canada has one of the lowest donation rates in the world. This has to change.

In most cases the saving of another life through a donation means that someone else took the time to think of others and acted in the most generous way possible. They literally gave themselves for others.

It is possible that my own daughter will be in need of a kidney transplant in the future. At that point my wife and I will be eternally thankful to the donor for they will be able to give her what we are not able to give. The gift of a kidney would be to her the gift of life.

Tomorrow I will be introducing my private member's bill, the awarding of the organ donation medal act. This bill will posthumously recognize the supreme gift that is a given to others in our society.

I would ask for the support of all members of the House in order to ensure that organ donors are suitably recognized through this bill.

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MARGARET CAMPBELL

Mr. Bill Graham (Toronto Centre—Rosedale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise today in the House to pay tribute to my neighbour, friend, constituent and mentor to myself and so many Liberals in Ontario, Margaret Campbell, the first Liberal woman member of the provincial parliament in Ontario who passed away late Monday night.

In the 1960s, after having helped to pave the way for women in the legal profession, Margaret began her stellar political life as a Toronto ward councillor, subsequently being elected city-wide as a controller and going on to become a much respected city budget chief. Margaret was one of the first voices speaking to the issue of domestic violence in our society.

Margaret was invested with the Order of Canada in 1983. In 1985 she established a fund for Liberal women seeking provincial election.

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In recent years, Margaret gave her time to the out of the cold program and lobbying on behalf of "her street kids", as she called them, continuing her social work.

All Ontarians will regret the passing of Margaret, whose devotion to social justice in our community was known by all.

* * *

[Translation]

TRAGEDY IN LITTLETON, COLORADO

Mrs. Maud Debien (Laval East, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we were all greatly distressed to hear the news of the terrible tragedy that struck a school in Littleton, Colorado.

Two heavily armed young men took the lives of other vulnerable and defenseless young people. This unbelievable event, unprecedented in its toll of victims, leaves us with a feeling of helplessness. The most distressing thing about this tragedy is that the young killers focussed particularly on Hispanic and Black victims.

This drama is a brutal reminder that the battle for racial integration is still being fought each and every day. It shows how important it is to be constantly attuned to our youth, in order to help them not to feel hopeless about the future.

The Bloc Quebecois wishes to convey its condolences to the bereaved families and to all the people of Littleton who mourn today.

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PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 26, the Government of Canada announced the signing of a bilateral agreement to promote the employment of people with disabilities. The agreement covers the conditions involved in keeping them on the labour market as well.

This is a federal government framework agreement, elements of which are negotiated with each of the provinces. These agreements, it should be noted, reflect the priorities of the provinces.

Quebec will have a good share of this program, some \$195.5 million over five years, to cover half of the cost of setting up programs and services for persons with disabilities.

This is an illustration of federalism working locally and involving the federal government and its provincial partners.

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[English]

MILLION DOLLAR COP

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to a million dollar Canadian.

S. O. 31

Last weekend an off-duty Vancouver city police officer was walking his dog when the dog sniffed out a duffel bag left lying beside a dumpster. The bag contained a million dollars.

Just think about it, Mr. Speaker, you are out walking your dog and find a bag with a million bucks in it. What would you do? I do not know what I would do, especially since I do not have an MP pension, but this police officer did not even hesitate. He turned the money in like the great citizen he is.

The question now is, who owns that money. As a private citizen, this officer would be the first in line for the money if no one claimed it within 60 days. However, as a police officer the rules are not so clear.

The police say they have never seen a case like this and it may have to go before the courts. In the court of public opinion I think the verdict is crystal clear: this million dollar cop should get the money just like any other Canadian.

* * *

• (1410)

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Nick Discepolo (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 25, the Government of Canada announced it would invest \$175,000 in the Multimedia Exchange Tour on Climate Change.

This tour is to show young Canadians what simple things they can do each day to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at home, at school, on the street, in their neighbourhood and in their community.

This sort of action demonstrates the Liberal government's intention to work to protect our resources and to inform future generations about protecting the environment.

I invite all Canadians to do their share to protect the vital resources of our country and planet.

* * *

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS CANADA

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the auditor general released the most damning indictment to date of the management policies of the DFO.

The auditor general hinted that the same mismanagement that led to the collapse of the cod fishery is now leading toward the total collapse of the shellfish industry in Atlantic Canada.

On decision making within the department he had this to say:

The absence of a fisheries policy that fully reflects sustainability concepts means that decisions are made on an ad hoc and inconsistent basis rather than as part of an overall framework.

We found resource use decisions in the shellfish fisheries that are inconsistent with the concept of an economically viable industry.

The department's actions have encouraged increased harvesting capacity. . . even though there is uncertainty about how long the recent increases in this stock will last.

We have already seen the movie cod one. No one in Atlantic Canada wants to see the sequel, shellfish two.

* * *

[Translation]

KOSOVO

Mrs. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the result of yesterday afternoon's vote in the House is clear: the Prime Minister does not care about parliamentary approval for sending troops to Kosovo.

How else to explain his scorn for democracy, when in 1991, he considered it vital to hold a vote in parliament before Canada participated in the gulf war? Just how important is democracy to the Prime Minister?

Here is one explanation, perhaps. It comes from an interview the Prime Minister gave to a German newspaper early in the year. He said, and I quote "The good thing about our system in Canada is that, with a majority, the government just has to keep the members of its own party in line".

The Prime Minister missed a fine opportunity to obtain a strong consensus from all the parties in this House. He could have strengthened his international position and honoured the demands he made himself in 1991.

The Prime Minister's lack of transparency and leadership, his lack of respect for democracy and for parliament all indicate that power is more important than democracy in this country.

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[English]

SIR WILFRID LAURIER

Mr. Hec Clouthier (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 1999 marks the 80th anniversary of the death of a great leader who led Canada into the 20th century, Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

As this century draws to a close, we must continue to champion the ideals of Laurier's lasting legacy as we pass the torch to a new generation of Canadians. We must continue to reach out to our fellow citizens to strengthen our bond and our identity as Canadians. We must continue to relentlessly challenge our own stan-

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

dards. We must continue to make our voice heard distinctly and bravely because we can and we will make a difference.

Let us inspire with intense passion and fervent conviction, proud of our noble heritage, enriched by our diversity of talent, invigorated by our unity of vision, and empowered by our infinite hope and undying loyalty. As Laurier would say, this is our responsibility and we must do so without fear and without favour.

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NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR NURSES

Mr. Charlie Power (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, nurses in Newfoundland and Labrador have been betrayed by two levels of Liberal government.

During the provincial election only a few months ago, Premier Tobin felt the pressure of the nurses' demonstrations on the campaign trail. He told them not to worry and hinted openly that everything would work out well for them after he secured his re-election. Now, he and his minister of health have turned their backs on the nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Nationally, the Liberals are gouging a staggering \$6 billion a year in CHST transfers to the provinces. That means that every year in Newfoundland we receive \$146 million less for health, education and social services than we did during the former Progressive Conservative government's time in office, and the Liberals would have us believe that theirs is a party of compassion on social issues.

• (1415)

After six years of Liberal government, Canada's health care system is in crisis. The province's ability to support those who deliver health care services has been seriously undermined. This government's record on health care issues is a national disgrace.

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[*Translation*]

NEW MEMBER

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that the Clerk of the House has received from the Chief Electoral Officer a certificate of the election and return of the following member:

Mr. Rick Limoges, for the electoral district of Windsor—St. Clair.

* * *

[*English*]

NEW MEMBER INTRODUCED

Rick Limoges, member for the electoral district of Windsor—St. Clair, introduced by the Right Hon. Jean Chrétien and the Hon. Herb Gray.

[*English*]

KOSOVO

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, just to advise the new member for Windsor—St. Clair, the official opposition is on this side of the House. We certainly congratulate him on his victory in his riding.

The Prime Minister is heading to Washington this weekend to meet with other leaders of the NATO alliance. It is important that our country be represented with a clear position on the question of ground troops. We simply cannot be seen sitting on the sidelines waiting for our NATO allies to make decisions for us. Does the Prime Minister support the use of ground troops in Kosovo, yes or no?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are supporting NATO and at this moment the strategy of NATO is well known. There are air strikes at this moment. It is a strategy that is supported by the 19 nations involved in NATO. I presume there will be discussions about ground troops, but there is no such plan at this time. There is no position to be taken because there is no demand for us to have ground troops in Kosovo at this moment.

• (1420)

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important for Canadians to know what the position of the Prime Minister will be in representing Canada at the Washington meeting. The Prime Minister said yesterday "If everyone agrees, I will not be the only one not to agree". What on earth does that mean? It sounds like the Prime Minister is sitting on the fence. He is going to Washington to represent Canada and Canadians do not know what his position is.

Will the Prime Minister tell the House exactly what Canada's position will be going into these meetings in Washington?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the position of Canada is very clear. We are supporting and we are part of NATO because it is very important to stop the murdering, the raping and the cleansing that is going on in Kosovo. We are part of a team of 19 countries which have decided that the best way to handle the problem at this moment is to have air strikes. That is exactly what is going on. The air strikes will continue for some time. If someday we are confronted with the necessity to send ground troops, we will do so with the others. I said that yesterday. We will not be the ones to not be members of the team.

Oral Questions

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the issue will go before the committee in Washington in two or three days. Now there is an opportunity for the Prime Minister to call a vote on the issue. With a clear mandate from parliament the Prime Minister would be able to represent Canada's position with confidence. As it sits right now, no one knows what his position is.

The Prime Minister has two days left. Will the Prime Minister call a vote on the issue of further commitments to the Kosovo crisis?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are not confronted with the problem at this moment. We are in the phase of air strikes. If the opposition wanted to have a vote on that, a motion was introduced last Tuesday by them. They could have put the question to the House. They were not interested. The Bloc was not interested on Monday either.

I said that if we have to send ground troops there will be a debate in this House. However, there is no such thing at this moment and I do not want to speculate.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the war in Kosovo seems to be escalating and new military commitments by Canada seem to be most likely. Does the Prime Minister think he is some sort of king who can simply send his peasants off to war? Does he really think—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. I would ask the hon. member to be very judicious in his choice of words.

Mr. Bob Mills: Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister really think that he can make this decision over cocktails in Washington instead of consulting parliament?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member thinks that the President of the United States, the President of France, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, the Prime Ministers of Greece and Italy and the Prime Minister of Canada will be in Washington for three days to have cocktails, he should be ashamed of himself. This person pretends that he is a responsible member of parliament.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is easy for the Prime Minister to act this way. He thinks it is some kind of joke. He ruthlessly crushes dissent in his backbench and routinely forces whipped votes.

Why does the Prime Minister think that his opinion is the only one that counts when we consider going to war in Kosovo?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member refuses to recognize that there was a debate last week on this issue. His own leader got up to support the position of the government, as well as the leaders of all the other parties. We had the debate. There was a fourth debate on Monday on the same issue.

• (1425)

If they do not have confidence in the way the government is handling this issue, they can go against what we are doing and tell our soldiers that they are not backed by the Reform Party.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, during a one-hour television broadcast, we learned more about where the Prime Minister stood on the issue of sending ground troops than in two weeks of questioning here in the House.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister surprised everyone by saying that he would not be opposed to sending ground troops.

I want to know why the Prime Minister claimed that this question was too hypothetical to debate and vote on here in the House, when his mind was already made up. How could he have so little respect for parliament?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I answer all the questions put to me every time I am here, in the House of Commons.

I said, and I repeat, that no decision needs to be taken right now because NATO's strategy is to continue the bombing against President Milosevic's regime.

That is the government's position. There will be talks on the weekend. But right now we do not have to take a decision about sending combat troops to Kosovo. The decision has not been taken and does not need to be taken as long as NATO has not made a decision.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, just because the Prime Minister is speaking does not mean he is answering questions.

Does he realize that, because of his bungling, his stubbornness and his lack of respect for parliament, he will not be able to speak in Washington next Friday with all the moral authority that he himself required of Brian Mulroney in 1991?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are assuming our responsibilities. If the hon. member has had a change of heart since rising in this House on Monday ten days ago in support of the government's position, let him come right out and say so.

If he himself is suggesting that we should decide immediately to send combat troops when that is not being considered at this time, let him say so.

I hope we will not need to send combat troops. I hope we will find a diplomatic solution before thinking about sending troops, but if it comes to that, I have said—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Laurentides.

Oral Questions

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to some alarming rumours, a sizeable portion of the humanitarian aid sent to the Kosovar refugees is apparently being diverted to the black market by local gangsters.

According to these sources, this diversion might affect up to 70% of the aid being sent, and apparently certain humanitarian organizations have already moved out of some regions because of this major problem.

Could the Minister for International Co-operation bring us up to date on this extremely worrisome situation?

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister for International Cooperation and Minister responsible for Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have heard these same allegations, and are taking all necessary precautions to ensure that the food goes where it is intended to go.

We have contacted General Maisonneuve, who is on-site, in order to get his impressions on this phenomenon. He believes this may well be an exaggeration, but allow me to assure you that this is of great concern to us and we are going to do everything possible to ensure that the food gets to those who really need it.

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): One more attempt from the government side to reassure us, Mr. Speaker, but we still lack an awful lot of information.

Can the minister commit to including representatives of the NGOs helping the Kosovo refugees in the government briefing sessions, so that we may know to whom the humanitarian aid is really going?

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister for International Cooperation and Minister responsible for Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are going to do everything we can to ensure that the desired information is made available.

[*English*]

It is very important for us to ensure that the people who are suffering get the food that we are paying for. We will do everything to share whatever information we have. I know that the people of the non-governmental operations who are there would also be very willing to speak to anyone about what is happening.

• (1430)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said last night that if NATO decided to send ground troops into Kosovo then Canada would follow along.

Canadians expect a leader, not a follower. The Prime Minister should go to NATO and push for a diplomatic solution to the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo.

Will the Prime Minister advance a specific diplomatic proposal at the NATO summit and, if so, what is it?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are working at the United Nations. The Minister of Foreign

Affairs has been meeting with his colleagues and has talked with most of the leaders many times about a possible solution.

It is clear to all of us that President Milosevic has to accept that to put a stop to the killing, to the raping and to the ethnic cleansing that has been going on for more than a year is a condition for us to stop bombing.

Of course I have talked with the Russians. Everybody would like a solution, but there will be no solution as long as President Milosevic continues his ethnic cleansing and the rest.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Russia will only support a truly international civilian protection force in Kosovo.

NATO on the other hand clings to its demand that any civilian protection force must be NATO dominated. We cannot have it both ways. Do we want Russia's participation or do we want NATO's domination?

We need Canada to take leadership and persuade NATO to support a truly international option. Will Canada lead or blindly follow?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I replied last week to a question of the leader that my government and I wanted to have more than the NATO force.

I said at that time, and I have repeated it in the House many times, that we have to have a force that will include the Russians. I said that last week to one of your questions. You should read what I told you last week.

The Speaker: Order, please. I ask hon. members to direct their remarks to the Chair.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, on December 10, when the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food made his announcement of the disaster assistance program, he said it would be bankable and he said dollars would be put in producers' pockets.

We know now that the program is not bankable. We know now that very few if any dollars have been going into producers' pockets.

My question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. Will he admit that there are problems with the AIDA program right now? Is he prepared to talk to the industry, to talk to the stakeholders and to revamp the program so more of those dollars can flow into the pockets of producers?

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been continually talking to the producers, to the provinces and to the farm organizations.

Oral Questions

What I am prepared to say to the hon. member and everyone else is that even though over 13,000 forms have been sent out to the provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, only 291 have been returned by the producers. When they return those forms then we can work on the forms.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, I was speaking with the minister of agriculture from Ontario and I find that only 5% of the producers will be eligible for the AIDA program. Mr. Spooker, in Manitoba only 5% of producers will be eligible.

Some hon. members: Boo, boo.

The Speaker: Order, please. I know there is a question in there somewhere.

Mr. Rick Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, it was a Freudian slip. I apologize.

Approximately \$900 million was supposed to flow to farmers. Unfortunately the government seems to be wanting to save money as opposed to saving agriculture.

Will the minister please make sure that the application forms are better processed so he can put back in the producers' hands the dollars that he promised?

• (1435)

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if you want some names to call the hon. member, I know some that would be appropriate.

The member refers to the forms. If he would like to see a set of the forms, I would remind him that there are only seven pages. The first page of the form is name and address. The next one is miscellaneous income and expenses. The next one is purchased inputs, crop inventory, livestock inventory, a summary of the inventory. That is the sixth page. The last one is a list of receivables and payables.

There is not one bloody figure on there that cannot be pulled off their income tax or their farm statement.

The Speaker: Let us be judicious in our choice of words.

* * *

KOSOVO

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.): Just as long as you do not become known as Mr. Streaker, it will be fine with us, Mr. Speaker.

The official opposition support for our troops and against Milosevic is absolutely unwavering.

The Prime Minister says he will let NATO decide whether or not Canada commits troops to Yugoslavia. How many troops is he

prepared to commit, or will he let NATO tell us? How many lives will he put on the line, or will he let NATO tell us?

This is a huge decision. It should be a Canadian decision. Why is he letting NATO tell us what to do?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): I said, Mr. Speaker, and I repeat it, that if there is a request for ground troops to go into a combat situation in Kosovo, there will be a debate in the House of Commons before we send them.

They could have had a vote themselves and they ran away from the vote. Rather than ask a question on Kosovo the day after the debate in the House, they had a strange day last week because the Liberal Party is getting effective in western Canada.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, when will the Prime Minister act like a leader? The last time I checked, Canada was a sovereign nation. They made a big deal about not taking their marching orders from Washington. Little did we know they would be taking them from Brussels.

When will the government put its position to parliament so Canadians can have their representatives vote on the most important decision a nation can make?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we had a debate. The leader of his party spoke on behalf of his party, I presume, and all the other leaders spoke. The morning after they could have had a vote on that and they declined.

The government has the confidence of this side. I was told last week that I had the confidence of the four parties on the other side. I thought it was enough to speak on behalf of all Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Americans are thinking of withdrawing Canada's defence and aerospace export privileges.

The Minister of International Trade learned this from the newspapers, but the Minister of Foreign Affairs was aware that his departmental staff had been discussing this with Washington for some months.

My question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who appears to know what is going on. Since the planned restrictions even affect contracts with no connection to military secrecy, how does the government plan to defend itself against these new attempts by Washington to do harm to the trade between the two countries?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be meeting next Friday with the U.S. Secretary of State to discuss this. It is very important for Canada and for the United States.

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Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how can Canada claim to be properly defending the interests of Quebec, when no one in Quebec was aware that the Americans were preparing to impose such trade restrictions, while in Ottawa the matter had been being discussed with Washington for some months?

Is this Ottawa's philosophy has for defending Quebec: What they don't know won't hurt them?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when officials and ministers of the government deal with another country we speak for all Canadians, incluant les Québécois.

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KOSOVO

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the only thing that we can seem to discern about the Prime Minister's position on the conflict in Kosovo is ground troops if necessary but necessarily ground troops.

That begs the question under what criteria would the Prime Minister believe that ground troops would be necessary. When that question comes before the NATO conference and Bill Clinton and Tony Blair provide their answers to the question, what will our Prime Minister say? When are ground troops necessary? Does he have a position?

• (1440)

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a very clear position. We have entered into the campaign to stop President Milosevic and the ethnic cleansing, raping and murdering that are going on.

However, we are a member of a team and as a member of a team we have agreed on a strategy that the best way to break the resolve of Milosevic was to have air strikes. That is what is going on at this time. It took 45 days of air strikes in Iraq before we could move on to the next stage. We are not there yet.

We are accelerating the air strikes at this moment. I believe that it is the best policy at this time, agreed to by everybody including Canada.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister misses the point. The members of the team will be gathering in Washington later this week to talk about what extension, if any, we get into in the Kosovo conflict.

When that discussion happens, will Canada through its Prime Minister just sit idly by and let the other members of the team make a decision for us and our troops, or will we participate in that

discussion, make a recommendation and offer a position as to whether and under what criteria ground troops would be necessary?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for a party that is supposed to support a position of the government, it is trying to have it both ways.

The hon. member should know that this Prime Minister is not known as a very shy person.

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[Translation]

PLUTONIUM IMPORTS

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we heard that the government categorically rejected the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade regarding the idea of burning MOX fuel.

My question is for the Prime Minister. How can the government ignore the work of a House committee and take the decision to import plutonium without even consulting the public?

[English]

Hon. Ralph E. Goodale (Minister of Natural Resources and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the testing of a minute amount of MOX material is already well covered within the licensing authority of the Chalk River lab.

If the project should go any distance beyond that, it would require a full public environmental review. We have said that now at least 17 times.

[Translation]

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, given the importance of such a decision by the government, should the Prime Minister not announce without delay that this important issue of importing plutonium will be debated in the House?

[English]

Hon. Ralph E. Goodale (Minister of Natural Resources and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, now for the 18th time.

If there is any decision to be taken that goes beyond the mere testing that is already covered by the licensing at Chalk River, there would be a full public review that would cover all environmental, health and safety requirements as provided in either federal or provincial law.

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FISHERIES

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the auditor general has just issued a stern warning to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans that the same mismanagement which led to

Oral Questions

the collapse of the cod fishery now threatens the multibillion dollars shellfish industry.

We have no cod. Thanks to the minister, soon we will have no shellfish. Is the minister proud that his legacy will be that there will no shellfish industry left in Canada?

Mr. Wayne Easter (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we should refer to the hon. member as the member of gloom and doom. He certainly knows far better than that.

The shellfish industry was the main economic activator in Newfoundland last year. The auditor general had some good things to say in his report as well in terms of some of the directions we are taking.

We have learned lessons from the past. We intend to build on those lessons and we intend to use the auditor general's report as good advice.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the auditor general made it very clear that the shellfish industry is going down the same path as the cod did 10 years ago.

The only lesson that the taxpayers learned is that it cost them over \$3 billion, and there are still no cod and the fishermen are worse off today.

Will the legacy of the government with shellfish be another \$3 billion on the backs of the taxpayer? What is it?

Mr. Wayne Easter (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the moneys expended in terms of the retirement packages in the groundfishery were spent for good cause, to help in terms of the social welfare of the community and to retire licences.

• (1445)

In fact there was too much capacity. We recognized that and that capacity has been brought down from 18,000 licence holders in 1992 to 11,000 today.

In terms of the shell fishery, we are managing it in ways of good management plans, dockside monitoring, enforcement officers, and the list is too long for me to continue with.

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[Translation]

MARIJUANA

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Minister of Justice said she was open to the idea of decriminalizing the simple possession of drugs. However we know that those who use marijuana for therapeutic purposes are in a particularly difficult situation.

Would the minister agree to move quickly for those already using marijuana for therapeutic purposes so that they no longer have to face the threat of being charged?

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member is referring to a resolution passed by the Canadian chiefs of police yesterday in relation to the possession of a number of narcotic drugs. As I indicated this morning to the press, I am certainly going to review the resolution passed by the Canadian chiefs and I look forward to discussing it with them at their annual meeting this August.

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[Translation]

BLOC QUEBECOIS

Mr. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first the Bloc established its identity insisting on the recognition of two founding peoples. Now it is going off in another direction, doing a total about face, dropping this and not replacing it.

Could the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs tell us what he thinks of this new trick of the party without a future, which is now denying our history?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has inherited from its past the opportunity, the obligation and the privilege of promoting the cause of the French language and the French cultures in Quebec, throughout Canada and around the world and to make this rich heritage available to Canadians of all origins.

It is part of our heritage, of today's reality and of tomorrow's future as a united Canada.

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[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the agriculture minister continues to blame farmers for his poorly designed program and his mistakes in implementing it. To date there has not been a penny go out to the farmers in western Canada or in eastern Canada. Preliminary analysis of this program by bankers and farmers shows that they are not going to get the support they desperately need. What contingency plan does this minister have to get money to hard-pressed farm families in Canada that need that money now for seeding?

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the hon. member. There has been money flow, including provincial money and federal

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money, in a number of the provinces, and it will continue to flow. As soon as the forms come in, we will deal with them. I can assure the hon. member there will be further cheques in western Canada before the end of next week.

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the forms should have been there last February, not now in April when it is too late to get the money for seeding.

The agriculture minister also indicates that this is a simple thing to fill out. Does the agriculture minister not know that you have to convert from cash basis accounting to accrual basis accounting? Does the minister intend to pay the farmers who are unable to fill out their tax returns and this form themselves?

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they can file either on a cash basis or on an accrual basis. We and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture advise that if they are filing their taxes on a cash basis and they desire to change over in this application to an accrual basis, they will likely benefit from doing so.

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KOSOVO

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Yesterday the Prime Minister confirmed that Canada has no independent policy in NATO on the Kosovo crisis, that we are simply a lapdog for the United States. The United States has said that while an independent peacekeeping force in Kosovo should include Russian troops, it must be a NATO led force and not a UN led force.

• (1450)

As Russia will never accept this position, why will Canada not show independent leadership, break the unholy NATO consensus and insist on a UN led, not a NATO led, peacekeeping force?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I said last week and I repeated it again today, that we hope and we think it will work much better if the Russians are involved. I said that in the House last week. If the member does not want to listen to what I say, that is a different thing.

When he says that all the policies are not decided by Canada, of course they are not. There are 19 countries, the United States, France, Great Britain, Italy, Greece, the Netherlands, Spain and many others. Nobody dictates to anyone what to do.

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, so much for Canada's leadership.

My question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The minister knows that hundreds of thousands of desperate refugees inside Kosovo lack basic food, water and shelter. NATO's only bankrupt strategy is to keep bombing, possibly for months.

What concrete strategy is Canada pushing in NATO to meet the desperate humanitarian needs of these refugees, or does Canada simply support Tony Blair's statement that they will just have to wait until the bombing is stopped? How much more suffering, how much more starvation before Canada shows some leadership?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I reported this to the House last week. This was a subject that was discussed at the ministerial meetings of NATO last week. I am sure the secretary general will have a report that he will be able to share with the leaders during the Washington summit.

I remind the hon. member that the position we have taken all along is that the most effective way to stop the suffering in Kosovo is to have the withdrawal of the Serbian troops and to stop the violence and atrocities so people can go back to their homes and once again live in dignity.

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[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. André Harvey (Chicoutimi, PC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

Further to the Chartrand-Laferrrière report, which proves beyond a doubt, with multiple models, the absurdities of the Quebec and Canadian tax systems, does the Minister of Finance agree that families earning between \$26,000 and \$70,000 a year find themselves poorer after a salary increase than before it?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not my practice to comment on provincial policies.

However, I have to say 25 of the 39 measures identified by Mr. Chartrand and Mr. Laferrrière were introduced by the Parti Québécois. The number of measures introduced by that government and the lack of co-ordination among them contributes significantly to making Quebec the province with the highest marginal rates in Canada.

Mr. André Harvey (Chicoutimi, PC): Mr. Speaker, we must not forget that 14 of the measures in the Chartrand-Laferrrière report concern the federal government.

As he knows full well that free trade and the GST were approved at the time in order, obviously, to fight the deficit and to lower taxes, does the minister intend to correct these injustices in the coming days?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows very well, in our latest budget, we lowered

Oral Questions

taxes by \$16.5 billion over 36 months, we will eliminate the 3% tax introduced by the Conservative government and we have provided for many exemptions.

That said, the member's question is very relevant. This is why we must lower taxes, and I hope all the provinces will follow the federal government's lead, our lead.

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[English]

KOSOVO

Mrs. Judi Longfield (Whitby—Ajax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence.

Can the minister tell the House what the cost of the armed forces participation in Kosovo is to date? Will this put in jeopardy our recent commitments to address quality of life issues in the armed forces?

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in view of the comment by the President of the United States about its \$6 billion cost, I think it is fair to note what our costs are. Of course they are far more modest. Since June of last year when we first put our CF-18s into Aviano, Italy, the total cost to this date is \$32.4 million. Since the air campaign began some 28 days ago, it is approximately \$11.9 million.

• (1455)

The Government of Canada will of course meet those commitments. At the same time, it will also complete its obligation to improve the pay and benefits and quality of life for our fine Canadian forces.

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INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the auditor general issued another scathing report on the minister of Indian affairs and it is virtually a carbon copy of the one issued in 1996. The auditor general says that her department is woefully inadequate when it comes to accountability. Allegations of wrongdoing and misuse of band funds are not followed up on and resolved. In fact, the auditor general confirms that matters have gotten worse.

How can the minister deny that she and her incompetent department continue to fail grassroots people across this country?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I read the auditor general's report with interest.

The hon. member gives me the opportunity to reconfirm to this House my commitment to have an effective allegations management system in my department. In fact, that is why about a year ago

I issued national guidelines on allegations management. In every region across this country we have allegations co-ordinators who are trained to deal with the variety of allegations that we would receive from first nations—

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

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[Translation]

BILINGUALISM

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Natural Sciences Research Council has just opened up a temporary personnel supervisor position. It is offered to anglophones, bilingualism is not required, and unilingual francophones are not accepted.

How can the President of Treasury Board justify such a thing in the national capital region? Will francophones be excluded from the temporary positions, or will they have to communicate with their supervisor through an interpreter?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the National Research Centre informs us, since they are the ones doing this, that what they need in these positions, in this unit, is four people.

Of the four, three are designated bilingual because the requirements of the position demand bilingualism, while one position is designated anglophone because the requirements of the position demand that the person speak English.

* * *

[English]

TRADE

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister for International Trade and has to do with the NAFTA meetings taking place later this week.

I would like to ask the Minister for International Trade why Canada is not seeking either to entirely get rid of the investor state dispute settlement mechanism or to significantly modify it by actually amending the agreement. Why do we read that the minister is willing to settle for an interpretative note? This is certainly a backtracking from what I understand him to have said before and it is certainly inadequate.

Is he willing to change his mind on this and actually seek an amendment to that particular provision, chapter 11 of NAFTA or to eliminate it altogether? That is what is at the heart of what is wrong with NAFTA, and with the MAI when it was still alive.

Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that after five years NAFTA has been a tremendous success for all three countries. Trade is up, investment

is up, and employment is up. We have built a North American economy that is working well for all three countries.

At the same time, in addition to discussing the achievements, we also want to address the challenges that still confront NAFTA. We have said that we will put chapter 11 and the investor state on the agenda to discuss it from a perspective of transparency, narrowing the word and meaning of expropriation without reopening NAFTA and losing the entire chapter.

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[Translation]

KOSOVO

Mr. André Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister talks of slaughter, rape and ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.

This information comes, I hope, from sources other than the media. Such actions alone would probably justify sending ground in ground troops.

Could the Prime Minister share with members of the House the information he has on these atrocities? This would not put anyone's life on the line, and might actually save lives. Could the Prime Minister share with members of the House his sources of information on the atrocities in Kosovo?

• (1500)

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, any member of this House and any member of the public who watches even a little bit of television and reads the papers knows what we know. It is public knowledge that operations began more than 12 months ago.

I am very surprised that the hon. member claims that these things are not going on. There are very few people in the world unaware that atrocities are now taking place in Kosovo and have been for the last 12 months.

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[English]

SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE ON CHILD CUSTODY AND ACCESS

Mr. Roger Gallaway (Sarnia—Lambton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on December 10, 1998, the report of the Special Joint Committee on Child Custody and Access was tabled in the House.

I know that there are thousands of Canadians who have been touched by divorce and who are waiting for a response. I would like to ask the Minister of Justice when she will table the government's reply to the report.

Privilege

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all members of that special joint committee for the very fine work they did on a very important issue and a very difficult issue for many Canadians, child custody and access.

I want to let the hon. member know that he and other members of the House can expect the government's response on or before May 10.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of a delegation led by the Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda, the Honourable Francis Joash Ayume.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

* * *

• (1505)

PRIVILEGE

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO COMMITTEE REPORT

The Speaker: Yesterday a question of privilege was raised by the hon. member for Red Deer. At that time there were two points raised. I judged that it was not a question of privilege, but I wanted to have more information on the whole situation.

The first situation we dealt with yesterday concerned a matter of courtesy to have the information there, and we dealt with that issue.

The second issue dealt with the alleged passing out of information to the media before our members of parliament received it. That was the issue we were dealing with.

I asked yesterday either the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the government House leader to give us an explanation today, and the government House leader seems prepared to give us the information now.

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I undertook yesterday to investigate the complaint made by the hon. member for Red Deer and others concerning the alleged leak of the government response to a report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade and I now wish to report to the House on that matter.

First, to put the matter into context, I should point out that the more common method of tabling such responses is by depositing them with the Clerk of the House, pursuant to Standing Order 32(1). As a consequence, such responses are often given little public profile and may even escape the attention of members. In this case the government believed that the issue at hand required public attention and chose to table the response along with an outline of its position on the general question raised in the House itself. The intent of the government was not to try to obscure the

Privilege

report from hon. members, but was quite the opposite; that is, to draw it to their immediate attention.

Unfortunately, it was evident from an article in the media over the weekend that someone with at least basic knowledge of the position arrived at by the government chose to convey such information without authority and quite probably unlawfully to at least one journalist. It does not appear from the article in question that the writer actually had a copy of the material tabled on Monday, but of course who knows? However, somebody obviously improperly relayed information which was at that stage still a cabinet confidence.

Officials in several departments were privy to this information and it is therefore quite impossible, at this stage at least, to identify the culprit. I wish to assure the House that such unauthorized release of information is not condoned by the government, least of all by myself, and that a full investigation by the proper authorities is under way on this matter.

The hon. member for Red Deer indicated that a journalist contacted him some three hours—I believe that was the number he gave—before the documents were tabled, claiming to have a copy. I regret to report that two journalists were given copies of the material sometime between 1.30 p.m. and 2 p.m.—not three hours before—on an embargoed basis. Even though the journalists in question appeared to have abided by the undertakings of the embargo, I regard this release as an error in judgment nonetheless.

I want to tell the House that it is definitely not the regular practice of the government to provide advance copies of material to be tabled in the House to the media unless comparable arrangements are made for relevant opposition spokespersons, as is done on matters such as the budget. I must assure the House that I will draw this matter to the attention of my colleagues in an effort to avoid such discourtesy in the future. I will come back to this point a little later in my remarks.

• (1510)

An hon. member: Your nose is growing.

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate—

The Speaker: Gentlemen, we are listening to an explanation. I would very much appreciate it if hon. members would not heckle, especially at this time.

I take this to be a very serious matter and I want to hear what the government House leader has to say about it. I therefore ask hon. members to stop heckling.

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I am giving the information which I know to the House and the information which I believe to be the truth. For members to suggest that I am doing the opposite of telling the truth is not only disrespectful of me, but indeed of the entire House of Commons.

It has not been possible to discover any release of any material as earlier as three hours before the tabling, although, as I said earlier, sometime between 1.30 p.m. and 2.00 p.m. two copies were released. I have been able to confirm that. It may be possible to trace this. If the hon. member for Red Deer wishes to be of assistance, he could speak directly to the office of my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs or, if he prefers, with department officials or even me if he has evidence that information was available three hours ahead of time.

The second issue at hand concerns the availability of material once tabled in the House of Commons. I am informed that the regular distribution system of the House of Commons was employed in the normal manner and that hon. members and their offices had access to the papers within the usual timeframes for such distribution. The specific times vary, of course, depending on the location of each member. I am informed that some offices received the material within about half an hour of tabling. One case which I verified received it only minutes after it was tabled.

However, I do not believe that sufficient courtesy was demonstrated in making information available to members in the House itself. I say this for the following reason. My information is that immediately after the tabling the kits containing the material tabled and related documents were placed in the government lobby and distributed in the foyer outside the House of Commons. These kits were available to members of the opposition on request. I was informed that a staff person from the New Democratic Party did in fact receive a kit upon request. However, they were not placed in the opposition lobby in a similar manner to their being placed in the government lobby, and I apologize for that as well.

In addition, I am told that the clerk of the standing committee sent copies of the response to all members of the standing committee by electronic mail mechanism at 3.30 p.m. Nonetheless, as I said earlier, copies were not placed in the opposition lobby for general availability. That is not the same as what was afforded to government members and I consider that to be wrong as well.

All parties in the House sometimes place material in their lobbies for partisan use by members. Nobody would expect that type of information, talking points and so on, to be shared. However, the material in question was not of a partisan nature, but was a review of government policy to which all hon. members have an equal right of access. Again, I apologize most sincerely for this error in judgment and basic courtesy.

In reviewing this matter it is clear to me that the government could serve the House better by improving and standardizing the method of responding to committee reports, when required, by Standing Order 109. I have therefore directed my officials to prepare new guidelines for departments with a view toward assuring that the needs of the House remain the principal objective of such responses.

Privilege

This case certainly demonstrates that some attention has to be given to the government's internal security. In addition, it exposes some errors in judgment and courtesy which, quite frankly, embarrass me, for which I have apologized and about which I have taken steps to correct. There was however, and I say this sincerely, no attempt to deprive the House of any information to which it is entitled. Indeed it was the opposite that was intended, that is to say, to maximize the information available to the House.

• (1515)

I submit, however, that there was no contempt for the House either intended or committed and that this matter should be taken as a justifiable complaint. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that you would determine that it was acted upon immediately, which it was.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have something new to add to what we are discussing?

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to clarify some of the points that have been raised just so that you have exactly what I said and the exact times.

My first interview was requested shortly after 12 o'clock, at about 12.04 or 12.05. The next two were after one o'clock. They said they had copies of it. They quoted from it and asked me to respond to it. That was three reporters.

Also, the hon. House leader mentioned that these were available at 4.30. My office is in the Centre Block and ours should be one of the first to be delivered, I believe. We could not get a copy until 5.30, as I mentioned yesterday.

Also, for our lobby staff person whom the hon. House leader said could have gotten one across the way, it took 55 minutes before he was able to get a copy.

We checked with the Clerk and we were told it would be at least an hour before we could have a copy. The clerk of the committee, whom we also called, confirmed that she had a great deal of difficulty getting copies so that she could distribute them to the members.

I really believe that we need an impartial investigation into all of this because there certainly is a conflict of information.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that I welcome the remarks of the government House leader in this regard.

I do not doubt the sincerity of his apology or his good intentions in this regard, but I would say that he has a big job ahead of him. I think there is a culture of contempt for parliament on the other side which he nobly struggles against but which we find rife within the ranks of his own party. I wish him well.

For the record, I want to say that we were looking for a copy and once we realized where they might be, at about 3.45, we did not receive one until 3.55. Of course the problem remained that by that time all the commenting was over and opposition members were in a position of not being able to comment in an informed way.

But I welcome the remarks of the government House leader and I wish him luck in bringing a rogue government to heel.

The Speaker: We do have a dispute as to the facts and to the times.

If I understand the hon. government House leader, he said in his statement that he was going to look into one or two other aspects about this particular incident as to the timing. He asked the hon. member for Red Deer if the hon. member would share with him to try to get to the bottom of all this.

Today we have an apology from the government House leader. I, too, believe it is sincere. I take it at face value.

Yes, the information should have been put in both lobbies. No, it was not. Will that be corrected? The hon. government House leader has said that he will do everything he can to see that this type of thing does not occur again.

On this whole issue of leaks, the opposition House leader says that he has intervened nine times. That is true. He has.

We have given our committee on procedure in the House this particular problem to look at. I anxiously await its report to this House and to see what it has come up with as a suggestion where we, members of the House of Commons, can better regulate these "leaks".

• (1520)

I would like to believe, as some hon. members have said, that the leaks come only from one side, but I do not. I think the leaks come from all sides. It is the institution that we are dealing with here. It is the institution at this time in history is in our hands.

I hope that in future this type of thing will not occur and I take the hon. government House leader's intervention as telling us that on his word it will not, to the best of his ability.

But, to the other thing about when it was released, as to the times, was it 12.04 or was it 1.05, I think this might be open to discussion. The offer has been made by the government House leader to the member for Red Deer to collaborate, to see if they can get to the bottom of this.

As for me, I judge there is not a question of privilege. But how many times do we have to stand in this House together to say that we want to do something about this. If we decide to do something, I await some kind of indication from the committee. If it is not forthcoming from the committee, then we will have to look perhaps at some other way of getting a way—and I use this word in the general sense—to police ourselves as members of parliament

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because we are not only hurting ourselves, we are hurting the institution.

At this point I find that it is not a point of privilege. I hope that it will not occur again. I hope that the committee can come up with a solution to our particular dilemma.

simply want to point out that it is a good account of the activities in which we took part.

* * *

[English]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

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 14 petitions.

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association has the honour to present its report to the Canadian delegation to the first part of the 1999 session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, held from January 25 to 29, 1999 in Strasbourg, France.

[English]

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Oak Ridges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to present in both official languages the report of the Canada-Taiwan Friendship Group delegation, January 1999.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to table in the House in both official languages the report of the Canada-Taiwan Friendship Group delegation of January 1999. We had the opportunity to meet with government officials and business leaders to promote trade and culture.

• (1525)

[Translation]

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the member for Oak Ridges, who was also a member of the delegation, was kind enough to supply me with his report. I

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 72nd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding its order of reference from the House of Commons of March 1, 1999 in relation to the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2000 in regard to vote 20 under Privy Council, Chief Electoral Officer. Mr. Speaker, the committee reports the same.

* * *

TAXPAYERS BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Ref.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-495, an act to confirm the rights of taxpayers and establish the office for taxpayer protection.

He said: I am pleased to rise to move first reading of this bill commonly known as the taxpayers bill of rights.

For several years now the Reform Party through its democratic party process has had a policy in its blue book calling for the introduction of a taxpayers bill of rights which would protect taxpayers from summary unfair treatment by the Department of National Revenue. We now know that department will become the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency which will be even less accountable than the current department is to this parliament.

We believe it is terribly important to enshrine in a law the rights of taxpayers to due process so that they are treated as innocent until proven guilty, rather than having the reverse onus from which they currently suffer.

This bill would also create an office for taxpayer protection which could order that taxpayers be protected from unfair harassment by members of the revenue agency.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

Mr. Richard M. Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I move that the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Finance presented on Friday, June 12, 1998, be concurred in.

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I will be sharing my time with the member for Souris—Moose Mountain.

This report from the finance committee deals with the issue of tied selling in the banking industry. I think it is important to note that the banks have long been regarded as captains of the financial industry in Canada. They are heavily regulated by requirement of the government. As well, they are required to operate in a most transparent and ethical manner by the consumers of their business.

• (1530)

Private industry is willing to present to the public a code of ethics or a code of conduct by which it operates so that the people looking to put their trust in their institutions can plainly see the guidelines the banks are going to operate by. The public, the consumers of those services, is able to clearly judge whether those institutions are in fact operating within the guidelines of their code of ethics or code of conduct.

No one will argue that the banking industry is a powerful decision maker in the financial sector and in the economy. It makes very powerful decisions that affect the economy. However, those decisions are less powerful than the Liberal cabinet which sits on the front benches of the government.

While the banks are prepared voluntarily to lay out their code of conduct, their code of ethics, their principles for all to see and to judge them by, the Liberal government has refused, for a number of years now, to make public the code of ethics that the Prime Minister himself says exists, the special code of ethics that he has for his ministers. He has been telling us since 1994 that indeed he has a special code of ethics that his ministers must adhere to and be judged by.

As the Canadian public, the consumers of banking services, ask the banking institutions to have their code of ethics made public—and which they have no problem in complying—we in the Reform Party have been asking the Prime Minister himself to make public the code of ethics, that supposedly exists, that his cabinet members, the most powerful decision makers in the country, are bound to adhere to. Yet he has refused every single request for the public presentation of that code of ethics.

We also understand that he has an ethics counsellor who helped draft the code of ethics. We have requested from the ethics counsellor a copy of this code of ethics but he has told us to speak to the Prime Minister. We have been talking and pleading with the Prime Minister to table in the House this mysterious code of ethics, if it actually exists, so that not only opposition members of parliament but even his own backbench members of parliament would be able to see this code of ethics. As well, the Canadian public would be able to see this mysterious code of ethics that the Prime Minister has maintained over the years actually exists.

Despite the numerous requests to the Prime Minister to table this code of ethics, he has refused to do so a number of times. To date, we have not seen it. He says he has it. We have asked for it but he has not presented it.

• (1535)

One can only draw one of two conclusions: Either the Prime Minister has not been totally honest with us in saying that he has—

Mr. Paul Bonwick: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I believe the language the hon. member is using is not parliamentary in nature. He is suggesting that a member of the House is not telling the truth. I would ask perhaps that the hon. member retract his statement.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I listened to the comment by the hon. member for Prince George—Bulkley Valley and his exact words were “not totally”, so that there was that inference.

I accept the point made by the member for Simcoe—Grey. I have allowed a certain discretion when the inference was not directed at a specific individual, but in this particular case, although it was oblique, it was directed at a specific individual. I believe the member for Simcoe—Grey is quite correct.

I would therefore ask the member for Prince George—Bulkley Valley to withdraw that remark.

Mr. Richard M. Harris: Mr. Speaker, of course I withdraw that. Let me rephrase that. I see you are anticipating this new phrase.

The Prime Minister has told us that this code of ethics exists and that it is a real thing but he has been reluctant or has refused to deliver it.

Either this code of ethics does not in fact exist—and the Canadian public, the opposition and even the government’s own backbenchers can draw whatever conclusion they want from that—or this code of ethics does in fact exist and the Prime Minister, in his refusal to present it in the House, is doing it because he does not want his own cabinet members, the most powerful decision makers in the country, to be subject by the Canadian people to the close scrutiny that would be available if that code of ethics was made public.

One has to then draw the conclusion that either it does not exist, even though the Prime Minister has said it does, or it does exist and the Prime Minister feels that he may just possibly be embarrassed by the conduct of his ministers. Given that those must be the only two conclusions we can draw, I say in the House that both of them, either one of them, are totally unacceptable in parliament.

When the Canadian people look at the House of Commons and see the Prime Minister, the cabinet, the government and the

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opposition benches, I think we would all want them to have as much confidence as possible in the decision making that goes on in the House.

Incidentally, the Prime Minister, in both of his red books, promised over and over again openness, transparency, honesty and straightforwardness in how the government would run the country. We see no example of that.

This is a very simple request. If the Prime Minister has a code of ethics for his ministers, which he says he holds them responsible to, he should just simply present it to Canadians so they can benefit from it and be able to look at it and say "This is fantastic. I can see now that every cabinet minister in this government must hold themselves to the highest standards in the operation of their jobs and in the performance of their duties".

That is what we in the Reform Party want for Canadians and what I want for Canadians. However, that is obviously not what the Prime Minister and every single one of his Liberal members want for Canadians. That is a shameful display of arrogance in this House.

• (1540)

I have received many letters from constituents all across the country asking me why the Prime Minister will not table this code of ethics. They want to know what he is afraid of. Only the Prime Minister knows what he is afraid of. Only the Prime Minister knows the danger that might be present if he were to table that code of ethics for his ministers. Not only could we judge and scrutinize the way cabinet ministers carry out their duties, but indeed all Canadians could do that. Maybe then the Teflon jacket on our Prime Minister would start to fray.

The vote last night by all the Liberal members in unison was an absolute shame. It was a black mark on democracy. It was a slap in the face of Canadians who want to trust the government. The Liberals should be ashamed of themselves. I hope the people of Canada will hold each and every one of them responsible for it. I would ask them to check out their local newspapers when they get back to their ridings.

Mr. Paul Bonwick (Simcoe—Grey, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member speaks of ethics, of his request and of the defeat of his bill last night. The very fact that he is making suggestions in the House that either individuals or the government itself are not abiding by a strict rule of ethics, whether it be on paper or whether it be in the heart, is profoundly sad.

My question falls in line with the word "ethics", which he has been tossing around in the House. Would he stand up in the House today and clearly state that he feels all the members within his Reform caucus act in a very ethical manner when they provide the services they were elected to provide, keeping in mind the commitments of his leader on things like Stornoway, chauffeur driven cars,

clothing expenses and so on? I wonder if he would take a moment to reflect on his own party's ethics or lack thereof.

Mr. Richard M. Harris: Mr. Speaker, on the wall of my constituency office is a code of ethics that I signed in front of over 100 witnesses when I was first elected in 1993. I had no hesitation in making that code of ethics public. It hangs in my office for all my constituents to see. It outlines all the promises I made to my riding and how I would conduct my duties as a member of parliament, their elected representative.

I ask nothing less than that of the government. Let it put forward its code of ethics. Let the Prime Minister tell the Canadian people exactly how he expects his ministers to do their job. The Prime Minister has not done that. Every single Liberal member of that government voted against it last night. This was a shameful thing for them to do and they should be ashamed of themselves. They have once again betrayed the trust of the Canadian people.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the code of ethics is a very important issue. I thank the hon. member for bringing forward the issue and for demanding that the code of ethics be tabled by the Prime Minister and his cabinet in the House.

Yesterday, we saw that not even one Liberal member voted for it. They seem to have some sort of fear, or, as the hon. member pointed out, maybe the code of ethics does not exist, or maybe they just do not want to present it. What is the hon. member's opinion—

• (1545)

Mr. Paul Bonwick: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I was under the impression that the hon. member was bringing forward a motion with respect to finance. I am curious—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): That is a point of debate and not a point of order.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Mr. Speaker, I would like to find out from the hon. member what conclusion he draws when he sees there is hesitation in tabling the code of ethics document in parliament.

Mr. Richard M. Harris: Mr. Speaker, the only conclusion I can draw is that either there is not a code of ethics, as he says there is, or he has some fear that his cabinet ministers might breach that code of ethics.

He has not only refused to produce the so-called code of ethics. He failed on another promise that he made in May 1994. He was asked if there would be a code of ethics and he said yes. He said "As a matter of fact I will consult with the leader of the opposition and the leader of the Reform Party before making that appointment".

An hon. member: Who said that?

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Mr. Richard M. Harris: The Prime Minister said that in May 1994. He said that he would search out an ethics commissioner who would create the code of ethics.

He did not confer with the leader of the opposition or the leader of the Reform Party. We were the third party then. We are now the official opposition. Not only did he not fulfil that promise, but now he says that there is a code of ethics he is unable or unwilling to present to the House.

In short, the conclusion I draw is that there must be something the Prime Minister is not telling us about this code of ethics.

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, today both sides of the House stood and welcomed a new duly elected member. I am rising to debate the motion by my colleague from Prince George. I bring to the attention of the House that what I have to say is more important than just one MP. It is more important than the Liberals. It is more important than any party in the opposition. I am talking about what is important to Canadians.

Just a few days ago a group of grade six students from Kanata came to visit me. It was strange that they would come in from an Ontario city but I enjoyed them. One thing I said to them was "You are more important as individuals today than I am because you are the future of Canada".

I will not be talking in these brief few minutes about the issue of tied selling. I will be talking about what is important to the House and every member of the House. We have to get into a selling program.

We just debated the issue of the leakage of reports. What did the public see when it listened to this debate? It goes beyond this institution. It goes beyond the city of Ottawa. It goes to the farthest point west on Vancouver Island. It goes to Bonavista. Canadians are now looking at the House in a disrespectful way. As individuals, as hon. members, our responsibility is to uphold the dignity and the traditions of the House.

Mr. Peter Adams: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I know the member is discussing the behaviour of members of parliament, but this is a motion that has to do with tied selling. The member just said that he would not be speaking about tied selling.

There is a great interest in this topic. My colleagues opposite have raised it. I think, Mr. Speaker, you should rule that he should address the topic of the motion.

• (1550)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The deputy government House leader makes a very good point. The opposition brought in a specific concurrence motion. The Chair will ensure

that those who wish to speak to the subject remain focused closely on the subject.

Mr. Roy Bailey: Mr. Speaker, what I was getting at was our responsibilities as members of the House to take a look at all things which affect finance in the House and the committee report.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business deals with finance and the financial business of thousands of its members across Canada. Those same members rate politicians at the lowest end of the scale. That is exactly what I am telling the government opposite. It is time we stopped the nonsense. It is time we stopped the bickering and took a look at something which is bigger than both sides of the House.

When dealing with financial matters and with the report of the Standing Committee of Finance it should be of the greatest importance. Let me put it this way. At the present time whenever Canadians see expenditures, revenues and so on, they look upon them with a great deal of suspicion.

Members of all parties in the House need to take all possible steps within our powers from every corner of the House to re-establish with the Canadian people a basic trust in what we are doing and a basic trust that every cent of revenue which comes in and every expenditure which is made are totally accounted for including, as the hon. member said, tied selling. That is a concern.

I pass a paper around when I talk to grade 11 and 12 high school students. When I say politician I tell them to write down one word. One of the most common words they write down is the same as the Canadian public says, crooks. We have a job of selling to do not only within this finance committee report. That is true, but we need to be more accountable.

Therefore, after 42 years in public life I believe the motion of the member from Prince George should be thoroughly considered by the opposition. I hope Canadians see the purpose of what we have done today in the hon. member's motion.

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister for International Cooperation and Minister responsible for Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is about finance. It is about tied selling. It is about a lot of latitude. When we talk about finance and some of the things we really value, we talk about honesty, integrity and ethics. We sometimes wonder why the Canadian public does not really appreciate politicians. Perhaps it is because sometimes some politicians have the habit of misinterpreting or misinforming.

Let me say something. I am a minister of the government. There is a formal code of ethics for ministers. It is a public document. We have to fill out how much we make and what we own and all the rest of it. Over and above that, the Prime Minister insists on other things from us. He names us. He decides what he wants us to do. That is his prerogative. We have access to information. Absolutely everything we do is scrutinized every day. We certainly do not fear

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any of that because we know it is a part of what makes the country so great.

• (1555)

In all honesty and integrity I remember when the Reform Party used to say that it would do things differently in Ottawa. It was to use civility. It was to treat others with respect. Have we seen that from the Reform Party? Absolutely not.

Some of the things that have gone on are absolutely unbelievable. Maybe Reformers should look to mend some of their own ways and look to what they said before they got here. Perhaps, if they followed that to the letter, we would all be better off and Canadians would respect us all a lot more.

Mr. Roy Bailey: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talked about some hon. members misinforming. I had no intention of doing that and I certainly did not do that. Nor have I misinformed in my whole career. I too have a code of ethics and I have about 42 years in my record to prove it.

We talked about respect. What happened after question period when the Speaker of the House and the hon. House leader wanted to look into something which does not show respect for the House? It was a leak, and that is what bothers me.

It is time the House did a better selling job, not just selling the finance report but selling ourselves, our total selves, our honesty and integrity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I will go across the Chamber and recognize the member for Simcoe—Grey.

Mr. Paul Bonwick (Simcoe—Grey, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is refreshing to know that you are approaching this in a fair manner, unlike perhaps some of my hon. colleagues across the floor.

The topic at hand was tied selling which is of concern to Canadians across the country. We are sitting here discussing tied selling. It is a very relevant subject for the House to be discussing. However, once again when we have an issue at hand that is of concern to Canadians all across the country—

Mr. Richard M. Harris: They support tied selling.

Mr. Paul Bonwick: By the way, they support tied selling.

When we are dealing with a topic such as this, all of a sudden they detract from the important and critical issue of the finances of Canadians and go to the ethics of cabinet and the ethics of the Prime Minister. They will not talk about their own ethics. I put a question very—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Actually the hon. member for Souris—Moose Mountain will have to anticipate the question because he has exactly 25 seconds to make his point.

Mr. Roy Bailey: Mr. Speaker, I take a bit of resentment from the inference that I was not being fair. Let me tell the hon. member that

I am one of the fairest men he will ever take a look at, and he should take a good look at me right now. What I am talking about—

An hon. member: Tied selling.

Mr. Roy Bailey: Yes, indeed, it is tied selling and anything related to the selling of the House to Canadians. That is what I am talking about.

Mr. Bob Kilger: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I move that we proceed to orders of the day.

Mr. Richard M. Harris: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. When you called for a resumption of debate, the hon. member for Calgary East was quite prepared to stand and continue the debate. Unfortunately he was missed. I wanted to bring that to your attention.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The Chair is deeply indebted to the hon. member for Prince George—Bulkley Valley.

The hon. member for Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh has moved that the House do now proceed to orders of the day. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

• (1600)

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): In my opinion the yeas have it.

An hon. member: On division.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

CRIMINAL RECORDS ACT

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (for the Solicitor General of Canada) moved that Bill C-69, an act to amend the Criminal Records

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Act and to amend another act in consequence, be read for the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Jacques Saada (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise to speak to and comment on the motion at second reading of Bill C-69.

Since coming to power, our government has shown through specific actions its desire to thoroughly reform our criminal system, by passing, for example, a number of administrative and legislative measures to prevent the sexual exploitation of children.

First off, in 1995, our government passed amendments to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to allow, among other things, certain offenders to be kept in prison until the very last day of their sentence, if it had been shown that they were likely to commit another sexual offence against a child.

In 1997, we added a new category of offender to the Criminal Code, that of long term offender, which applies to sexual offenders and provides for their surveillance for up to ten years after the end of their sentence.

In 1995, we created the national flagging system, which through the intermediary or the use of the Canadian police information centre, which I will call the CPIC throughout my text, enables prosecutors to better identify and try violent offenders, under the provisions of the Criminal Code pertaining to dangerous offenders.

The national screening system, created in 1994, also uses information from the CPIC on criminal records to help certain agencies identify child molesters seeking work where they could be in contact with children.

The planned measures will therefore allow the organizations concerned to protect the vulnerable individuals for whom they are responsible. When we speak of vulnerable individuals, we mean primarily all those who are more at risk than the rest of the population, because of age, disability or handicap.

We have all heard about troubling cases where children having been sexually abused by individuals in a position of trust. Of course this has a devastating impact on the victims and their families, but it also has one on the community as a whole.

In addition, the provincial and municipal governments, as well as the volunteer organizations, adopt policies and practices aimed at preventing such occurrences. While a criminal record check by the police is an important screening tool, this must not be considered the first, last, or only method.

The organizations must have a reliable recruiting, training, and supervision system. Any properly designed screening system must make unqualified candidates, pedophiles included, withdraw of their own accord, when they see how careful the organizations are

about selecting candidates and ensuring the safety and protection of those for whom they are responsible.

• (1605)

In this connection, I will refer briefly, but with the utmost pride, to the very close collaboration that has been in place since 1994 between the government and an organization called Volunteer Canada, in promoting a national information campaign on this important topic.

We produced educational material for distribution across Canada via volunteer organizations and local communities. Thanks to these measures, increasing numbers of organizations are gaining an awareness of the importance of an effective screening mechanism. Despite all that has been done, more needs to be done, and we want to do more.

This is what is behind Bill C-69. It provides for a flagging system. This system of flags for certain files has the support of our provincial and territorial colleagues.

In fact, I would remind members that, during the past year, the federal-provincial-territorial task force on high risk offenders met on several occasions to discuss certain issues with respect to information systems on sex offenders, and the pardon of sex offenders.

It focused primarily on ways of simplifying police access to the criminal records of pardoned sex offenders.

Following its discussions, the task force produced a report containing ten recommendations, one of which specifically deals with the flagging system the CPIC should adopt to identify criminal records of pardoned sex offenders. This report received the approval of federal, provincial and territorial justice ministers at their October 1998 meeting.

Right now, the provisions of the Criminal Records Act and administrative guidelines allow access to the sealed records of pedophiles, particularly when the police are looking for a criminal record. Naturally, when the police know or suspect that an individual with a record has been granted a pardon, they may, based on fingerprints, submit the sealed record to the attention of the solicitor general.

However, if the police are unaware that a pardon has been granted, they do not necessarily look up fingerprints while they search for a criminal record. In such a case, a normal query of the CPIC system does not reveal the existence of a criminal record for which a pardon has been granted.

So that the procedure I have just described can apply in all cases—I repeat, in all cases—where a pardoned sex offender is being screened prior to being given a position of trust, Bill C-69 proposes that such files be flagged.

A police officer doing a check would immediately see that a pardon had been granted and that the file was sealed. He could then apply to the solicitor general for permission to break the seal.

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This indicator appears only to police officers authorized to do screening research at the request of an agency acting in good faith and with the consent of the person the research is on. These are important mechanisms intended to ensure the credibility of the process. By requiring finger prints be taken, we are making sure the person in question is correctly identified.

The new arrangement will have retroactive effect, so that the files of rehabilitated individuals already in the system may have these indicators attached to them.

The bill also contains provisions guaranteeing the rights of rehabilitated individuals. Only authorized police officers and officials responsible for applying the law will have access to the information on the offenders, and each applicant must sign a consent form in this regard. By requiring this consent, we give applicants the choice of having their job application processed or of withdrawing it.

If they refuse to co-operate, applicants will be making it clear to the agency responsible that they are not perhaps the best individuals for the job.

Bill C-69 will also continue to give the solicitor general the discretionary power to remove the seal on the file of a rehabilitated individual.

• (1610)

As there is no reason to think that the minister's use of his current discretionary power is causing a problem, we must keep it to ensure the integrity of the system.

The government also carefully re-examined the legislative provisions of Bill C-69 to ensure they are in keeping with the provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Human Rights Act.

We therefore have the national police data bank, the CPIC, the Canadian police information centre, which is operated by the RCMP on behalf of all police services. This bank contains information on offenders' criminal records.

We also have the national screening system I referred to before, by which employers or volunteer groups working with children and other vulnerable individuals may require a record check of applicants as a condition for hiring or for volunteer work.

In conjunction with the notation system proposed in Bill C-69, the CPIC and the national screening system are designed to prevent sex offenders from infiltrating positions of trust.

Some people may wonder "Why not do away with pardons, or considerably restrict access to them?"

As we know, a pardon allows persons found guilty of a criminal offence, who have served their sentence and proven that they have become law-abiding citizens, to have their records sealed.

Those making this request have led crime-free lives for an average of eight years before applying for pardon.

The fact that the majority of pardoned individuals live as honest citizens is clear proof that ex-offenders can indeed become law-abiding members of the community.

In my opinion, it is important to defend the principle of pardon, while taking care not to diminish the integrity of the system and making changes which will help provide children and other vulnerable groups with better protection.

I would like to conclude with a comment that may be a bit unusual for this House. In this process, on behalf of the Solicitor General, and with his approval, I pledged before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights that we would do everything in our power to speed up the process of getting Bill C-69 to a committee if it passes second reading. There, it will be able to be examined by serious and conscientious people with one common goal: to protect our population, particularly our children and people with certain disabilities.

Today, I would like to pay tribute to all the political parties represented in this House, which have helped ensure that this will be possible.

[English]

Mr. Eric Lowther (Calgary Centre, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of the hon. member opposite.

For the benefit of those who are listening today and also for those who are in the House, I think we should clarify the issue which Bill C-69 is attempting to address.

In Canada today many people do not realize what a pardon is. I always thought when there was a pardon it meant that some new information had come to light and the person had been convicted wrongly, was not guilty of the offence and, therefore, they were pardoned and the whole record was struck.

However, that is not the case in Canada with the way our parole board and pardons division work. What happens in Canada today is that once a person has been convicted, sentenced and then released on parole, if they have not been caught committing another offence and have not re-offended, they can apply for a pardon.

Many people do apply for pardons. Let me quote some numbers for the clarification of those listening.

When a person applies for a pardon, what are their chances of getting it? According to the National Parole Board records for the last number of years, only about 1% of the total decisions that it makes every year are denials. In 1996-97 there were over 18,000 decisions made with respect to pardons. Of those decisions, 184 were denials, which is about 1%, and 12,566 pardons were granted

for mixed indictable offences or summary offences. In effect, about 96% of the people who applied for pardons received them. It is almost a fait accompli.

• (1615)

The effect of a pardon is that a person's record is now sealed, hidden, and no one will ever know they had this on their record.

This bill would allow, in certain circumstances, for that pardoned record to be opened. We think that is laudable and it is consistent with a bill which our party put forward, which has been in the House for some time, Bill C-284, which calls for basically the same thing. The government has come forward with its bill which has followed ours in the same vein.

The type of pardons that we want to bring to light are the ones that relate to sexual offences, particularly sexual offences against children. There are some good reasons for that when we look at the recidivism rates of those people who are involved in that kind of thing.

The government member equated a pardon with being rehabilitated. From government studies we can see that just because a person has received a pardon for a grievous offence, such as a sexual offence against children, the recidivism rates are so high that we cannot equate a pardon with rehabilitation.

A report was prepared by Corrections Research and Development, which is a government department, concerning child molester recidivism. It states:

The initial follow-up of the child molesters found that 42% were reconvicted of a sexual or violent crime during the 15 to 30 year follow-up period. . . . The highest rate of recidivism, 77%, was for those with previous sexual offences, who selected extrafamilial boy victims, and who were never married.

This is a 15 to 30 year program with rates as high as 77%.

A report to the federal, provincial and territorial ministers on information systems on sex offenders against children stated:

Reconvictions underestimates the rate of reoffending—as only a fraction of the sexual offences against children result in the offender being convicted. Consequently, the proportion of child molesters in the present study who reoffended would be expected to be greater than 50%, but the precise proportion is difficult to estimate. All the men could have reoffended, but only half got caught.

Hon. members can see that the concern is the rate of recidivism, and rightly so I would submit.

What about the ability of our medical profession and our institutions to rehabilitate people who are in this situation? Again I quote from a government report by the Correctional Service of Canada, entitled "Factors Related to Recidivism Among Released Federal Sex Offenders". It states:

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It is notable that the pedophile group had the highest rate of sexual recidivism relative to incest offenders or rapists. . . . This finding suggests that pedophiles may be more persistent with respect to committing sex crimes over time.

Another report of the Correctional Service of Canada states:

Does sex offender treatment work? We are still uncertain. There is disagreement even amongst the most prolific and knowledgeable researchers in the area.

As hon. members can see, the whole concept of rehabilitating people who have fallen to this level of depravity is in question. Therefore, the whole premise of giving pardons to people who have not been caught is a moot point and in fact puts our children at risk. That is why, in some ways, I am glad that Bill C-69 has come forward. However, later I will make the point that it needs to be strengthened.

Who should have access to this information if there is a pardoned record out there? It is our premise and the premise of the bill that we put forward that the key people who should have access to this information are those who are hiring people or bringing in volunteers to look after children. These organizations want to know that every possible check has been made to ensure that those they are bringing in to care for the children which they are responsible for have been thoroughly examined and that they are not putting their children at risk or putting these people back in a situation where they will fall prey to old problems.

• (1620)

We questioned various groups. We looked for support on this issue and we asked how they felt about it. We have support from groups right across the country. I have in my hand a list of 40 different national child care organizations which desperately are asking why we are hiding these pardoned pedophile records from them when they are bringing people on board. What is the point of not informing them of this kind of information? They want change.

These groups include the Adoption Council of Canada, boys and girls clubs, Canadians Addressing Sexual Exploitation, minor hockey associations, and even The Sheldon Kennedy Foundation. These groups point out that people who are predisposed to this type of depravity work to put themselves in positions of trust or care over children. They purposely do it. That is why we need to make every attempt to protect children from this situation.

We have also heard from the YMCA and, interestingly enough, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General and the Minister of Family and Social Services from my province of Alberta. Both of those ministers have sent strong letters endorsing the bill which we put forward, Bill C-284, which requires passing along information concerning pardoned records to groups which care for children. In some ways Bill C-69 attempts to do the same thing.

It is probably not surprising to anyone that all of these groups want access to this information. We all say publicly that we want

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to do all we can to care for children. It is important and incumbent upon this House that we make every move possible and I am glad we are debating this bill today.

There are some key points in Bill C-69 which need to be strengthened. This bill is the weaker sister of Bill C-284, which was brought forward some months back and is now before the justice committee. Bill C-69 proposes to possibly extend—and possibly is the key word here—greater background check information to a person or organization responsible for the well-being of one or more children, or vulnerable persons, or to the person to whom the application has been made for a volunteer position. The government is saying that possibly it will release this information under Bill C-69.

Bill C-69 states that certain criminal records for which a pardon has been granted or issued would be flagged in the system, retroactively if necessary, as part of the criminal convictions retrieval system. That is a good idea. We support it. However, it does not specify which offences would be flagged. It states that those will later be mentioned in the regulations. We have not seen those regulations. We are not sure exactly which ones are going to be included and which are not. When this bill goes to committee we will be calling for a clear disclosure of which offences will be included in the regulations under by Bill C-69 because they are not explicit in the legislation.

Section 6.3 of Bill C-69 requires the consent of the job applicant, in writing, for the authorities to check to see if there is a flagged criminal record. I do not have a problem with that, but even when the person has given consent the solicitor general still has the authority not to disclose this information to the hiring body. It seems strange to me that a person can give consent for his pardoned record to be checked, after it has been confirmed that he is applying for a position of trust or care over children, and yet the solicitor general will not make it automatic that this group know the person's past. The government wants to continue to have the discretion to say that it will decide in every case whether it will release this information.

• (1625)

It is hard to understand why the solicitor general might choose not to release this information if the applicant himself or herself has already approved its release.

This concerns me. We have been pardoning pedophiles for 20 years and we have never released this information. There is a lengthy process involved to get it. It is so lengthy and cumbersome that most people do not even know it exists. We have never made any attempt to advise people that they could be bringing on board someone who has been pardoned of a sexual offence against children.

Will anything change with Bill C-69? We are still leaving the discretion in the hands of the solicitor general. If we know there is a risk, and the person has signed off on it, it seems to me that it should be automatic, as opposed to more red tape and more bureaucracy.

There is a real problem with this. Julian Fantino, head of the police association, said the police are put in a difficult position because of Bill C-69. An organization requests to have a record checked. The person signs off on information with respect to his pardon and criminal activity. They go in and find that there is a flag for a pardon. Under Bill C-69 the police could not tell the hiring organization that the flag is there because they would be violating the Canadian Human Rights Act for revealing that there is a pardoned record. It has to go all the way up the ladder and all the way back down, and they still may not be able to give the information if the solicitor general says no.

That puts the police in a very difficult situation. If the conditions are met, we should be releasing the information. That is one of the amendments we will be calling for and that is consistent with what is called for in Bill C-284 which is already before the committee.

In the same vein, Bill C-284 calls for an amendment to the Canadian Human Rights Act which would allow organizations which are looking after children, or other vulnerable individuals, to make a decision not to hire if they find that someone has a pardoned record for a sexual offence against children. They could make a decision not to hire and not be later dragged into court for violating someone's human rights because of making that decision based on the existence of a pardoned record.

As crazy as that sounds, the fact is that if people are not hired because of a pardoned record their rights are being violated. Therefore, we thought it necessary to include, as advised by legal counsel of the House, a clause in the Canadian Human Rights Act that would allow these organizations to make a decision not to hire and not be held accountable for breaching the Canadian Human Rights Act.

This has not been touched by Bill C-69 and I think that it opens up children's organizations to all kinds of new litigation and liability should they decide not to hire someone who has a pardoned record.

The government is again following Reform's lead by putting forward legislation which the solicitor general initially opposed. He opposed Bill C-284 when it was introduced. Now he has introduced a weaker sister, a look alike bill, under his own name, Bill C-69.

Part of the reason he has done that is because there has been such strong public support for Bill C-284, which has come in the form of letters and petitions. In fact, the whole reason the bill came to the House and was passed on second reading was because of a 25,000 name petition from parents and children's organization who were saying that they had to have access to this kind of information.

• (1630)

We have seen the government come forward with its own bill, Bill C-69. As it is presently worded, Bill C-69 only goes part of the

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way toward better protecting our most vulnerable. It puts too much discretion in the hands of the solicitor general, the same solicitor general who has held this information for 20 years and not revealed it to these same children's organizations. There is discretion all the way up in Bill C-69 as to whether or not these organizations will be informed of the pardoned record.

All the criteria has been met. A children's organization is hiring somebody to look after children. The person has agreed that his or her record can be checked including the pardoned record. But that record is still not going to be released without the solicitor general's okay.

By not requiring disclosure once the criteria is met and the consent is given, or specifying the type of crimes it is aimed at, Bill C-69 is much weaker than Bill C-284 which is at committee.

By not amending the Canadian Human Rights Act which I just mentioned, Bill C-69 opens up children's organizations and agencies caring for vulnerable individuals to liability and litigation by an individual who feels that he or she was discriminated against on the basis of his or her pardoned record.

Even with the shortcomings of Bill C-69, Reform still supports its intent. However, we would much rather work with the current Bill C-284 at committee stage. It essentially proposes the same thing as the bill the solicitor general has belatedly introduced here. We have expressed our desire to work with both bills and to work with the solicitor general by accepting amendments to Bill C-284 in committee and combining them on the merits of both bills.

By co-operating at committee stage the House will not have to start at square one in the legislative process as the solicitor general is proposing with Bill C-69. After passing second reading it took four months to get Bill C-284 to its current committee stage. We can see what might be entailed in a potential delay of starting back at second reading of Bill C-69. It is good today that we are moving ahead to get both these bills in committee at the same time.

We hope the solicitor general will go beyond partisan politics and ensure prompt passage of strengthened legislation that will better protect our children from individuals who are predisposed to targeting and victimizing the most innocent of our society, our children. In the days ahead we look forward to bringing forward strengthening amendments to both bills in committee and coming back to the House with an improved package that will go through third reading quickly, then on to the Senate and eventually into law.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to such an important topic, all the more so with you in the Chair.

Such a bill, with the particular objectives it has, exemplifies how all members of this House can work together constructively. In fact, a comparison of Bill C-284 and Bill C-69 will be edifying.

Bill C-69 provides a mechanism for disclosing the contents of an individual's criminal record to the appropriate authorities in cases of sex offences. As my colleagues pointed out earlier, the purpose of this bill is to prevent serious repeat sex offences against children or other vulnerable members of our society.

What would this bill actually do? It would introduce a system to flag sex offences so as to limit the number of situations in which a person found guilty of a sexual offence, indecent assault or whatever, could again come into contact with or take up a position of authority over children or other vulnerable individuals.

• (1635)

Specifically, the purpose of this bill is to prevent a pardoned sex offender from becoming a care provider, a supervisor at a park or a children's recreational facility, or a day care worker, or being in any position where he could take advantage of the innocence of a child.

Bill C-69 could apply to special care facilities for the mentally handicapped or to support services to help them prepare for living on their own.

As a society, we have too often heard of cases of sexual abuse committed by repeat offenders who had officially been pardoned.

The purpose of the bill is to respond to requests by associations promoting the rights of victims of criminal acts and, more importantly, to ensure a safe environment, something we all want as a community, in which our children, our most valuable asset, may grow and develop.

The mechanism I spoke of at the start of my remarks is an indicator, a sort of warning light, that follows the pardoned record of a sexual offender and is activated when a security check is made on the reliability of the individual, who is seeking work that would put him or her in contact with children.

I can already hear the hardline libertarians railing against such a practice, given that a pardoned sexual offender is officially rehabilitated as an individual who respects the law and the ethics guiding our society.

To them, I would say, there are never enough ways to ensure the security and development of our children.

Naturally, Bill C-69 takes account of the guarantee of confidentiality inherent in rehabilitation and for this reason security checks must be done with the approval of the applicant. This check will be

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done in the national screening system under the Canadian police information centre by individuals duly authorized to consult the register.

Should the famous warning light come on, under the law the record and its contents would be sent to the solicitor general, who would ultimately decide on the relevance of removing the seal from the record.

Here the big question arises. It represents a major concern for the Bloc Quebecois. Should the solicitor general not be obliged to reveal the contents of the record that are of a sexual nature simply as a precautionary measure for children and society?

We think the minister's discretion could apply to the contents of the record where they apply to other issues, except those of a sexual nature. In simpler words, the minister, in the case of sexual offences, must reveal the content of the criminal record; he may do so for all other cases. He would continue to enjoy discretionary powers in all other cases.

If this means we might save a child, who would otherwise be a victim of sexual aggression, I think the bill would have served its purpose.

The wording of the bill indicates that the minister may inform the appropriate authorities of the contents of the record in question. We are, however, of the opinion that there is a moral obligation for the Solicitor General to disclose its contents when it includes a listed offence. As I have said, this moral obligation ought to be translated into a legal one.

Of course, this security check poses a threat to children or other vulnerable individuals. With this adjustment, the government might better attain the objective of its bill. It might even, I believe, benefit from the unanimous support of this House, even that of my colleagues in the Reform Party, who are somewhat unenthusiastic about Bill C-69.

The government would also have to continue to heed our recommendations and proposals, including those the Bloc Quebecois will bring to the committee.

I would like to return briefly to the verification system itself. As I said, these checks would be done via the national screening system administered by the Canadian Police Information Centre.

● (1640)

In an article in this morning's *Ottawa Citizen*, journalist Jim Bronskill describes the technological obsolescence of the CPIC's data bank computers.

This is, in my opinion, an unacceptable situation, and it is the responsibility of the federal government to ensure proper funding

for this body, which provides frontline information to some 13,400 police forces all across Canada.

Early this year, in March, we MPs had the opportunity to learn more about this matter from the Canadian Police Association at its annual legislative conference, held right here in Ottawa. I had an opportunity, as did several of my colleagues in the House, to discuss the issue with Yves Prud'homme, the president of the Fédération québécoise des policiers et policières du Québec, and to actually meet in my office with police officers from all over Quebec and Canada.

The Bloc Quebecois sees Bill C-69 as one more step along the road to ensuring our children's safety, but we must make sure that we have reliable records in the national screening system so that we can implement this political and collective wish.

This brings me to another point. Do we have real and effective guarantees regarding the turnaround for analysing files submitted to the CPIC that could eventually end up in the solicitor general's office?

There is the matter of the time it takes for a file to make it all the way up to the solicitor general's office and back down again. Bloc Quebecois members have some questions and concerns about the speed with which files could be processed.

There is nothing in the bill right now to allay our concerns. However, I hope that the government will take note and introduce specific provisions so as to prevent any loopholes that would threaten the safety of our children.

After this brief overview of the bill, I urge Liberal backbenchers as well to pressure the solicitor general to put more teeth into Bill C-69 and make it more consistent with the problems we are actually facing.

The Bloc Quebecois therefore supports this bill so that it can be referred quickly to committee for consideration. As I said at the very beginning of my speech, a comparison with Bill C-284 will be edifying. Finally, a positive response to our concerns would help to ensure speedy passage of this bill to ensure the well-being and safety of our children and vulnerable members of our society.

[English]

Mr. Peter Mancini (Sydney—Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to follow the hon. member for Charlevoix with whom I have had discussions on this bill and who sits on the justice committee with me.

It is also a pleasure to say that for the second time in two days we see the beginning of some co-operation between all parties in this House on a particular measure that is important to the people of Canada.

Yesterday we had an opportunity to discuss in this House the unanimous report of the justice committee dealing with victims of

crime. The speeches yesterday reflected the commitment of all parties to ensure that those people who are victims of crime have a role to play in the criminal justice system.

For those who are watching on CPAC and for those who read *Hansard* it is important to know that government sometimes can work together with others. That is not to say there are not some areas in this bill that need addressing and they have been raised by other members in the House.

We in the New Democratic Party will ensure that this important legislation gets to the justice committee as quickly as possible. It deals with protecting those who are most vulnerable in our society, children and adults who may be vulnerable.

This has always been the commitment of the New Democratic Party. It is why we have always pushed for inquiries into child poverty. It is why we have always ensured that the disabled are protected under human rights legislation. We in the New Democratic Party recognize that the strength of our society is measured in the way it protects those who are most vulnerable.

We applaud this piece of legislation. It is important to know that it did come forward in another bill, a private member's bill which is now before the justice committee. Recognizing that there was mounting support for that, the solicitor general drafted his own legislation and introduced it to the House a few days ago and it will now go to committee.

• (1645)

That legislation does a number of things. It attempts to protect children from pedophiles. The mechanism by which it allows that responds to those many groups that have been mentioned by other speakers, the boys and girls clubs, the YMCA.

I was the president of the board of directors of the YMCA in my own community. We had to deal on an ongoing basis with hiring people, with volunteers who came in to work with children. We had to ensure that we were not submitting the children to any kind of risk.

I also recall in my own riding when an organization through no fault of its own did find itself subject to litigation. One of its volunteers was found to have abused children in the care of that organization. The community was concerned. That organization, which had good principles and laudable goals, was set back many years.

Those organizations will be pleased to see this legislation come before the House today.

It would be remiss if we did not say that for a long time in this society we did not recognize that children and vulnerable people could be the subject of criminal actions of a sexual nature. It is to the credit and strength of character of the many people who have

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come forward in the last few years. The Sheldon Kennedy organization has been mentioned. Children and adults have come forward to expose what has happened to them. Whether it was at Mount Cashel, residential schools, hockey rinks, it takes tremendous courage to come forward. Today, by the passage and examination of this legislation, I think we are responding to those needs in our society.

I echo the comments I made yesterday. It is important to recognize there has to be a balance. Where we have to be careful with this legislation is in the protection of human rights and the protection of privacy. This bill makes an effort and we will examine it very closely in committee to ensure that it meets all the qualifications so that privacy is protected.

One of the good things in the bill and one of the things we pushed for in the private member's bill was that the individuals who apply to work with children in an organization be notified. They have to give their consent to the searching of their records to see if they have been pardoned for any kind of sex offence against children. By ensuring they have to consent to that, we allow them to withdraw their names if that is the way they want to go, or to allow them to know this check is taking place.

The member for Calgary Centre spoke to this and raised some very good questions. I think they are questions we will examine in committee. I expect he, our party, the Bloc and the Progressive Conservative Party will bring forward amendments to the legislation to ensure that it meets both of those needs. The member made some good points but there are some other points I have to raise in response to what he said.

The hon. member discussed what pardons were and how many people receive pardons. It is important to note that 97% of those who receive pardons never reoffend. There is some indication that those who receive pardons are deserving. We are a human system. There are those who do reoffend and perhaps they ought not to have been granted a pardon. A 3% error rate is not perfect, but it does justify that the pardon is appropriate for the other 97% who have not reoffended.

Many pardons are granted for things other than sexual offences. It is important for people to understand that the vast majority are for shoplifting offences that occurred 20 years ago, or a disturbing the peace charge that happened when someone was in university. They may have been minor incidents but they provide those persons with criminal records for the rest of their lives. When they apply for a position where they have to be bonded, where they cannot have a criminal record, they may lose that job for that kind of thing. The pardon is there for a purpose.

My colleague from Calgary Centre talked about the recidivism rate of pedophiles. He is right. We are right to be concerned about that. When we talk about pardons, it is important to understand that in order to receive a pardon, one must have been clear of any

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reoffence for at least eight years. If there is a high rate of recidivism among pedophiles, one would hope they are not getting pardons. Clearly if that reoffence happens in four or five years, they are not going to receive that pardon. That being said, we can never be too cautious when it comes to protecting the innocent and the vulnerable.

• (1650)

Some of the sections of this proposed law we support strongly in the New Democratic Party. We think it is important there be measures to ensure that the criminal records of pardoned sex offenders seeking positions of trust are available for screening purposes by placing a flag on the records of the sex offender so that police can be alerted and that a sealed pardoned record exists and that the police can request that record and request from the solicitor general authorization to open it. It is important for those organizations and for the protection of the children that those amendments be made to the law.

As I have indicated, it is important that the individual be advised that that is going to happen. They can then disclose to the organization themselves that such a record exists, or they will know at least that it will be brought forward. If they have nothing to fear, then they have nothing to fear.

There are questions however and some of them were raised by other speakers. In the interests of time I will not go through all of them. There is some question as to discretion and why the discretion would be permitted to the police to notify the organization or not. I question why that discretion exists. As a member of the justice committee, it is one I look forward to debating at committee.

I am struck that perhaps that discretion ought to be there in case of an error, but I cannot imagine that this type of check would result in an error. One would hope it would not. Even if there were three John Smiths who applied for a position with an organization dealing with children and one of those John Smiths had been pardoned for a sexual offence, one would hope that there would be a way of distinguishing that person from the others.

These and other questions have to be raised in committee. They will be. I think there is broad based support for this legislation among all parties. I hope and expect at the justice committee that the amendments will be brought forward in the same way and accepted in the same way. I have to say that in my experience on the justice committee, for the most part that is what happens and it results in legislation like we had the other day.

If we can work together on this in an all-party fair manner in the interests of our children and those who are vulnerable, it may well bring forward in a timely fashion legislation to protect our children. We in the New Democratic Party are committed to that and that is the spirit in which we will approach this legislation.

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

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

YOUTH CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACT

The House resumed from April 15 consideration of the motion that Bill C-68, an act in respect of criminal justice for young persons and to amend and repeal other acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee; and of the amendment.

Mr. Jack Ramsay (Crowfoot, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-68, the youth criminal justice act.

Before I proceed, I would like to take this opportunity to commend my colleague from Surrey North for his prompt and critical review of this long awaited piece of legislation. As stated in an earlier speech, my Reform colleague lends credibility to this debate based on a personal tragedy that hopefully none of us here will ever endure. That was the murder of his son.

• (1655)

In December 1995, more than four years ago, I undertook a preliminary review of the youth justice system. My initial findings were circulated among my colleagues in the Reform Party. I would like to share with the House some of the content of the opening paragraphs of this paper which began with a historical overview of our youth justice system.

The Juvenile Delinquents Act enacted in 1908 created a juvenile justice system separate from the adult system. The Juvenile Delinquents Act was distinctively child welfare oriented with a guiding philosophy behind the act defining "a child having committed delinquency not as an offender but as a person in the condition of delinquency".

The Juvenile Delinquents Act created an informal system of justice with little emphasis on legal rights. A range of justice officials, including judges, probation officers and correction officials, had very significant discretion in dealing with young offenders. With this treatment rather than punishment orientation, sentences were indeterminate to be served until rehabilitation was effected.

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The discretionary nature of the Juvenile Delinquents Act and the rehabilitation objective caused very substantial interprovincial variations in the implementation of the act.

Recognizing that the exclusively welfare oriented focus of the Juvenile Delinquents Act was not appropriate and to reduce judicial discretion, the process of reforming the Juvenile Delinquents Act began in the 1960s. It was not however until the early 1980s with the introduction of the charter of rights and freedoms that major juvenile justice reform became inevitable.

The Juvenile Delinquents Act was inconsistent with the emphasis on due process in the charter. According to a 1994 Ottawa Law Review, the provincial disparities in treatment of juveniles permitted under the Juvenile Delinquents Act was considered to be contrary to section 15 of the charter that came into effect in 1985 which guaranteed equality before the law.

The Young Offenders Act enacted in 1984 gave youth very significant legal rights and established a uniform age jurisdiction of 12 to 18 years. The Young Offenders Act also provided determinate sentencing and formal alternative measure programs to divert less serious cases from youth court.

The new youth criminal justice act will effectively re-enact that contentious portion of the Juvenile Delinquents Act, the portion that wrongfully promoted an inequitable application of the criminal law. This new act provides far too much discretion to the courts in the sentencing of young offenders. The only real direction provided to the courts is to order the less restrictive sentence.

I turn now to lines 22 to 25 of the preamble of the youth criminal justice act which read "take reasonable steps to prevent youth crime by addressing its underlying causes, to respond to the needs of young persons".

The justice system cannot address the root causes of crime, causes that cannot and should not be used as excuses for committing crime. The justice system must deal and deal effectively with an offender after a crime has been committed to provide the necessary public protection regardless of the offender's background.

Forces outside the justice system must deal with the causes of crime through the design and implementation of crime prevention policies and programs, programs such as the headstart program sponsored by my hon. colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

The justice system was not designed to deal with dysfunctional families, nor was it designed to address the economic hardships that often led to family breakdowns and to juvenile crime. The current and past governments' failure to recognize this simple fact has diluted the purpose and strength of our justice system, particularly in the area of youth crime to the point where young criminals

are somehow not responsible and therefore not accountable for their delinquent behaviour.

This fact is reflected in many of the lenient sentences that have been and will continue to be handed out to young offenders.

Two years ago this April, the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs tabled a comprehensive report containing 14 recommendations for amending the Young Offenders Act.

• (1700)

The report was a result of six months of extensive consultation and travel throughout the country at an expense of almost half a million dollars. Over 300 people representing various sectors of the youth justice system and society in general testified before the committee. That testimony was incorporated into the committee's report.

On April 22, 1997, on behalf of the Reform Party I published a minority report containing 17 recommendations and proposing a comprehensive three pronged approach to deal with the complexities of youth crime and the contributing factors, including early detection and intervention as an effective means of crime prevention, community based resolution and sentences in cases of minor offences, and strengthening the Young Offenders Act through significant amendments.

Two years after the Reform Party proposed such a plan the Liberal government introduced a youth criminal justice act. We are obviously pleased the minister incorporated some of our proposals, and of course not all, into the new act. In particular we fully support, as we recommended years ago, the use of early detection and intervention and the diversion of non-violent and minor offenders to community formed justice groups such as the very successful programs in Sparwood and Maple Ridge, British Columbia.

We also support providing police officers with the necessary discretion and power to deal with non-violent offenders informally. I recommend however that this discretion not be taken away from parents, teachers or any other person in a position of authority.

Currently there is a movement under way spearheaded by a Liberal senator to repeal section 43 of the Criminal Code which protects those in a position of authority if they use reasonable force in the correction of a child. We do not however accept the minister's checkerboard approach to justice that appears to be the crux of the new youth criminal justice act.

This act, as stated earlier, provides far too much discretion to the youth courts. This will result in an inequitable application of youth criminal law across the country, which was a major motivation for changing the old juvenile delinquents act in the first place.

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We also do not accept the minister's outright rejection of what I consider to be the two most important recommendations of the standing committee. The minister has refused to accept the committee's recommendation to lower the age of criminality to encompass 10 and 11 year olds in limited circumstances, and she has rejected publishing the names of all violent offenders.

The first and guiding principle of the new youth criminal justice act should be the protection of society. The only way to ensure the safety of our children and grandchildren is to provide parents with the names of all violent and dangerous offenders, which in my opinion include drug traffickers. This category of offender has wrongly been missed in the new legislation.

With regard to lowering the age of criminality to 10 years, Professor Nicholas Bala of Queen's University summarized the work of a 1992 Statistics Canada survey of 27 police forces in Canada. The data indicated that offending behaviour by children under 12 was a significant problem. The study further indicated children under the age of 12 committed about 5% of all youth crime. Despite this fact, authorities are powerless to hold these children legally responsible for their crimes. Although a number of provinces do have a child welfare system that can and does deal with these children adequately, many provinces do not.

Repeatedly witnesses told the standing committee on justice that in the case of violent offences a welfare response is inappropriate. Lowering the age to 10 years does not mean there would be a large influx of 10 and 11 year old children being drawn into the court system. The system can divert most children of this age away from any formal response, in particular with support for alternative measures and community based justice committees.

By amending the age we will have in those very few cases of violent offences the means to provide these young children with the rehabilitation they need. As it stands now the minister has abandoned 10 and 11 year olds who by committing criminal acts signal they are in need of help. The minister has abandoned these children to the provinces that do not have the constitutional authority to legislate against criminal acts.

I want to sum up my concerns about the bill by pointing out the most unacceptable portion of it. The minister has attempted to create the impression that she has listened to the people and mandated in law the changes they have been asking for in the Young Offenders Act. This is not the case.

• (1705)

All the minister has done is provide the courts with the discretion to do so. Many courts may not share the same concerns as the majority of Canadians and, through the exercise of their discretion provided for in the bill, refuse to mandate what the people have

asked for. It is the people through their elected representatives who should determine the law, not the courts.

For years Canadians have asked the government to make specific changes to the Young Offenders Act. These changes include the publication of names of all violent offenders, and particularly repeat violent offenders. They wanted the mandatory attendance of parents in court with their children. They wanted the lowering of the age of criminality to include 10 and 11 year olds, as I mentioned earlier, and the application of adult sentences for all serious crime. In each and every case the courts should be mandated to impose the sentences for which the people have asked and with which the minister has indicated she has complied.

Under the new act the courts have not been mandated. Instead the minister has given the courts the discretion to implement these changes or ignore them. This is wrong. Canadians should make the law through their elected representatives. The courts should interpret and impose that law so that the will of the people of the country is reflected through the decisions made within our courts and by the sentences imposed by our courts.

The bill falls far short of this simple democratic principle. It leads to the very serious concern in some groups in the country that there is a great deal of judicial activism which, if I could just touch on it for a moment, I believe is unfortunate.

The blame should not be placed at the feet of our judges but rather on our legislators for providing open ended legislation which allows the courts to make decisions that are not supported by the majority of Canadians. Over the last number of years and certainly since I have been in the House, the people of Canada have asked for changes within the Young Offenders Act.

I do not know if it has been deliberately done or not, but the minister through this bill has created the unfortunate perception that the wishes and the cries of Canadians for the last number of years have been adhered to and that those demands for changes have been implemented in the bill. They have not been mandated at all. They are there, but we will see the status quo maintained because in too many cases the courts will not embrace the same concern for some of these offences as reflected by the Canadian people. Therefore the courts have the discretion either to implement an adult penalty for some of these offences or simply impose the penalty under the Young Offenders Act or this new act.

Very few if any of the changes the people of Canada have been asking for are mandated. In other words we have not told the courts what we want. We have not instructed the courts about the kind of sentence we want for an offence such as murder, serious assault, manslaughter and so on. Even those offences must be tried in the youth court system. Then the crown must apply for an adult sentence to be imposed. The defence can speak against it, but it is

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left to the discretion of the judge as to whether or not an adult sentence is imposed. The bill is deficient in that way.

Inasmuch as it may have fooled the people, it is a very serious matter that the government may have brought forward a bill which has led people to believe the government has listened to their cries for reasonable changes such as the publication of the names of all young offenders who commit a violent offence or have a series of violent offences on their records. That again is left to the discretion of the courts. It is not mandated that the names be publicized.

• (1710)

My final point is on the appearance of parents or legal guardians in court with their children. That is not mandated. Again it is left to the discretion of the courts.

What do we have in the bill? We have the perception of change where there may be no change at all. We will have to wait and see. Some of the attorneys general of the provinces have already expressed dismay over the principle contained in the bill, that is the enormous discretion which will allow judges to make varying decisions across the country. We think that is wrong.

We should not be going back to the checkerboard type of legislation we had under the old juvenile delinquents act where there was a varying of sentencing and adjudication from province to province. We have gone back to that. There is not a standardized form of sentencing implied within this statute.

It is deficient in that way, which I think is very unfortunate. When the bill reaches committee stage and the clause by clause amendments come forward, we hope the government will take a serious look at the amendments we will be bringing forward to close some of the loopholes we think the people will be dismayed to see exist within the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am always interested to hear the remarks of my colleague from Crowfoot. Unfortunately, it is the Reform tape playing.

The minister tabled statistics no one disputes, which indicate that crime among young people has dropped by 23%. In addition, they also reveal, and no one disputes this either, that violent crime by young people has also dropped by 3.2% since 1993.

We all know that, when the law is properly applied, as it is in Quebec, it works well and to the satisfaction of all stakeholders in the justice system.

Does my colleague from Crowfoot not think that instead of changing something that works well, we should implement what works well and make whatever changes are necessary after a trial period? At the moment, before changes are proposed, does he not

think that the Young Offenders Act should be properly applied throughout Canada, as it is now in Quebec?

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Ramsay: Madam Speaker, if my colleague thinks the juvenile crime rate is okay in Quebec I disagree with him. I disagree with the crime rate of juvenile offenders in Quebec. If the crime rate is going down that is wonderful, but for years it went up year after year after year. Now it is levelling off and coming down a bit, which is wonderful. If there are methods to account for that, let us emphasize those methods. Let us see what we can do.

As I said in my opening comments, we are very much in favour of the three pronged approach that is evident in Quebec to a greater extent perhaps than in any other province where provincial programs are set up. When a child is struggling in school with aggressiveness or whatever, where it is clearly indicated that the child and perhaps the parents need assistance, that is provided.

We recommended that all provinces adopt that approach and funding be set aside for it. At the second level we very much embrace community committees such as the Sparwood and Maple Ridge programs. I am sure there are programs like those in Quebec where on the first or second minor offence children are taken not into the court system but into the community system where they can receive the assistance they need.

• (1715)

If the acting out by these children is a sign or a signal to society that they need help, surely we should be giving them that help. We also wanted to encompass 10 and 11 year olds because we felt the federal government had abandoned them. In the province of Quebec perhaps there is a good program that looks after those young people who are signalling by their misbehaviour that they do need help.

We say the federal government, because it is the only authority that can legislate in the area of criminal law, has abandoned these young people who, by committing criminal offences, are signalling everyone within seeing or hearing distance that they need help. It has abandoned them.

That is why we urged the recommendation made by Professor Bala and others; that under certain circumstances the justice system have authority in this area to ensure that those young people receive the type of rehabilitative treatment that obviously their actions are signalling they need. We are very much in support of that.

I want to touch on the point that perhaps the juvenile crime rate is down. In so many areas, the offences committed by young people are not even reported because the police tell us that they cannot do anything about it.

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If there is break and enter into a home, what answer is there when the police are called? They say "Send us a list of the items that have been stolen". That is as far as it goes. At one time the police used to come to every break and enter with their fingerprint section and test for fingerprints. They do not do it anymore because they do not have the budget for it. The federal government has cut back in that particular area of law enforcement and crime prevention. It is unfortunate that it is doing that.

If there is one area in which we would like to see greater spending it is in the area of helping our young children. We say, save the ones we can, help the ones we can, but for those who create a threat to our lives, we must not shrink from the use of incarceration. However, if we do incarcerate them we must make sure they get the help they need while they are there. I hope that answers my colleague's question.

Mr. Mark Muise (West Nova, PC): Madam Speaker, would my hon. colleague not think that instead of all the millions wasted on the old Bill C-68 from the previous parliament, that those millions of dollars could be better spent on this type of bill?

Mr. Jack Ramsay: Madam Speaker, my colleague has hit the nail right on the head on this particular issue.

When Bill C-68, the firearms registration bill came in, we were promised that it would cost no more than \$85 million to implement. Before a single firearm was registered last year, the cost was over \$200 million, and the government cuts the budget of the RCMP. If we look at it carefully, it is cutting the RCMP budget by over \$20 million, but in what area? It is not in the provincial area where there are provincial and municipal contracts but in the federal area. What is it cutting down on? It is cutting down on drug enforcement, organized crime and so on.

Let us take a look at drug enforcement, the main revenue source for organized crime which is responsible for bringing drugs into our schoolyards that affect our children and contribute to this terrible situation we see in many of our larger cities. The government is reducing that budget by an enormous amount.

When the minister stands up and says the government has cut some \$20 million out of a \$1.2 billion budget, that is not accurate. It is not cutting anything out of the provincial budgets. It is cutting out of the federal programs.

That \$22 million is coming out of the federal programs where we have the special units covering white collar crime, organized crime, drug trafficking and so on. Yes, it is a matter of priorities, but the government is spending money on a useless firearms registration system that will not enhance the safety of our streets and homes. It could be spending that money on a host of other things, including making sure that we have enough uniformed policemen on the streets to help reduce crime. Let us get them into the schools talking with the children, like the DARE drug program that many of the police forces are running in western Canada. We should be focusing our money on those areas, not on a useless

firearms registration system that has not proven to do anything to reduce crime or enhance safety on our streets or in our homes.

• (1720)

Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I know that in a former life the hon. member was a policeman. The minister has touted the whole idea of police cautioning. The government seems to think this is something new, but I know it has been going on for years. I know it has been going on in my part of the country for a long time.

I wonder if the hon. member could elaborate on his experience with police cautioning of young people to keep them out of the courts.

Mr. Jack Ramsay: Madam Speaker, there is a real story here. As a member of a police force, my colleagues and I used to keep more young people out of court than we ever took in because we had the discretion to do so.

There was a time, in the history of the federal police force that I belonged to, where in order to get the budget it needed to give members of the force a day off or leave, it had to justify its demand for further revenue. Treasury Board would only accept one type of proof for needing more money or more men and that was through statistics. Instead of—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): I am afraid that I must interrupt the hon. member. His time has expired.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate, in support of the amendment by my colleague, the hon. member for Laval Centre, which clearly and unambiguously calls for withdrawal of the bill.

If we were asked to give an award for the most despicable, the most backward, the most ill-founded bill as far as youth rehabilitation is concerned, we would not hesitate for one second before giving the nod to this bill on young offenders.

I would like those who are listening in, or have just joined us, to have some idea of what is being proposed to us. There is nothing run-of-the-mill about it. This bill refers to 14-year olds. That is those in early adolescence, not those who are 18, 19 or 20, i.e. young adults. To all intents and purposes, these are not even adolescents yet. These young people aged 14 could be given sentences comparable to those for adults. In order to avoid any ambiguity, I will read the actual words, for I am very much aware that words are important in matters of law.

This is what we are being asked to vote on, and I would ask the Liberals to pay a bit of attention. The clause in question states:

—being the group of offenders liable to be sentenced to what would be imposed upon an adult, in order to encompass the 14 and 15 year-old group.

This makes no sense whatsoever. How can the Government of Quebec, Quebecers and all the youth support network, which makes Quebec society something very unique, accept such a bill?

As an aside, I have just come from a Privy Council briefing session in which I heard reference made to the House leader. He is, I know, a man who can be called upon for certain matters, for certain circumstances, but there are some matters with a human dimension which require, I believe, an appeal to his common sense.

• (1725)

I ask him to tell us in all honesty if he thinks that a 14-year old who is just starting out in life, who has no experience and is at the mercy of his environment, can be considered a hardened criminal the way an adult can? Naturally, it is possible that there are circumstances where young people get off to a bad start in life.

In our work as MPs, we all see instances of this. That is why we must turn to family support, social institutions, and measures for socializing and moulding a young person that will completely redirect these values, that will attempt to give meaning to his life.

The House leader surely knows that the commission of a crime by a 14-year old is a cry for help. It is a sign of distress, a sign of inner turmoil. It does not make the offence committed any less serious, but we cannot agree with the logic that imprisonment and an intense process of criminalization will resolve the problem. I just do not see it.

Members know that this bill is politically driven. They know that the Minister of Justice wants to align herself as closely as possible with the Reform Party. It is a question of votes.

When the Minister of Justice introduces a bill such as this, she does so not as the Minister of Justice but as an Albertan. That is what has to be understood. She introduces it as a servant of the federal government, which wants to hold on to its seats in western Canada.

This bill comes straight from the Reform Party mould. I wonder whether the union of the Liberal Party and the Reform Party is not germinating in a bill like this one. That is what we are talking about.

The Liberal Party never said in the red book that we should criminalize 14-year olds. Can the House leader tell us whether in the red book—and I leave the description to him, but it went round in certain circles—there was ever talk in 1993-94 of criminalizing 14-year olds? There was not. Now, the Liberals are realizing that the time for elections is approaching and consideration must be given to an electoral base.

It is too sad to be funny. No one here finds it funny, because the fate and the future of the young are at stake. I would ask the House

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leader to exert his influence on cabinet to ensure that corrective action is taken.

What I find the hardest to understand is the levels of crime. When the discussion concerns the organized crime that is gnawing away at communities, cities such as Montreal, we are entitled to expect remedy. How is it we are discussing a law on young offenders aged 14, but for three years we have been calling for legislation on money laundering, which we have yet to see?

There is a problem setting priorities. This government must understand that there are nuances to the subject of crime. Things are happening as if the word nuance was prohibited in ministers' speeches. And yet, I think a distinction must be made.

As the member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, I am often asked by my constituents about this issue, by people who are concerned about street gangs, about young people aged 13, 14 or 15 who may go astray and commit reprehensible acts in our society. This does not make them criminals in the same way as adults. This is what I just cannot understand.

I truly believe that we would make a terrible mistake, as parliamentarians, if we were to get caught up in that. If we set the age at 14 today, who is to say that, next year, representations will not be made to set the age at 13, or even 12? Where would it stop?

• (1730)

As parliamentarians, we cannot subscribe to this kind of logic. This is all the more worrisome considering that juvenile crime is not on the rise.

There is a whole attempt on the intellectual and political front to misrepresent facts; and this is dishonest. The government wants us, the decision makers and parliamentarians, to think that juvenile crime is on the rise when in fact, as the hon. member for Berthier—Montcalm, who is the Bloc Québécois justice critic—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member. He will have two minutes remaining when next this bill comes before the House.

It being 5.30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's order paper.

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[*Translation*]

CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette, BQ) moved that:

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That, in the opinion of this House, the government should have a standing committee of the House of Commons hold public hearings on every proposed procurement of goods or services by the Canadian Armed Forces valued at more than \$100 million, in order to ensure that the procurement process is transparent and fair to all concerned.

He said: Madam Speaker, I will begin with the following question: Why did I move such a motion?

On numerous occasions, examples of insufficient spending on the part of National Defence have been raised in the daily newspapers and in the House, and there have also been examples of heavier spending, in fact, very substantial spending.

Looking at these examples, one could not help but conclude that what applies to minor spending ought to apply equally to major spending, which is the reason for this motion.

In the past, National Defence's goods and services procurement procedures have experienced numerous failures. I want to go into a few examples of these.

First of all, the purchase of the utility tactical transport helicopters known as the Griffons. Cabinet approved this on April 7, 1992, and Treasury Board assented on September 8, 1992. The very next day, a \$754.5 million contract for the purchase of some 100 Griffon helicopters, a flight simulator, and other equipment, plus related documentation and services, was awarded.

The first aircraft was delivered in March 1995, and the last in January 1998. The estimated total cost of the project was \$1.2 billion, according to the auditor general's April 1998 report.

It can therefore be seen that the project went \$445 million over budget, more than 59% over budget. It has cost \$1.2 billion rather than \$754.5 million.

The Griffon replaced three other models of helicopter, which were retired: the CH-118 Iroquois, the CH-135 Twin Huey and the CH-136 Kiowa.

The auditor general made many criticisms with respect to the selection of this helicopter. I refer to the April 1998 auditor general report, which states that "it appears there was a review of how a single aircraft could replace two types but departmental officials could not produce a copy of it".

• (1735)

Other documents as well were lost only God knows how.

A study done in August 1992, after the department had decided on the Griffon, showed that its load capacity was less than that required to transport a gun or engineer equipment. Its load capacity

for evacuating wounded and for logistical support was also lower than required.

In its response, the department stated that the lack of capacity could be made up by the support provided by allied aircraft. In other words, the equipment we are unable to load in our helicopters could be loaded with the help of our good neighbours. That is the good neighbour strategy. So much for Canada's sovereignty in the area of national defence.

The department concluded that to buy only one type of utility tactical transport helicopters would cost less than to modernize and maintain a fleet made up of several types of aircraft. However, the auditor general demonstrated that the operating cost of the new helicopter would be 20% to 40% higher than that of the aircraft to be replaced.

The department bought the aircraft from the only supplier it consulted. Only one supplier was consulted. This is a commercial aircraft and not a military one. Other types of helicopter were turned down. Life cycle costs for other aircraft, which might have been lower, were not considered.

This aircraft has a limited reconnaissance capability, and the auditor general concluded that the tactical studies did not adequately justify replacing two divergent aircraft types with one, and that they were concluded too late in the process to affect decision making. In addition, the studies called into question the suitability of the aircraft that was selected.

The acquisition of search and rescue helicopters is another example. They are the Cormorant helicopters, the ones in the notorious helicopter contract.

On April 23, 1998, the Minister of National Defence announced the purchase of 15 Cormorant search and rescue helicopters from a British-Italian consortium, E.H. Industries. The total value of this contract was \$777 million, with \$580 million for the aircraft and \$197 million for project management, training, parts, integrated logistic support, and a small contingency fund.

Delivery to the Canadian forces should commence in the summer of 2000 and be concluded by the spring of 2002. The financial resources for this program are provided for in the February 1997 federal budget, and they are within the existing financial framework.

Four helicopter manufacturers were competing for this contract. There was E.H. Industries, which manufactures model AW-520 or the Cormorant; Boeing, an American manufacturer offering the Chinook; Eurocopter, which manufactures the Cougar; and Sikorsky, an American company manufacturing the Maplehawk.

Initially the cost of acquiring helicopters was some \$593 million. This was reduced to \$580 million, because a saving was made by having the helicopters picked up at the manufacturer in Italy, rather than having them delivered to Canada.

E.H. Industries expected providing the Canadian forces with helicopters would mean jobs totalling 5,000 person years for Canadians over the life of the eight year contract.

• (1740)

E.H. Industries also undertook to provide major industrial and regional benefits before the conclusion of the contract. So, it made a commitment to spend a total of \$629 million on industrial and regional benefits.

Here again, of the \$593 in industrial and regional benefits already distributed—that is what we were told in May 1998—\$318 million will go to Quebec companies. The E.H. Industries consortium in Canada includes Bombardier, located in Montreal, Canadian Helicopter Corporation, in St. John's, Newfoundland, and Bristol Aerospace in Winnipeg.

There are other examples of major purchases. I mention here the purchase of 35 helicopters intended this time for maritime patrol. The purchase of these new helicopters has become necessary because it is time to get rid of the thirty or so Sea King helicopters from the 1960s. Every hour of flying time requires an average of 21 hours of maintenance, according to the army. In addition, the army also says that they have to be stripped down almost entirely after every 500 hours' flying time.

The Sea Kings are based on warships. They fight submarines, acting as the eyes and ears of the frigates.

Minister Eggleton, like his predecessor, asked his staff for a study on the possibility of renting helicopters instead of buying them. The acquisition cost of 35 helicopters is estimated at \$2 to \$3 billion. As for the search and rescue helicopter contract, Eurocopter is in contention for this new contract.

In 1997, this company lost out in the bidding process for 15 maritime search and rescue helicopters. Bitter, it even threatened to sue the government and its competitors. It would have been useful to have a committee of the House compare the bids at the time so that parliamentarians could see them and make absolutely sure that we made the right choice.

Members will recall that, originally, the Department of National Defence had called for 50 aircraft, that is 15 search and rescue helicopters and 35 maritime patrol helicopters. However, in 1993, the Liberals cancelled the EH-101 contract, saying that the contract, which was awarded by the Conservatives, was too expensive. We demanded a lot of explanation at the time but never got the information we wanted.

The cancellation of this contract cost taxpayers a whopping \$478.3 million, or almost half a billion dollars.

Today, with regard to the search and rescue capability, the Liberal government would have us believe that it saved money,

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even taking into account the cost of cancelling the EH-101 contract. Let us wait and see how much this contract for 35 new aircraft will cost taxpayers. Again, in this case, we think that the opportunity to discuss this issue before a standing committee of the House would help shed some light on the real terms of the contract.

I will now deal with the auditor general's report on DND, dated April 1998. It shows that DND bought military equipment that does not meet the needs of our troops. In other words, the department is badly mismanaging its budget.

Out of six major capital equipment projects worth a total of \$3.3 billion, half the projects scrutinized by the auditor general do not meet the pre-established needs of the military. Therefore, 60% of the \$3.3 billion worth of capital equipment purchased does not even meet the real needs of the army.

Another example is the Leopard thermal weapon sight. On September 19, 1996, Treasury Board officially approved a project to install a thermal weapon sight on Leopard tanks.

• (1745)

The total estimated cost of the project is \$145 million. The results of tactical analyses on how to upgrade the Leopard do not justify the decision to improve only the night vision system. Indeed, the army established that the upgrading of the whole vehicle, including the gun and the armour, was the minimum that would have been acceptable.

According to DND, a detailed analysis of existing options was not carried out for financial reasons. DND decided that purchasing the thermal weapon sight was the only affordable option. However the auditor general found no study showing this option optimized the financial resources of the army.

As part of a 1992 study by the Canadian forces, contracting out was considered. However, they came to the conclusion that no Canadian firm could supply this service and it was therefore preferable to buy the equipment. However the department did not bother calculating the cost of contracting out this service.

Then there was the project to replace the Lynx, the Coyote project.

In 1992, the government announced it was purchasing 299 light armoured reconnaissance vehicles and related support equipment. A contract was signed in March 1993. The total cost approved by Treasury Board was \$883,686,000 for the budget year. The vehicles were delivered in March 1996 and January 1998.

The Coyote provides the army with a reconnaissance capability. The tactical concept adopted for the Coyote armoured reconnaissance vehicle was based on various studies, including the simulation study used for the Leopard C1. This study showed that, without the support of a powerful force, a vehicle with armour like the Coyote's could not withstand enemy fire during a battle of

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average intensity. There again, the vehicle acquired was not suited to the needs of the army.

The study also showed that this type of vehicle could certainly not be used by a multipurpose force. Units using this kind of vehicle should be considered light units with limited means and should perform only limited tasks.

At the time of the audit by the auditor general, Canadian forces were still conducting trials to determine how the Coyotes could best be used. The assistant deputy minister, materiel, and the vice chief of defence staff ordered that Coyotes be bought on the basis of prime necessity. However, no other vehicles had been tested.

These are enough examples to justify the motion.

However, I will deal with the conclusions reached by the auditor general in April 98. He concluded that the Department of Defence relied on simplistic judgments for complex purchases, that it relied very little on equipment use plans in its studies and that the choice of materiel it ends up buying is not based on the results of the studies carried out.

This probably explains why, for 12 maritime coastal defence vessels, the department bought two units of a mechanical mine-sweeping device that is only effective against specific types of mines. This probably also explains why it did not buy all the necessary equipment that would allow its ships to conduct effective night patrols in poor visibility. In other words, we are well protected, but only during the daytime and when the weather is fine.

For taxpayers in Quebec and Canada, this waste of public money is unacceptable. It is also a major cause for concern, since DND plans to spend close to \$6.5 billion over the next five years.

Once again, the federal government is mismanaging our tax dollars, and taxpayers in Quebec and Canada would be well advised to see to this.

• (1750)

We must change the defence department's way of doing things. On February 11, 1999, the auditor general appeared before the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs to provide an update on that department's procurement policy.

On that occasion, the auditor general levelled criticism at the defence department's way of doing things. The department now has a plan of action to reform its procurement process, but that plan is incomplete and it does not go far enough.

For example, the purpose of the pilot project component is to test certain procurement concepts. However, several of these projects will not be completed before September 2000. Moreover, the pilot projects selected are relatively unimportant.

Conversely, in Great Britain, the smart procurement initiative was much for audacious. It led to a broad reform of the procurement proposals process, which could lead to a closer partnership between government and the private sector.

Contrary to what is done here, the British have literally opted for their major procurement items, namely their aircraft carriers, attack submarines and Apache helicopters. Canada could follow the lead of the British in that regard. Meanwhile, the House could make a first step by voting in favour of this motion.

In conclusion, I wish to say that taxpayers in Quebec and Canada can expect, in the months and years to come, to pay colossal amounts of money for these projects.

Therefore, they have a right to expect that their money is being spent wisely on good quality products. For that to happen, we believe that we should avoid past mistakes and change the way the department does things, first by adopting a rule whereby any procurement project valued at more than \$100 million will be examined during public hearings by a standing committee of the House.

The purpose is to make the process more transparent and fairer for taxpayers in Quebec and Canada, so that they can get more of their money's worth. Finally, we do not believe that our motion is an end in itself. However, we do think that it is a step in the right direction.

[English]

Ms. Carolyn Parrish (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services I would like to respond to the question raised by the hon. member for Joliette concerning the transparency and fairness of the procurement process, most specifically where the Department of National Defence is concerned.

I am therefore pleased to provide the House with a general overview of the procurement policies, processes and practices of the Department of Public Works and Government Services, as well as a brief historical background of the department.

A lengthy debate on every proposed procurement of goods and services by the Canadian Armed Forces over \$100 million is not needed. Nor is it very efficient. The procurement policies presently in place demonstrate precisely what the hon. member is seeking: the assurance of an open and fair process to all concerned.

The Department of Public Works and Government Services is mandated to ensure that the procurement process is one of integrity and one which is conducted in an open and transparent manner. Wherever possible competition is the preferred approach.

To ensure businesses have equal access to contract opportunities the government has put in place an electronic tendering system called MERX. Accessible through the Internet all potential

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suppliers are informed about procurement opportunities at the same time. MERX reduces access costs, increases competition and provides businesses with a single point of access to information on contracting opportunities.

This system is also currently being used by seven provinces and a growing number of public institutions such as municipalities, academic institutions, school boards and hospitals. It is an excellent example of the kind of co-operation we can work on with all levels of government.

In addition, in 1997 the Government of Canada launched Contracts Canada. Through this initiative hundreds of seminars were conducted annually and are conducted annually today with businesses across the country on how to do business with the crown. Furthermore, virtually all contracts processed by the department are published on the Internet, again ensuring openness and equal access at the same time.

• (1755)

I would also like to take this opportunity to promote the Department of Public Works and Government Services benefits driven procurement initiative. In the past the traditional approach to procurement in a complex project was for an organization to spend months, possibly years, developing a detailed requirement to present to industry. Firms were invited to present bids based on a sometimes massive document and the lowest bid usually won.

This approach had many pitfalls. That is why a new approach has been introduced to deal with the complexities and risks of major procurement projects. Basically the benefits driven procurement asks the industry to deliver certain agreed upon results rather than follow a blueprint assigned by the government. The industry is also invited to submit ideas on what sort of project should be undertaken before a formal request is issued.

What distinguishes this approach is thorough and rigorous front end planning to remove or mitigate potential problems in a procurement process. Both the front end planning and the management of the entire acquisition life cycle are based on four basic elements: a solid business case, risk analysis, clear delineation of accountabilities, and a compensation structure closely tied to the contractor's performance.

The benefits driven procurement will help support the Canadian industry, boost confidence in the public sector and confirm the public works department as a world leader in government procurement.

Federal purchasing services are provided to more than 100 federal departments and agencies by the Department of Public Works and Government Services, the Department of National Defence being its biggest client. Its mandate is to ensure the

integrity of the procurement process. It is committed to open, fair, transparent and competitive procurement policies and processes. This is fundamental to our ability to deliver excellent service to our clients through the Government of Canada.

In addition, the department is determined to harness innovative ideas and make the federal procurement process even more efficient as we move into the next millennium.

The Department of Public Works and Government Services is the nation's largest purchasing agent, providing an astounding range of services to support the daily operations of government to meet the needs of all Canadians.

Every year this department buys more than \$8 billion in goods and services covering 17,000 categories of service and creates more than 60,000 contract opportunities for businesses in Canada. These opportunities stimulate Canada's economy and create or maintain jobs in every sector, particularly for small and medium size businesses which are the engines of economic growth for Canada.

As I previously mentioned, the Department of National Defence is the Department of Public Works and Government Services biggest client, accounting for approximately half the department's business every year. It includes much more than weapons, ships, aircraft and military vehicles.

The public works and government services department has a long history with the Department of National Defence going back to September 1939. On the eve of the second world war Prime Minister Mackenzie King asked for the preparation of an act to create a department of supply. On the prime minister's behalf C. D. Howe, the then minister of transport, defended the move in the House of Commons by declaring that "the best guarantee that profits on war material will be kept to a minimum is to place men of skill, experience and absolute integrity" in charge of purchasing and production. This led to the war supply board which became the department of munitions and supply and then the department of defence production.

For almost 60 years the Department of National Defence has identified its needs and the Department of Public Works and Government Services has been responsible and accountable for developing and implementing procurement strategies to fulfil those needs. Canada is one of the few countries in the world where this separation exists. It is crucial to ensure the process remains fair. In the end we want Canadians to receive the best value possible for the money spent on their behalf.

To conclude, let me reiterate the government's commitment to a fair, open, transparent and competitive procurement process, a process which ensures equal access for all businesses and is managed in a way that will pass the test of public scrutiny.

Private Members' Business

• (1800)

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to discuss the motion of the hon. member from the Bloc.

Motion M-73 calls on the House to hold public hearings on every proposed procurement of goods and services by the Canadian forces valued at more than \$100 million. With respect, I would like to suggest that this would be a bad idea.

Many observers of the defence department procurement process have pointed out that the level of bureaucratic and political interference at that process is already bad enough. In fact the auditor general's report makes mention of that. I will quote from that document:

The federal government's approach to major weapons systems acquisition is too complicated, marked by the involvement of several departments, an adversarial approach to industry and complicated paperwork and specifications. Overall (industry experts) believe the current federal approach adds overhead costs and slows project completion, adding again to the total cost.

In other words, the hon. member from the Bloc is suggesting that they would add another layer of political involvement and the bureaucracy that would come with it and the process would be even more extended. In my view, the defence procurement process could use a lot less political involvement.

The last speaker from the Bloc sat in the defence committee hearing yesterday when Dr. Bland made a presentation on procurement. The question came up regarding the cancellation of the EH-101s and the present purchase of the shipboard helicopters and the process that it now entails. The question basically was what is wrong? What happened? Where is the problem?

Dr. Bland put it in this way. He said that the problems lie with the military, bureaucratic and political interface. That is where it lies. Tell me what that means, military, bureaucratic and political interface on this procurement process.

The EH-101 helicopter is a prime example of political interference, I might add. In other words, it is political interference. In the hard face of all these contracts that have been either cancelled or altered, it is direct political interference.

I do not think adding another layer of political involvement would work. I can see all kinds of arguments arising out of having public hearings on this matter. All of a sudden there would be a myriad of politicians wanting to jump into the fray making sure that a chunk of that contract was going to end up in their ridings.

What would happen to the process? It would be extended. It would be more involved, and I would have to suggest it would be much more costly to do it.

What the defence department needs is to be able to purchase the equipment it needs to do its job. It needs politicians to leave it alone and not tell it what to buy. There is always the issue that there is a political element to every purchase, but that is where experts come in to advise the politicians. The politicians should not be telling the specific department what to buy.

I know that other contracts have been let. There has always been the question of sole sourcing. That is one point that has always come up, where there is no bid process. It would be nice to have the assurance that there would be a greater number of open bid contracts and not the sole sourcing we have seen in many cases here in Canada.

There is always the question of political interference. It may not be directly by anybody in the cabinet, but it could be someone else. They could have a certain industry in their riding and may want to have a chunk of all that. I can see that coming into the mix here if we have these public hearings and politicians demand that they be involved, that industries in their ridings be involved. It may often be the case that it may not be the best industry to be involved in that bid process.

• (1805)

When the frigates were built, the contract was let to one shipbuilder. The one shipbuilder decided on who the subcontractors were going to be. He was guaranteed that in the contract, which was a good provision within the contract.

It prevented what some members tried to do. They tried to have that contract changed by saying they had a subcontractor in their riding that would be suitable for that contract. The contractor was able to say "No, you will not be permitted to become part of this bidding process. I have the final say". It is my understanding it saved millions and millions of dollars because the subcontractors were selected by the contractor and everything went ahead smoothly without the interference of the politicians.

For those reasons alone, I must declare my opposition to the hon. member's motion.

Mr. Gordon Earle (Halifax West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this motion. We see it as an initiative to begin the huge job of cleaning up the mess in this government's defence ministry.

The auditor general pointed out in his report last year that national defence plans to spend \$6.5 billion over the next five years to purchase equipment for the Canadian forces. The auditor general was scathing in his report. All Canadians deserve an open and fair defence procurement procedure. They are not receiving the quality they deserve from their taxes.

Canada's auditor general had these words to say about this Liberal government's defence procurement practices:

We are concerned at the extent to which the Department relies on professional judgment in making complex purchase decisions. Management did not conduct adequate analyses to justify its spending decisions for most of the projects we examined. Tactical studies often did not reflect the way officials said they actually planned to employ equipment, were done too late to influence decisions, produced results that contradicted the purchase decision, were undertaken by contractors who had an interest in the Department's decision, or were not done at all.

In three cases, the Department considered only a single option. In other cases, the options analyses were inadequate.

This is simply not good enough. Furthermore this is not news to this government. The auditor general has been sounding the alarm bells on the government's procurement policies for years. The auditor general reminded the government of the following:

In 1992, we reported that DND had recognized the need to simplify and streamline its major capital acquisition process, which had become unnecessarily complex, process-driven, costly and no longer appropriate for the management of the defence capital program. Our 1994 chapters on Information Technology and Infrastructure Management pointed to continuing problems with the Department's project and program management systems, despite attempts to improve them. Our 1994 follow-up chapter also noted that while the Department has generally concurred with our recommendations, it has been slow to implement improvements. We also expressed our concern that the actions it has taken may be inadequate to address the problems with the project and program management systems.

Many of the problems associated with the purchase of major capital equipment that we found in our 1984, 1987 and 1992 audits continue to affect today's defence capital acquisition projects.

Just how bad is this situation? Following is a partial list of the disastrous mishandling of the Canadian taxpayers' money by this Liberal government's defence spenders courtesy of the auditor general: excessively complex and labour intensive acquisition process; inadequately trained project managers; insufficient resources and underestimation of supportability costs; an ineffective and untimely staffing of project management offices; gaps and overlaps in project management responsibilities; poor procurement practices; poor application of program and project risk evaluation and risk management principles; lack of an integrated information system; and inadequate project management information.

• (1810)

Housing and pay conditions for our forces personnel still demand attention. Recent announcements to improve pay, particularly for the lowest paid defence personnel, helps but it is not enough.

If the government were not guilty of wasting the taxpayers' money, I wonder how much we would be able to improve housing for our forces personnel. I wonder if we would be facing the safety crisis posed by our obsolete Labrador and Sea King helicopters. All Canadians deserve to have these very serious issues resolved.

The motion before us proposes to hold public hearings on every expenditure over \$100 million. The sentiment lying behind the

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motion is good. It raises a very important question. At the crux of this issue is the extent to which the Liberal government is wasting untold millions of dollars. I can say that the people of my riding of Halifax West and throughout the province of Nova Scotia do not want the government to continue to waste their money.

I want to know, and I am quite sure that Canadians would want to know, what military hardware is currently mothballed in warehouses and elsewhere throughout the land. There must be big ticket items that are neither currently being used nor intended for use. Let us see an inventory of unused hardware that might be sold to other allied countries.

I am concerned that the government may be reluctant to provide this information so as not to be embarrassed by the amount or value of equipment purchased that was never used or used only for a short period of time before becoming obsolete or incompatible with other equipment.

In the standing committee we are currently reviewing the procurement process. It is true that one of the things that comes to mind is the complexity of this process and the length of time involved from deciding that a piece of equipment is required to the time that equipment is acquired. Perhaps part of the problem could be resolved if there was more public transparency.

The public should be aware of what is happening, the amounts of money that are being spent and how they are being spent. The previous speaker argued that public involvement might further complicate the problem. However, I would think that perhaps the threat and the involvement of public scrutiny would be a very positive thing. As things become more transparent it places more responsibility upon us to make sure that things are done properly, adequately and more effectively.

In this instance we could argue very strongly that with such huge amounts of money being expended, public scrutiny and transparency is a very important factor and would assist in the process. Anything that can assist in this procurement process to bring fairness and justice to the system and to bring good value for the money being spent is something that we would support.

On behalf of the New Democratic Party I am pleased to indicate our support for this motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. David Price (Compton—Stanstead, PC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy today to support this motion by the member for Joliette.

The motion reads:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should have a Standing Committee of the House of Commons hold public hearings on every proposed procurement of goods or services by the Canadian Armed Forces valued at more than

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\$100 million, in order to ensure that the procurement process is transparent and fair to all concerns.

[English]

In my opinion, there are good reasons to support this motion. I think that the Liberal government has given Canadians great cause to question its procurement programs. I tend to partially agree and partially disagree with the member for Calgary Northeast.

The auditor general has said that there is too much bureaucracy within our procurement process. Perhaps we should be taking out some of those levels of bureaucracy and putting in public scrutiny at that point. Public scrutiny should probably be at the level of the statement of requirement so that we could get this moving a little faster.

• (1815)

If we look at the maritime helicopter project, the SOR on that has already been nine years and we still have not seen anything. If we had the defence committee involved in it we would have seen something by now. From that point on it can go through the regular process but again taking out some of the levels and maybe speeding things up a little. There is no question that things have been dragging.

After all, this is the Liberal government that came to power by cancelling the EH-101 program at a cost of about \$1 billion. It says it was only \$500 million. If we look at what it will cost by the time we get the new Sea Kings and the search and rescue on line, it will probably be well over a \$1 billion.

This program was critical to the Canadian search and rescue forces and maritime helicopter capability. It was cancelled for strictly crass political purposes. Our search and rescue capability today is hanging by a thread. A couple of weeks ago an American helicopter piloted by a Canadian completed a rescue mission off the coast of Nova Scotia.

There is a report sitting in the minister's office that reportedly says the Labrador helicopters are prone to catastrophic failures and they present a high risk to crews. The Liberals have since turned around and bought the EH-101 helicopter for search and rescue, but after spending almost \$1 billion to cancel a program.

The interesting point is that we will not see the first new helicopter until the year 2001. As for the Sea King it is still waiting for a replacement. We do not even have the SOR on it yet. Once we get that it will still take five to eight years down the road.

I have been to Greenwood to see the work they are doing to rebuild these helicopters. If we add in the rebuilding they are doing, we are talking about 70 hours for every one hour of flight. No

wonder the auditor general is nervous about the whole situation and is saying that the government is not handling things properly.

It is costing us millions of dollars to keep these aging helicopters air worthy, and that with a minimal return. The Sea King is available less than 40% of the time and its mission system fails half the time when it is available. There is question about the legitimacy of the Canada search helicopter program from industry and the Sea King replacement contract is coming up.

[Translation]

The member for Joliette has already spoken to us about the infamous Griffon helicopters. I will therefore leave them aside for now.

[English]

Then there was a Bombardier contract for NATO flight training in western Canada, an untendered contract awarded by the Liberal government to the tune of \$2.85 billion. Many questions have been asked about this Liberal decision. Perhaps, if the process were more transparent, parliamentarians would have been less suspicious of Liberal motives in the decision.

These are questions that parliamentarians should be able to ask and should be able to get substantive answers to, but not at the moment. In my opinion the Liberal government, through its sleight of hand approach to procurement, has forced parliamentarians to put forward these types of motions.

One of the very functions of the committee process is to enable parliamentarians to question government on the estimates. The government has not been forthcoming in this regard and has demonstrated its disrespect for the parliamentary process. It is not just a problem of the Department of National Defence but of all departments of the government. Thus parliamentarians are forced to take action such as this motion to create another committee.

SCONDVA is studying the issue of procurement. This committee should have the same oversight role with regard to defence procurement. SCONDVA demonstrated its competence and its credibility with the recent quality of life study. It is a good, strong committee with members deeply interested in the defence of the country and has garnered considerable expertise on defence issues in the last several years. Thus it is only right that the expertise of SCONDVA is given an oversight role on defence procurement.

If we remember, the Somalia inquiry called for a vigilant parliament. Vigilance must be demonstrated in the field of defence procurement as well. Another committee as recommended in the motion would be necessary to allow SCONDVA to deal with the massive issues before it.

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• (1820)

My only concern is that while remaining vigilant we do not unnecessarily tie the hands of government in times of crisis. For instance, the United States is now running low on cruise missiles at a time when it is at war.

It might not be in the nation's national security interest to put procurement issues through a committee during a serious crisis. I think many would agree that this is a delicate time and a delicate issue. Thus I support the motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion by the member for Joliette.

I seconded this motion because I think it makes a lot of sense. One could even ask why what it proposes is not already in practice.

The motion proposes that a standing committee hold public hearings on every proposed procurement valued at more than \$100 million. This would probably come under the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs. There would therefore be witnesses, people who would ask questions in order to examine all aspects of such procurement. One hundred million dollars is a lot of money. The government would do well to be transparent.

Speaking of national defence, we can see in the Kosovo crisis that one of the problems of this government is a lack of transparency in its actions, the paucity of information it provides. Ultimately, we should perhaps not expect to be given strategic information in wartime.

I had to replace the member for Joliette on the committee. He almost never misses committee meetings. He is extremely available and devoted to his work. Approximately one month ago, however, he asked me to replace him on the defence committee. At the time, the committee was examining government contracts and defence procurement.

National Defence representatives, officials and military personnel appeared as witnesses. I was surprised at the difficulty, not to say the impossibility, of obtaining information, about the breakdown by province of military equipment procurement, for instance.

We were given a few examples. If memory serves, there were about 50 budgets and, at the most, three breakdowns. It is interesting for members, who represent their riding, of course, but also their region and their province, to know how the money is distributed. I was able to question witnesses on regional impacts.

Why did the member for Joliette ask me to replace him? Quite simply because I am the Bloc Québécois critic for regional development. I therefore wanted to see the defence budgets, the impact they could have on a region.

This information seems to be a state secret. Yet I was not questioning them with a view to finding out what the equipment looked like or what it was made of, or to obtain military secrets. If that had been the case, I could understand. There is no question of telling all, of making everything public, when dealing with defence matters. It is important, however, to know how the money is distributed, what companies and how many jobs are involved. Questions have to be asked about how defence budgets are allocated and decided upon.

• (1825)

I also asked how these things were assessed and by whom. Departmental officials said that they had committees, that studies were commissioned and that the findings were submitted to cabinet. An interesting discovery we make while reading the auditor general's report is that taxpayers from Canada and Quebec can expect to spend large sums of money on projects over the next few months. That means there is a lot of money to be spent each year and, over the next few years, more equipment will have to be replaced.

The report also says that cabinet did not always rely on the findings from studies commissioned by the Department of National Defence. The findings from studies, whether in-house or conducted by firms outside DND, should be used. The auditor general noted, however, that decisions made by cabinet were seldom based on these studies, which is absolutely deplorable.

Regarding the choice of criteria, officials told me that studies were taken into account, but that decisions were primarily based on the political judgement of cabinet members.

When small amounts are involved, I can understand that it may not always be necessary to call for public tenders. But for contracts of \$100 million or more, as the member for Joliette said, it seems to me that tendering should be considered.

In fact, I think the member for Joliette is a little bit too reasonable. If I have one criticism to voice regarding his motion, it is that the amount could have been smaller. However he made the following comment in his speech "This is for lack of anything better, since currently there is no obligation to go to tender for procurement projects valued at even more than that". He suggests that at least we start at this level.

Personally, I would go further, but he is wise. He is trying to get the support of all parties and possibly government members. Even though it is a private member's motion, government members could support it. It seems to me it would be in the public interest.

We should have a parliamentary committee to review budgets, legislation and regulations on this. This is what our constituents want us to do. We are talking about \$100 million in military equipment procurement and the government is telling us "No, these decisions are up to cabinet". The auditor general, public

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servants and independent observers are saying that the trouble these days in Canada is that everything is decided by the cabinet.

However, I will not go as far as my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean and leave with my seat on this account.

Last night, the governing party went against the wishes of all the opposition parties and refused to hold a vote in the House on the deployment of ground troops in Kosovo. Decisions like these reflect the centralizing approach of the government.

The year 2000 is near. In my riding, people do not think much of politicians as a whole because they feel that in this parliament, as in others, democracy means "You can say all you want, decisions are made elsewhere". In this instance, decisions are made strictly at cabinet level.

And who controls the cabinet? The Prime Minister. This is how things are done in the Prime Minister's office: the minister responsible makes a recommendation and the other ministers

support it because of what is called collective cabinet responsibility. In fact, only a handful of people make the big decisions.

I want to remind the House that we are talking about \$100 million, which seems quite reasonable to me. This is why I wholeheartedly support the motion put forward by the hon. member for Joliette. I want to commend him for moving the motion and aptly arguing in its favour. I urge my Liberal colleagues to support it.

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

It being 6.30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow, pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6.30 p.m.)

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