



CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, June 8, 2000

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 8, 2000

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I request the unanimous consent of the House to introduce a motion.

There has been discussion and agreement between the House leaders, and I believe that you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment this day, proceedings pursuant to Standing Order 38 shall be taken up, but, at the conclusion of these proceedings, the motion to adjourn shall be deemed to have been withdrawn and, notwithstanding any Standing Order, the House shall continue to sit for the purpose of considering the report stage and third reading stage of Bill S-10 and of Bill S-3, provided that the Chair shall not receive any dilatory motions, quorum calls or requests for unanimous consent and that, when no Member rises to speak, all questions necessary for the disposal of the stage of the Bill then under consideration shall be deemed to have been put and deemed agreed to on division.

The Speaker: Does the hon. House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1005)

Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Discussions have taken place between all the parties and I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That at the conclusion of today's debate on Bill C-214, An Act to provide for the participation of the House of Commons when treaties are concluded, all questions necessary to dispose of the said motion shall be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Monday, June 12, 2000, at the end of Government Orders.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

CANADA WATER RESOURCES

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in accordance with section 38 of the Canada Water Act, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the annual reports for the years 1996-97 and 1997-98.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 13 petitions.

* * *

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, relating to chapter 17, the Canada Infrastructure Works Program, phase II, and the follow-up of the phase I audit of the September 1999 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts,

Routine Proceedings

relating to chapter 30, sole source contracting for professional services using advance contract award notices, of the November 1999 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

Further, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, relating to chapter 23, involving others in governing, accountability at risk, and chapter 24, the Canadian adaptation and rural development fund, an example of involving others in governing, of the November 1999 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

Finally, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 14th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, relating to chapter 4, Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada, elementary and secondary education, of the April 2000 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, the committee requests the government to table a comprehensive response to these reports.

INDUSTRY

Mr. Walt Lastewka (St. Catharines, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Industry in relation to Bill C-5, an act to establish the Canadian Tourism Commission. The committee reports the bill without amendment.

• (1010)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee recommends that it be granted leave to travel to Norway and Scotland during the month of April 2001 to continue its comprehensive study on aquaculture; that the committee be composed of two Canadian Alliance members, one Bloc member, one NDP member, one PC member and five Liberals; and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

HEALTH

Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Health.

Pursuant to Standing Order 32(5), the committee has considered the proposed tobacco regulations referred to the committee on Friday, May 12, 2000, pursuant to the Tobacco Act, s.c. 1997, Chapter 13, section 42(1), and has agreed to report the regulations without amendment.

These regulations are part of a larger strategy for tobacco control. The overall purpose is to reduce tobacco consumption and smoking uptake by young people. The committee has recognized this and, therefore, has included recommendations for additional study, which include the examination of exemptions and omissions, movement toward plain packaging, attention to affected workers, study of optimal tax efforts and other matters.

I would ask that the House give its unanimous consent to give concurrence to this report without debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): The hon. member will have to present a motion for concurrence at a later time.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA SHIPPING ACT, 2000

Hon. Stéphane Dion (on behalf of the Minister of Transport) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-35, an act respecting shipping and navigation.

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

* * *

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-36, an act to amend the Criminal Code (criminal harassment, home invasions, applications for ministerial review—miscarriages of justice, and criminal procedure) and to amend other acts.

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

* * *

CANADA STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE ACT

Mr. Bill Graham (Toronto Centre—Rosedale, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-487, an act to amend the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act (financial assistance relating to Convention refugees and their education needs).

He said: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to introduce this bill to the House, which is the first private member's bill I have taken the opportunity to introduce since I was elected in 1993. The bill is designed to expand the definition of a qualifying student in the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act to include a convention refugee.

• (1015)

If adopted, the bill will permit persons determined to be convention refugees by the Immigration and Refugee Board but not yet landed, to be able to apply for student financial assistance and thereby acquire post-secondary education and training. Presently these Canadians in waiting are not able to apply for such assistance.

Routine Proceedings

Many people of considerable talent living in this country are denied equal access to higher education based solely on the unfortunate circumstances of their birth. In denying them this access we deny them the possibility of fulfilling their aspirations and we deny ourselves the benefits that they can bring to society as a whole.

[Translation]

This legislation is aimed at creating fair conditions for a segment of our youth population and at allowing them to fully participate in our society for their own benefit and ours.

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

[English]

Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would seek the consent of the House to move concurrence in the third report of the Standing Committee on Health tabled earlier this day.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to present the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

PETITIONS

HEALTH

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is my honour to table a petition to save public health care in Canada, a petition that has been signed by 7,529 Canadians.

Specifically, this is a petition to the federal government to restore immediately the federal cash contribution to health care to 25%. The petition urges the federal government to fulfill the commitment it has already made to implement home care and a national program for prescription drugs.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to present a number of petitions from people in my riding and throughout Ontario on the topic of Bill C-23.

The petition says that there is significant empirical evidence about the value of marriage as the cornerstone of public policy which produces real tangible public policy benefits. The petitioners draw the attention of the House to the motion passed on June 8, 1999 which defines marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

The petitioners also point out that there is inappropriate intrusion and discriminatory practices on the part of the federal government to extend benefits based on a person's private sexual activity excluding other types of dependency relationships.

The petitioners ask that parliament withdraw Bill C-23 and affirm the opposite sex definition of marriage in legislation and ensure that marriage is recognized as a unique institution.

[Translation]

GASOLINE PRICING

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by several hundred residents from Quebec who are protesting predatory gasoline pricing.

These petitioners call on parliament to pass a resolution to stop world petroleum cartels in order to bring down overly high gasoline prices.

Since we know that the price of gasoline at the pump reached record levels, such as 84.9 cents a liter, in the greater Montreal area last week, I believe this petition is highly relevant.

Moreover, this petition for adequate funding for research on alternative energies to ensure that, in the near future, Canadians will be free from the obligation to use petroleum as the main energy source.

• (1020)

Mr. Maurice Godin (Châteauguay, BQ): Madam Speaker, for some months now, the Bloc Québécois has been calling upon this government to take steps to stabilize the price of gasoline, which has attained an all-time high, particularly in Montreal.

The Bloc Québécois is calling upon this government to suspend the excise tax for a time, to intervene with the oil exporting countries, and to make amendments to the Competition Act that will give it some teeth.

On behalf of the people in my riding of Châteauguay, I am tabling a petition bearing 1,300 signatures. In it, the petitioners are calling for the government to put an end to its inactivity and to protect the least advantaged members of our society.

[English]

HEALTH

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased today, along with my leader of the New Democratic Party caucus, to present a petition on behalf of hundreds of Canadians regarding the serious threats to health care today. It is a very timely petition given the failure of the government to take action against the threats to medicare, particularly bill 11.

Supply

The petition calls on the government to address this matter both in terms of restoration of funds under the budget and to withdraw its secret 12 point agreement with Alberta, which is the forerunner to bill 11, and to begin now to address the questions of violations of the spirit and letter of the Canada Health Act.

I am pleased to present this petition which reflects the fact that health care is the number one priority of Canadians.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—CANADA INFORMATION OFFICE

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ) moved:

That this House condemn the government for having established the Canada Information Office, which gives lucrative contracts to those close to the government party for, among other things, the purpose of gathering, analysing and collating information about a large number of citizens, and that this House urge the government to close that Office.

He said: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the question on the order paper, particularly today in the presence of the Deputy Minister responsible for both Public Works and the Canada Information Office, whom I am pleased to see here in the House.

I know that this is a source of great interest and perhaps in certain cases of great concern. As parliamentarians, it is not our purpose to cause concern to anyone, but rather to inform Canadians, and Quebecers in particular, of this formidable propaganda tool, which goes by the name of the Canada Information Office.

As we know, in what the Prime Minister so frequently reminds us is the best country in the world, we imagine that certain attitudes, philosophies and thoughts exist only in countries where democracy is threatened or totally thwarted. We imagine that it is impossible in Canada, for a single instant, for democracy to be attacked, weakened or made to serve purely partisan interests. Unfortunately, history has given us a number of examples to disprove this.

The other day, I heard the hon. member for Winnipeg North—St. Paul say “Find me a single example in Canadian history where democracy has been thwarted, where it has not been respected”. He also asked for examples where new Quebecers or new Canadians had not been respected.

• (1025)

I appreciate the fact that the hon. member for Winnipeg North—St. Paul is a new Canadian, but if he reads the official record of this House, he will realize that toward the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, we had to compensate after the fact Japanese Canadians who have been imprisoned during the last world war, including those who were born in Canada.

This was not a favour to this ethnic group, quite the contrary, because democracy had been abused back then. No doubt good excuses were made up to do this at the time, but nobody can tell me that democracy and freedom of speech are part of the Canadian way.

Most of the time, there is freedom of movement for people and ideas, but not when the issue is Canadian unity. In this case, an agency has been set up to repress those who may have a different opinion.

This agency is exclusively at the service of the Liberal Party of Canada. When it was set up in 1996, it was supposed to counteract sovereignists in the field, and all federalist parties agreed. However, they have been taken for a ride.

I really felt like laughing, because I have always said that when the Prime Minister talks about a chair in the House, we should be very careful, because we cannot be really sure that what he has in mind is the same thing we do. In the Prime Minister's mind, a chair does not necessarily have four legs of the same length, a horizontal seat and a vertical back rest. If we were to ask the Prime Minister to draw a chair—to see what the concept means to him—we would be surprised by the result. We would see that no one in the House has the same idea of a chair as the Prime Minister.

When the Prime Minister and the then deputy prime minister agreed to create the Canada Information Office, self-righteous federalists said: “Here is an organization that will benefit Canadians, by opposing the sovereignist discourse in Quebec”. But they were tricked.

When he created this organ the Prime Minister's devious plan was to use it also for election campaign purposes and partisan promotion for the sole benefit of the Liberal Party of Canada.

This is where the other parties were taken in, including the Reform and Progressive Conservative members, who believed in the Prime Minister's good faith. But we in Quebec have a long-standing tradition of distrusting this Prime Minister as well as his follower, his disciple who follows him like a shadow and who is also in the House this morning. Though they are Quebecers, when they tell us something, we must always be on our guard, because

there is always a catch, and history is there to prove that we were taken in by them more often than we deserved.

The Canada Information Office, which was supposed to promote Canadian unity, had to get some furniture first. It not only needed telephones, tables and chairs, but also employees who were trustworthy and able mainly to promote the Liberal Party of Canada and to sell it to Quebec.

Some appointments were made. Hiring these people required an exemption to the application of the public service employment regulations. The first legislative measure passed by this government was to exempt the Canada Information Office, by ministerial order, nothing less, from the application of the Public Service Employment Act and its regulations, including those on hiring.

Of course they wanted docile individuals who would obey unquestioningly the dictates of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs of the day, whose job it was to promote Canadian unity.

• (1030)

They needed docile people and they found them. But, docility comes at a big price. From the questions the Bloc Québécois put to the Minister of Public Works all week long it is clear that docility pays. We learned that a certain Richard Mongeau, a well known lawyer, the lawyer who defended the members of the RCMP accused of stealing the Parti Québécois membership list, who defended RCMP officers when they torched the barns in Quebec and who defended all those who had to do the dirty work. He was an ardent defender of these people.

In addition, for his last dirty job he was told “You have to come to the CIO. Your service record shows you are quite capable of doing the dirty work required by the current Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, the Prime Minister and the Minister of public works without remorse or scruple”.

This was how \$160,000 was paid to Richard Mongeau to check the spelling and punctuation of the press releases issued by the minister of public works allegedly to inform Quebecers about federal programs available and beneficial to them. Mr. Mongeau earned \$160,000 for that. In addition, his firm, Leblanc et Leduc, probably got another \$50,000 to correct Mr. Mongeau’s own spelling.

In this whole CIO business, they have both fists in the trough. There are a few who are really gorging themselves, but this is a Liberal Party tradition. There is nothing wrong with that; it has been going on since confederation. Poor people with good ideas have become extremely rich thanks to all kinds of subsidies and schemes. That is the Liberal way of thinking.

When those people across the way rise to proclaim their adherence to the Liberal way of thinking, we have to be careful.

Supply

Being a Liberal on the other side of the House means that one is willing to do a lot of things, including creating the CIO, the Canada Information Office.

Under the rules governing the CIO, the conditions of employment of the public service do not apply to that office. It currently employs 83 people, which makes it large enough. It seems to me that with 83 employees the minister should have at least one or two persons capable of revising texts, correcting errors if necessary and putting in the correct punctuation. But no. Employees are apparently asked to write something up, but it is Richard Mongeau, who is paid \$160,000 a year, who checks for spelling and punctuation errors. It seems to me that an office which employs 83 people should be self-sufficient, especially with an annual budget of \$20 million to \$25 million. How is the money given the CIO each year to operate and fulfil its mandate being used?

Contracts are awarded to a lot of people but not to just anyone. We have here the list of those who were awarded contracts over the last few years. They all have one thing in common: they have contributed various amounts to the election fund of the Liberal Party of Canada. Sometimes it is difficult to establish a relationship on a pro rata basis, and in some cases it is almost impossible.

For example, if we look at someone who was awarded a contract for \$166,000, or for \$1 million, as was the case for Tremblay Communications, we can see that Michèle Tremblay contributed \$2,000 to the Liberal Party of Canada both in 1997 and in 1998.

• (1035)

It seems reasonable, a \$2,000 contribution for a \$1 million contract. But there are other examples of solid supporters of this party who, for much smaller contracts, will give \$15,000 while they were awarded a \$30,000 or \$35,000 contract. Is this an indirect way of saying “I give you work, so pay something back into our election fund and make a financial contribution to our party?” In this case, one has to ask if in fact the work was done. Was the work contracted important and necessary?

It is interesting to read certain work descriptions in some of the contracts. For example, Intersol was awarded a small \$28,000 contract. It reads:

—provide advice on the region’s organization and on the design team discussions and work with this team to develop an approach meeting the employees’ needs.

This is a vague mandate. I am sure that, for \$28,000, my daughter, who is in grade 5, could perform a task like that in no time just by searching in dictionaries and finding ideas here and there. She would be very happy to receive \$28,000. But this amount is not for her; it is for the friends of the Liberal Party.

Here is another one, “Advising and auditing”, \$35,000. This is awarded to individual entrepreneurs, lawyers, et cetera. There is also “Implementation of recommendations regarding the CIO

Routine Proceedings

contract award process". What does that mean? There is another \$57,000 contract for the "Classification and writing of work descriptions". That is a lucrative work. These people are professionals hired by the CIO.

Les Associés RCN received \$8,500 for "Consultation with Human Resources Development". How long did they work? Fifteen minutes, three days, six weeks? We do not know, but we know that they did not provide useful advice to the Minister of Human Resources Development, probably because the contract was not lucrative enough. They were paid \$8,500 but they certainly did not give the minister sound advice, because she has been in trouble with Human Resources Development ever since.

The other day I was listening to the hon. member from Winnipeg North—or something like that, I am not sure, and he was quite insulted when I did not remember the exact name of his riding—who told the House that what Human Resources Development did and was now being condemned for was nothing much: an outstanding amount of \$2,500 out of several hundred million dollars, \$1 billion or \$1.5 billion in grants. In his mind, \$2,500 in unaccounted for money is nothing, only a venial sin really. On the other hand, it gave work to people with disabilities.

Jobs were created for disabled people in that company, which was given \$700,000 just to change its name. It was strictly a request to change its name. Any of my notary colleagues could easily have done that for \$1,000 or \$1,200. Seven hundred and twenty thousand dollars were given to that company for a request to change its name. The hon. member for Winnipeg North—St. Paul says that it allowed disabled people to work.

When we read the list of those who were awarded all these contracts, it is obvious that the main disability of those who were given grants was that they unfortunately were Liberals. This is what explains the advance and disbursement of funds. The minister has now been struggling for several months to defend herself about that.

Today, I can see that an amount of \$8,500 was given to Les Associés RCN to advise the Minister of Human Resources Development. This at least was written in here. They have advised the minister poorly and she will certainly agree with that.

• (1040)

The Canada Information Office was to be the response to the sovereigntist rhetoric in the field. This was the implementation of plan B. It is unfortunate that the role of that agency, which was already not very glorious, was diverted to the exclusive benefit of the Liberal Party of Canada.

I was going to read a list of those who were awarded grants without tender, but I will leave that to my colleagues.

I thank hon. members for having listened patiently to what I had to say.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. When my colleague began his speech, he was to tell you that he would be sharing his time but he forgot to do so. I seek unanimous consent of the House to use the minutes remaining in the 20 minutes available to him.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): In fact, there is only one minute and 40 seconds left. Is there unanimous consent of the House to allow the hon. member to use that time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Mitis, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleagues for that consent; I will put that one minute and 40 seconds to good use.

I want to propose an amendment to the motion we tabled. The amendment would read as follows:

That the motion be amended by adding after the word "that Office" the following: "immediately."

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): The amendment is in order.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there have been discussions and I seek the unanimous consent of the House for the following motion. I move that the third report of the Standing Committee on Health which was tabled earlier today be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

*Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[Translation]***SUPPLY**

ALLOTTED DAY—CANADA INFORMATION OFFICE

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to participate in the debate on the motion introduced by my colleague the hon. member for Chambly.

I somehow sensed from his speech that the whole organization of the CIO and this structure of patronage rests on a cornerstone, and this cornerstone that seemingly received \$160,000 is called Richard Mongeau.

Could our colleague from Chambly tell us who is this Richard Mongeau, what is his profession and what he is doing now, so that we know the whys and wherefores of this situation?

• (1045)

Mr. Ghislain Lebel: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles for his question. Richard Mongeau was recently—on January 13—appointed to the Superior Court of Quebec. He is a 54-year-old lawyer who was called to the Quebec bar in 1971 and who has a long and distinguished record.

From 1973 to 1976 he was chief of staff to Quebec's former minister of social affairs, Claude Forget. In order to make it into the magnificent Liberal Party of Canada, one must first go through the training school of the Liberal Party of Quebec.

In 1977 he set up a law firm and quickly obtained business from the federal government, including a case defending RCMP officers accused of various crimes: theft of PQ lists, setting fire to a barn, theft of dynamite. We remember: it made the headlines at the time. He was hired to represent RCMP officers before two commissions of inquiry and before the criminal court as well. From 1993 to 1999 he defended André Lizotte against the Royal Bank. He is a reputable and accomplished lawyer. After 1998 he became the federal negotiator with the Cree.

After the Oka crisis, the federal government appointed lawyer Michel Robert, who had been president of the Liberal Party of Canada, to head up a commission of inquiry into the entire Oka incident.

An hon. member: He is a judge now.

Mr. Ghislain Lebel: He is a judge now. He knew the proper channels.

After \$1.6 million worth of efforts and before his report was made public, the present Prime Minister appointed him to the court of appeal. As a result, all his work and everything he had done up to that point was set aside. It could no longer be used. It was all thrown out because the government could not wait. It was in such a hurry to appoint someone with a solid record, as it had been when it appointed Michel Robert to the court of appeal, that it had no scruples about tossing out \$1.6 million of effort, of investigations conducted and of mountains of paper in order to appoint him immediately to the court of appeal.

The Liberal Party knows how to reward its friends and its good friends. Richard Mongeau was one of those. I am not in any way criticizing the work of Mr. Mongeau, who has been a judge since January, but I am speaking of the period before January 13. He represented a senator in a dispute with a member of this House. Just recently, before his appointment, he was very prominent in the Liberal Party of Canada.

Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Madam Speaker, I do not know if the hon. member had the opportunity to say it, but since we often hear the Minister of Public Works and Government Services say that contracts are always awarded by way of the bidding process, can the hon. member for Chambly confirm that the CIO contracts have always been awarded, as we often hear in the House, by way of public tender?

Mr. Ghislain Lebel: No, Madam Speaker. It would seem that the CIO started to use the public tender process only recently. In fact it would have started to use it no more than one year ago.

Before that, and I can mention a few names for the benefit of my colleague who wants to know, there was the Groupe Cible, for a \$27,100 contract, no public tender; Média Q, \$37,500, no public tender; Ekos Research Association, \$53,500, no public tender; Muséobus, \$27,750, for graphic concept creation services, and for printing and adapting services. Of what, I do not have a clue.

• (1050)

There were also Densan Consultant and Electronic Media Monitoring which got \$60,000 with no public tender. Compex Consultant got a \$27,535 contract to provide an overview of provincial laws and public consultation on constitutional amendments.

An hon. member: As if the people of the justice department cannot do that.

Mr. Ghislain Lebel: Indeed, as if the justice department had no employees.

This is why people rise up against such a way of doing things. We have a public service that I believe to be efficient, competent and able to do the work it is asked to do, and they do not make use

Supply

of its services. Rather, they go into backrooms, they resort to alternative solutions, they rely on what is known as the pool of Liberal Party friends and they give them contracts worth millions of dollars for jobs that could be done by public servants at no additional cost, since these people are already being paid.

The minister was never able to explain to us the reasons why he relies on contracts with the private sector, when he has all the necessary resources within the federal administration.

The government laid off 45,000 public servants in 1995 and it is then that friends of the party in office started getting all kinds of contracts right across the country to do things that these public servants were paid to do and were doing very well. We were proud of their services.

The government is replacing career public servants with apparatchiks and friends of the party—

An hon. member: Or with agencies.

Mr. Ghislain Lebel: —or with agencies. The government finds all sorts of schemes to make its friends get rich. This is what the minister never managed to stop. On the contrary, he blindly got on board and was never able to justify his decisions.

He should be brought back to reality, so as to recognize, like everyone else here, that such spending to help his friends and ensure his re-election must be stopped.

The government is all over the place. It spends a fortune on the drafting of press releases when it has public servants who could do a very good job at that, believe me. When will the minister stop boasting and bragging with taxpayers' money? He wastes and spends, but it is not his money. It is everyone's money, including yours, Madam Speaker.

That is the purpose of today's opposition motion, to say that enough is enough. The government must stop making fun of the public. It must stop taking advantage of taxpayers, making them work so hard and taxing them to the gills, while wasting public money inconsiderately, through extravagant spending, gargantuan dinners and so on.

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate being given this opportunity to inform the members of this House and of the public at large of the role, procedures and many achievements of the Canada Information Office.

I am delighted to do so, because, clearly, the members of the Bloc Québécois cannot be expected to applaud the development of direct and relevant communications between Canadians and their government.

In fact, more people, especially those from Quebec, are discovering the services and benefits available to them from the Government of Canada, as the separatist issue fades into the background. This is the reason for the unrest among the Bloc Québécois members in recent days. I can understand this frightens them somewhat.

• (1055)

[English]

They will never let the facts interfere with their dream of breaking the country apart.

[Translation]

Established in 1996, the Canada Information Office first focused its efforts on establishing structures and meeting the most pressing needs.

In 1998, the Government of Canada struck a special committee in Cabinet to plan and co-ordinate all government communications. The Prime Minister did me the honour of asking me to chair it, and I can assure you I take this responsibility most seriously.

The Prime Minister also made me responsible for the Canada Information Office, which he mandated to provide strategic advice and operational support to the new ministerial committee. This committee and the CIO share a common mission, that of helping to improve communication between the Government of Canada and the public. Better communication means better understanding, and, indirectly, better mutual appreciation.

There is absolutely no doubt that the CIO makes a positive contribution to Canadian unity through its work, initiatives and successes.

This is why the members of the Bloc Québécois are today calling for its dismantling, and I can understand them in a way. Still, I would remind them that Canadian unity remains more than ever an important priority of our government and of all the other political parties represented here in this House.

[English]

At this point I would like to explain the reasons that led our government to examine the whole question of improving communications with Canadians, to set up the CIO and to support the efforts in this area.

Throughout the world the new millennium is associated with the advent of new information technology. We are surrounded by hundreds of television channels, 24 hour information networks, the Internet, cellular phones, e-mail and many other tools or toys bringing instant communications and information to us.

The net result is that we are living in an environment where we have access to more information than ever before. At the same time

Canadians have developed a taste, even a need, for increasingly precise, specialized and complex information.

[*Translation*]

Canada is not made up of an homogeneous group of individuals: education, language, economic situation and lifestyle are all factors which affect public information needs. However, there are some common values.

All studies show that in Canada as in other countries citizens feel that their governments are not tuned in to their needs. They want their governments to give them more precise information on available services.

Each one of the various departments can communicate its own priorities and accomplishments but the CIO offers a comprehensive perspective of Government of Canada communications.

That is the context in which the Government of Canada decided to give itself an indispensable tool to better communicate with the citizens of our great country. That tool is the Canada Information Office.

Besides assisting the cabinet committee on communication matters, the CIO develops projects and co-ordinates with various departments and agencies initiatives to better serve the Canadian population.

Our objective is to see the CIO become a centre of excellence in government communications. Everyday, the direction and staff of the CIO strive with ardour and dedication to reach that objective.

In fact, the success of some initiatives shows that we are on the right track. I am thinking for instance of the rural guide that was distributed all over the country. Last week, that guide received an award of excellence from the International Association of Business Communicators for the National Capital Region.

• (1100)

Of course, the Bloc Québécois members did not even mention this honour.

This is a very concrete example of why we constantly seek to improve communication with Canadians, who have a right to know that what they receive from their government is factual, essential and relevant information.

[*English*]

The CIO does public opinion research, follow up and media analysis. These activities benefit a number of departments and are pursued in collaboration with them.

Thanks to these initiatives, the Government of Canada listens more attentively to the concerns and particular needs of citizens

Supply

throughout the nation. Other projects like advertising in weekly newspapers offer Canadians specific information on the services that the government makes available to them.

[*Translation*]

There are also ministerial tours, which give Quebecers an opportunity to talk directly with Cabinet members. They talk about the issues that are close to their heart, and about the projects people in their area hold dear. They request and obtain relevant information on their government programs and services.

These tours are true examples of democracy in action. Ministers go back to the grassroots to keep Canadians in remote areas informed and to listen to them, even groups who have never had a direct and personal access to their elected leaders.

Who could condemn, criticize or oppose such an initiative? Nobody, apart from the Nlob Québécois. I would even say that the Bloc has a hard time doing it. Not being able to oppose the very commendable and positive initiative from the CIO, the Bloc members are looking for flaws. They claim that these ministerial tours are partisan. We all know, and all the people we have met also know, that it is not true. I would like to let some of the people we have met talk about that.

At the end of a ministerial tour in his area, the president of the Trois-Rivières chamber of commerce, Jean Boutet, said, and I quote:

We took this opportunity to talk to Paul Martin about the budget surpluses, the bank mergers, the state of the Canadian economy, the need for regional equalization and the good work he has done in the last years.

Are the budget, banks and the economy partisan issues? Of course not. Those are issues that Canadians everywhere in the country are highly interested in. But let us see more.

In Matapédia-Matane, the mayor of Matane, Maurice Gauthier, stated, and I quote:

We discussed several issues, such as the port, the airport, the diamond development and new technologies.

Are those partisan issues?

In Quebec City, the editorial writer at *Le Soleil* wrote, and I quote:

—the beginnings of this era of co-operation are promising and are spreading in the Quebec City area a wave of positivism that is welcome.

I believe it is clear that these tours are a means to communicate with Quebecers.

Let us move now to the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, where the Bloc Québécois House leader comes from. The mayor of Jonquière, Daniel Giguère, stated at the end of a ministerial visit, and again I quote:

We really felt that the government wants to help Jonquière and the area. It was very constructive.

Supply

Is that being partisan? When the truth hurts, the Bloc members holler.

Why are the Bloc members upset? Why are they demanding that the CIO be dismantled? They are terrified that Quebecers will find out that Canada is working well and that it is worth being part of it. Being short on substantive arguments about the value of and need for ministerial visits in Quebec, the Bloc members have attacked the contracting out process.

Here too, their accusations do not stand up to scrutiny. I repeat, all the CIO contracts have been granted in accordance with treasury board rules.

• (1105)

Better yet, I can assure the House that, since April 1, 1999, all contracts over \$25,000 have been awarded to professionals who qualified through a bidding process.

All calls for tenders were posted on the MERX electronic bulletin board, and competitions were held under the rules set out by the Government of Canada.

In a fit of partisanship that is typical of the Bloc Quebecois, other members of that party are screaming because certain contracts were awarded to people who share the government's political philosophy.

I am trying to understand why the millions of Canadians who support this government could not or should not have access to government contracts. In my opinion, this would just deprive us of a large and precious pool of professional skills and expertise. Moreover, such an approach would create a highly discriminatory system that would go against our most fundamental values.

Of course, I understand that members of the Bloc Quebecois would prefer by far that these contracts be awarded only to sovereignists, but I have to tell them frankly that they are not being realistic. Even their head office, in Quebec City, cannot achieve such levels of so-called perfection.

In the meantime, the government team will continue to visit all the regions of Quebec. Moreover, thanks to the excellent services provided by the CIO, we will keep on spreading the good news that Canada works and that it is worth being part of this great country.

[*English*]

Yes, Canada is a great country and it is worth being part of it. I know Bloc Quebecois members are nervous and worried. The Canada Information Office has become an essential, efficient tool against the goal of separating Quebec from Canada. They want to see it dismantled. I am telling my friends loud and clear that this will not happen, not now nor as long as there is a separatist party threatening to break up our great country.

[*Translation*]

It is clear that Quebecers appreciate—

Mr. Daniel Turp: It is annoying listening to this.

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano: When it hurts, they react.

I was saying that it is clear that with each passing day Quebecers find more reasons to belong to Canada. They do not want to hear about referendums. They no longer want to be at odds with each other. They want their governments, all their governments, to work together calmly, hand in hand, in order to improve our quality of life.

Their desire to live in peace, harmony and prosperity is legitimate and is shared by Canadians in all regions of the country. That is why I am proud of the constructive and positive work done by the team at the Canada Information Office.

Despite what Bloc Quebecois members have said, the men and women working in the CIO are making an important contribution to our country. Daily, they are strengthening the ties between individual Canadians and the Government of Canada. Daily, they are helping to build on Canadian unity and solidarity. They deserve our respect and our encouragement. That is why we are going to continue working together, calmly and with determination, in order to develop the potential of our great country, Canada.

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Madam Speaker, after that great speech, I am tempted to ask the minister how much that speech cost us and who wrote it?

The Canada Information Office does not do anything itself. Everything is contracted out. I would not be surprised if the speech that the minister just read cost us \$25,000 or \$27,500—this is the scale involved.

If the drafting of his speech was contracted out, could the minister table the contract in the House and assure us that it was awarded through a bidding process?

If, as the minister admits, the Canada Information Office is a tool to promote Canadian unity, why is it managed by the Department of Public Works and not by the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs?

• (1110)

Is it because out of all the jobs the Prime Minister has given him, the minister omitted a very important one? Is it because he is the chief organizer of the Liberal Party of Canada in Quebec that the CIO had to be at his service, so that he could do his job as the organizer in Quebec for his party? That is the real issue.

Why is the CIO not under the authority of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, if promoting Canadian unity is its only responsibility?

Supply

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano: Madam Speaker, I thought I had explained at the beginning of my speech the reason why I was the minister responsible for the Canadian Information Office. The member of the Bloc Québécois, however, is so obsessed by his beliefs that he has not listened in the least.

At the beginning of my speech I said that, in 1998, the Prime Minister created a cabinet communications committee of which I was made head, and he subsequently entrusted me with responsibility for the BIC since its mandate is to co-ordinate the communications of the Government of Canada, of all its departments.

So I am the minister responsible for the BIC because I am the chair of the communications committee and not because I am the Minister of Public Works. I believe, however, that this is a bit too complicated for the hon. member for Chambly to grasp.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I recall specifically when the Canada Information Office was set up originally under the heritage minister. The reason this minister is now in charge of the Canada Information Office is that it was not managed at all well by the heritage minister and in fact the CIO was getting into some difficulty.

I want to state clearly and unequivocally that my party and I, along with the NDP and the Progressive Conservatives, share the same beliefs as this minister and the government. Canada is the greatest nation in the world. We must do everything we can possibly do to keep it fully intact. I have some difficulty, though, with the way in which the CIO has conducted itself over its brief history.

First, the CIO has never explained its involvement in the missing \$4.5 million for Options Canada. If that money were wrongly spent, if that money were put into a wrong place with respect to the referendum question in the province of Quebec, and if there were some malfeasance on the part of the government, I would suggest to the minister that it is in the interest of the people of Canada who are federalists for the government to come clean about the \$4.5 million rather than continue to sweep and sweep and sweep it under the rug.

Second, the difficulty the government has created with the Canada Information Office is that many of the contracts and much of the ongoing activity have been conducted in a way that does not benefit what we are in Canada, which is a democracy. In a democracy the people depend on the people in the Chamber to hold the government accountable for the affairs of the government and to be as transparent as possible.

I suggest in the strongest way possible to the minister that even if we can get him to clear up the history of the Canada Information Office, which I do not have a lot of hope for but I am asking for,

from this point forward there must be proper transparency of the Canada Information Office. The country needs openness and transparency because democracy cannot be true democracy without openness and transparency.

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano: Madam Speaker, concerning the hon. member's question about Options Canada, BIC was not in existence at the time. I think it was heritage, and the minister of heritage has said many times in the House that an audit was going on and the auditor general was involved.

• (1115)

Concerning my responsibility as the minister responsible for the CIO, as I said in the House this week, at the beginning of its creation the CIO was asked to deliver a mandate but it did not have the necessary tools among its civil servants, and it actually created a mess. Therefore certain extensions were given.

Once I took over the responsibility for CIO, since April 1, 1999 every contract above \$25,000 has had to be publicly tendered. Those contracts can be checked through access to information. A full fiscal year is in place for every contract above \$25,000 and that can be audited. I have been assured by officials that is what took place. My director was very clear in a written letter which I made public.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Madam Speaker, above and beyond the questions of transparency and use of public funds, which we consider misuse, for studies by Complex consulting on provincial legislation relating to amendments to the constitution, I would like to know who these people are.

What the Canada Information Office is doing is, quite obviously, part of plan B. I would like the minister to tell me whether what the Canada Information Office is doing and the propaganda it is distributing is not merely part of plan B, part of the arsenal being used against Quebec sovereignty, against that eminently democratic project of ours.

It is a major insult to us when the member says that what we are planning is a threat to break up Canada and that it lacks legitimacy, since the Supreme Court of Canada itself has said that it was a legitimate project.

Enough then of this talk of threats by someone who is himself from Quebec and who knows that there are people in his riding, as there are elsewhere in Quebec, who believe sovereignty is a legitimate option that deserves to be presented and defended to Quebecers with all the democratic tools at our disposal.

Is not the Canada Information Office and everything it is doing quite simply one more component of plan B, which is aimed at blocking Quebecers' path to sovereignty?

Supply

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano: Madam Speaker, I hope I will have the same time as the hon. member.

First, I have always said that when Quebec City communicates, it informs. When Ottawa communicates, it is propaganda.

For example, in fiscal year 1999-2000, the Government of Quebec, through various departments, such as the departments of revenue, finance, treasury board and others, gave \$96,000 to the Mouvement national des Québécois et Québécoises. That is legitimate. I have always said that it was legitimate to promote separation. Two referendums were held in Quebec and Quebecers said no. Is this not democratic?

Why are they allowed to talk up their option while we are obliged to say nothing and not defend our options? Where is democracy in all this?

[*English*]

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, it is with a great deal of respect that I approach the debate this morning.

The Canada Information Office has a very interesting title. The word "Information" has some very interesting connotations because information is separate from facts. Facts are indisputable observations, the things that everyone would agree upon. Information is not necessarily agreed upon. Information is often the taking of facts, interpreting them and applying them in certain ways to create a particular result that may influence other people to make decisions, to feel a certain way or to develop certain attitudes.

● (1120)

It is to that extent that I would like to read from the department's statement, the departmental overview, the mandate, the rules and responsibilities of the Canada Information Office.

I would like to ask the people who are watching this particular debate to pay particular attention to the words in the statement and compare them, if they have read the novel by George Orwell, to *1984*. The statement reads:

The Canada Information Office's (CIO) mandate is to improve communications between the Government of Canada and citizens. While individual departments and agencies communicate about activities within their areas of responsibility, the CIO is increasingly focused on communicating with citizens from a corporate perspective, representing the Government of Canada as a whole. . . Information on the government's overall direction, key priorities and the broad range of programs and services.

Based on public opinion and communications research, the CIO developed national and regionally responsive citizen-focused communications initiatives. It

also provides advice and support, in collaboration with the Privy Council Office, to the ad hoc Committee of Cabinet on Government Communications which was created in 1998 to improve the effectiveness of government communications.

The CIO's role and mandate has gradually evolved to the above. When it was created on July 9, 1996 through Order-in-Council 1996-1066, its mandate reflected the Government's commitment to inform Canadians about their country, about each other, about the renewal of the federation and about the role of the Government of Canada. This evolution from a largely unity focused mandate to one more focused on corporate communications was brought about in response to the Government's commitment to better communicate with citizens.

As I went through those three paragraphs, how many of those who have read George Orwell's *1984* would say, that is like the information office that George Orwell imagined a long time ago, which was actually to create a particular impression or direction as to what should happen.

The hon. minister just indicated, and it is reflected in a phrase in one of the above paragraphs, that it was primarily to bring about the unity of Canada. I could not agree more with the minister. I think we do need to have this country together. One of the saddest experiences I have had in the House was to witness the operation of the members of the Bloc whose sole purpose is to destroy the unity of the country.

Nothing hurts me more than to think of breaking up the country that my grandfather chose as being the place where he wanted to live and where he wanted his children to get married and his grandchildren to live. I am proud of this country. I am so thankful that he chose to move out of Russia, come to Canada and set up his operation here.

I want to keep the country united. I love our uniqueness and our various cultural differences. We are not all the same and I am happy about those differences. However this does not make one group better than another. It does not mean that we should separate from one another. We can learn from one another and live together.

Not only does that require information, it also requires an attitude, an attitude of patriotism, of transparency and of working together, and to be democratic about it. We must also be accountable to one another. We do not need nor do we want a propaganda machine that will do only one thing: promote a particular political party.

The mandate does not say that it is the Liberal Party that is being promoted. It says that the government's operations are to be communicated with the citizens. To that degree it is good, but is it doing that? That becomes the key question.

The minister has given us some assurances this morning, but I want to ask whether in fact those assurances are being observed.

I now want to get into another part of the department's own statement about the operation of the CIO.

● (1125)

I will read what it says on page 7 of the document that I am referring to. It says:

The CIO's activities are greatly influenced by the opinions and attitudes of the Canadian public. What Canadians tell us in our surveys help shape our initiatives and the communications advice we provide to the government. For instance, our research indicates that many Canadians believe the government is not providing them with enough information and a large majority believe that the government should place a high priority on providing information on how to access programs and services. Our research also tells us that Canadians possess relatively low levels of familiarity with government actions.

I cannot help but think about what has happened in the House in the last three months. The Minister of HRDC has been singularly secretive about certain things. It was not until a request was made by our critic, my colleague for Calgary—Nose Hill, that this be made public that in fact it became public. We have seen a number of things. We have had to dig and dig and push and pull to get the information.

We still do not have all the information. If that is the issue, if this group found out that Canadians want more information, why is it not forthcoming? I really question whether in fact the CIO is doing what it was supposed to be doing.

The overview goes on to say:

Demographics also play an important role in determining our activities. The CIO's communications strategies reflect Canada's increasingly diverse and pluralistic population and take into consideration factors such as regional differences, the aging population and varying levels of literacy.

That is indeed true. Just a moment ago the minister referred to the increasing sophistication of technology; that people want more information and they want it faster. With the complexity of the various issues, we need to recognize that complexity itself can be an impediment to clear communication. It therefore has to be simplified so that people can understand it directly and accurately. The key factor here is accuracy.

The final sentence reads:

Technological advances and new media are also having significant effects on how the Government of Canada communicates—

That is the case. There are rumours now that the government is considering a secure channel. There is a lot controversy around that particular channel. How will the contract be awarded for that particular channel? What are the specifications that will have to be met? These things are not clear at this point. There are a lot of complications with that, and I am sure the hon. minister would be only too pleased to recognize this and take some action.

I really encourage the minister to ensure that the kind of things he does in that particular connection do not fall into the kind of criticism that we are offering to the CIO, in the way it is operating

Supply

and particularly the advice it has given to the HRDC, if indeed it gave it some. I think it probably did.

Let us look at the department's communications activities. It says:

In 2000-2001, the CIO will place much of its effort on the design and delivery of innovative, citizen-oriented, corporate communications products and initiatives.

If it is going to be citizen-oriented, we will have to see the evidence that it is citizen-oriented, that the primary purpose is to get the people and the government to talk together rather than the government talking to the people and telling them that this is what they had better believe and this is what they had better do.

We want to have it the other way as well which says "We, the people, would like you, the government, to do this". I ask myself, I ask the hon. minister and I ask the Prime Minister, if this is the case, if they have been listening so carefully, if they want to be citizen-oriented, why is it then that we have not had a tax cut? Why is it that we do not have a plan to pay down the debt?

Over and over again I hear people asking when the government will start paying down the debt. When is it going to have a plan to pay down the debt? There is no plan. The only plan it has is that if it has a little surplus, it will put it toward the debt. That is fine but that is not what we want.

We want a systematic and planned contribution that will say how much the debt is going to be reduced each year. Unless we do that, the interest charges and the service charges for that debt will continue and we will get nothing.

The health care budget alone would be covered by half of the service charges on the debt at the present time, and I am speaking about the federal contribution. If we are going to be citizen-oriented, we must pay attention to that.

The paper goes on to say:

These corporate communications initiatives will be designed to reflect citizens' needs and interests for information—

● (1130)

The citizens want action. They want information, that is true, but they want to know what we are doing.

What is the Minister of Health going to do to fix the health care problem? We do not know. He is not telling us. When he goes to a meeting he says all kinds of beautiful things. Not too long ago he was in Kelowna in my constituency and made a beautiful speech. He said that we are going to enter into a partnership with a program with the Kelowna General Hospital. The doctors in the audience asked, "Where is the money?" It is easy to talk, but where is the action? Very noble activities are being proposed here, but what are they really going to do?

Supply

“They will be based on the CIO’s research and what it has learned from its practical experience to date”. That has given us a whole lot of information. Are they really going to do that? It is going to be a major change.

The addition of regional communications co-ordinators will further enhance co-ordination and collaboration of government-wide communications at the regional and local level. The CIO will also continue to play an important role in a variety of government-wide communications initiatives led by other departments and agencies. For example, it is working closely with the Treasury Board Secretariat, the Privy Council Office, and Public Works and Government Services Canada on a revised government communications policy. It is also collaborating with the Privy Council Office on the development and renewal of the government communications community.

That is wonderful and it sounds so good. I want to ask the minister whether he will have those kinds of statements that this is what they are going to do. Will he present to parliament a report saying that these are the things the Canada Information Office actually achieved, that it did what was said it would do?

There are a lot of things we need to do, but I want to move on to another section which has to do with sole source contracts. The hon. minister a moment ago said that as of April 1, 1999 there have been no contracts awarded above \$25,000 that were not tendered.

I have here the auditor’s report dated November 1999. This particular report is a rather strong indictment on the whole business of sole source contracting. In fact, using advance contract award notices, the auditor general goes so far as to say that this has become a fifth way of granting contracts by the Government of Canada. He makes some rather strong statements. In his introductory paragraph he says:

The principles of accessibility, competition, fairness to suppliers, transparency and best value lie at the core of government contracting policy.

Good.

The contracting regulations require that all contracts be let through a competitive process, with certain very narrowly defined exceptions. When the contract is needed in an emergency, when the value is small, when it is not in the public interest to solicit bids (for example, if national security is involved) or when there is only one supplier who can do the work, the contract can be let without competition on what is called a sole-source basis. Almost 90 percent of the 50 sole-source contracts we examined did not fall under any of the exceptions or did not have adequate evidence of doing so and hence ought to have been competitively tendered. As in last year’s audit of sole-source contracts for professional services, we concluded that the process of awarding most of the contracts audited in this year’s sample would not pass the test of public scrutiny.

Those are very, very severe indictable statements. This refers not only to the CIO but goes right across a number of departments. I have the list of departments which were involved and they all came in for criticism: the Department of National Defence, the Canadian International Development Agency, Industry Canada, the Department of Human Resources Development, and the Department of Public Works and Government Services. Ninety per cent. That is high.

He goes on to become much more specific. I want to refer specifically to several of these. I am reading from the auditor general’s report:

Only 11 percent of the 50 contracts we examined had a justification for sole-sourcing on file that complied with the conditions stipulated in the Government Contracts Regulations. Specifically, none of the contracts in our sample were for under \$25,000. None invoked the exceptions for pressing emergency or national interest. The critical decision used to justify sole-sourcing in most of these contracts was the determination that the contractor was “unique”—that is, the only person or firm capable of performing the work. Managers are supposed to make this determination, justify it and document it before deciding to sole-source and before posting an ACAN, the advanced contract award notice. However, in 89 percent of the 50 cases we examined, the uniqueness of the contractor was either not determined at all (that is, management was fully aware that the firm selected was not unique) or was unsupported in fact.

• (1135)

That is pretty serious stuff. I want to go to another paragraph:

Accordingly, many more contracts than could be justified were awarded without competition—a situation that does not reflect the principle of open access to contracting opportunities with the federal government. The awarding of these contracts would not withstand public scrutiny. This situation also imposes significant opportunity costs on the contractor community at large, which is all too often unfairly denied access to potential business that it has a right to compete for.

It goes on. The Bloc made some very interesting observations. The sponsor of today’s motion made some interesting statements about the fact that certain people’s uniqueness was determined not by their qualifications or competence but rather by their political affiliation. It makes me think back to what the department said in its mandate and its role for the CIO. It says:

Through its media monitoring capacity and regional presence, the CIO will continue to track current and emerging trends, increasingly from a corporate perspective. It will gather information in a timely and targeted manner to enable the government and the CIO to respond to citizens’ information needs efficiently and effectively.

That is beautiful. All of Canada is involved. Now watch the next sentence:

It will continue to co-ordinate ministerial visits in Quebec, providing factual background information on the communities they visit as well as logistical and other support. The CIO will also continue to produce a variety of information documents such as calendars of events to help the government in its communications efforts.

Singled out is Quebec. Why? I do not know why. One can surmise; one can speculate. But there is no question about the positive position that has been taken that a region has been clearly identified and it has been carefully articulated that is what we will be concentrating on. One of our focuses will be Quebec.

I am very concerned that this country stay together and there is reason to concentrate on Quebec. We want Quebec to feel welcome in Canada, but the rest of Canada wants to be welcome in Canada also. British Columbia wants to feel as much a part of Canada as Quebec, as Alberta, as Saskatchewan and all the other provinces. We want every citizen in Canada to be proud of being a Canadian.

I do not find I am sympathetic at all. I find little sympathy in my mind and in my heart to identify one particular area and say that is where we will concentrate, and by implication suggest that we will not concentrate in the same way on the other parts of Canada.

I wish the CIO would have stated clearly that we will concentrate on all parts and all regions of Canada and not name one in particular and say that by implication it is special. We are unique and we are different. We are not the same, but we are equal, and that is a significant issue. None of us is better than another.

• (1140)

This is the issue. If the CIO really wants to do its job, let us develop that patriotic attitude among Canadians that we are one and equal before the constitution and the law.

[Translation]

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Madam Speaker, it seemed to me that my colleague from the Canadian Alliance near the end of his remarks said that this instrument of electoral organization, the CIO, operated only in Quebec.

Is he not afraid, though, that one fine morning—at the moment we have a minister for electoral organization from the Liberal Party of Canada in Quebec, he is using the CIO in Quebec—but is it unimaginable that a Liberal Party of Canada organizer in Alberta, British Columbia or Saskatchewan might one day also use the CIO to unseat Alliance members in their ridings where they live? Canadian unity is not an issue there and yet this is what the CIO does. For the time being, it is doing it in Quebec—and this does not distress the member particularly—but the day it starts its activities in his riding is the day my colleague will perhaps change his tune.

Finally, my question is as follows: is he not worried that the government will use its information for purely partisan purposes? And when a party is mentioned, it is not necessarily the member's party. I would like to know how he sees things.

[English]

Mr. Werner Schmidt: Madam Speaker, am I concerned? Yes I am, very much so.

If the hon. member will recall, right at the beginning of my remarks I said that the CIO is becoming more of a propaganda machine in favour of the government party, rather than to do the broader thing, which is to direct the attention of Canadians to what is really happening. I tried to make it very clear that what we are talking about here is not necessarily facts, but about information which is designed to develop attitudes in a particular direction.

Am I concerned that this could be used for electoral purposes? You had better believe I am concerned about that. By the same token, I also am not that naive to think that a government that is in

Supply

power would not try to slant the information to shine the best possible light on its activities. That is fair ball. The Bloc does exactly the same thing. When it is used exclusively and where it is manipulated, that is where I take exception. There is some evidence that has happened and it could easily be used that way.

That is one of the reasons I am very critical about the way in which the CIO operates. It must be encouraged to become very balanced in its approach and do as I indicated in the last part of my remarks, which is to build a strong Canada where people are equal, where provinces are equal, and where we can unite under one flag.

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for a very enlightening speech.

He questioned whether or not the government listens. Definitely the government listens. We had a plan to reduce the deficit by 3% of the GDP. We eliminated the deficit and now there is a surplus. Now the government has a difficulty. When it had a deficit it could tell everybody there was no money. Now that it has money everybody wants some. The government must balance it. Definitely we listen.

The CIO communications division co-ordinates the government as a whole. I remind my colleague that each department has its own responsibility in communications matters to communicate its policies and reports. I would like to reassure the hon. member that every year there will be a report and it will match what is now the system in parliament. We have a three year plan and every year we compare our reports.

• (1145)

Along with the President of the Treasury Board we are striving to make sure that we can evaluate and express opinions as parliamentarians on whether the policies we advance are taking place and providing the results we hoped for.

The member addressed the question of the Quebec ministerial tour. I assure the hon. member that the tour is ministerial, even though the Bloc claims otherwise. As I indicated during my speech there are no party people involved. The real objective is to communicate to Quebecers the programs of the Government of Canada.

On a daily basis we, and when I say "we" I mean Canadians, the Government of Canada and the country as a whole, are attacked by the Bloc here or by the Parti Québécois in Quebec misinforming or saying that Canada does not work. I recall in 1995 they said the country was in bankruptcy, that Quebec should get out of Canada because it was in bankruptcy. We are not in bankruptcy. We are one of the best industrial countries in the world. We can look at economic growth and its results in terms of interest rates and inflation.

Supply

As ministers from Quebec we said that we had to inform every region of the country of what Canada was doing. That is what we are doing. Ministers in other parts of the country decided to do it. This was demanded of the CIO by the Quebec ministers. Since we wanted to go around the province we needed an organization that could do it. We are different ministers with different responsibilities but we wanted to ensure there was a follow-up and that when questions were raised they got clear answers and solutions. In the meantime we can be co-ordinated to know exactly what as a whole the Government of Canada is doing for its citizens.

That is the Quebec ministerial tour. If we would not have included it in the report, probably the member would have accused us of hiding it. We are not hiding it. We put it there because we wanted everyone to know. I hope other regions of the country continue to inform Canadians because that is what it is all about.

Mr. Werner Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. minister for saying that we listen to the people. Indeed we do. I am sure the government has listened to the people to a degree. My point is that the government is not listening well enough. People are telling us very clearly that while there is a certain amount that will be paid down on the debt it is not enough. Taxes have not been cut the way they should have been cut.

Before the Liberals became the government they said they would cut the GST. They did not. They are still taking the \$7 billion which are being contributed by people in Canada who earn \$20,000 or less. Talk about greed. The Prime Minister has said that ours is a party of greed. I would like to turn that right around and say it is exactly the opposite.

If we really want to listen then we should listen to the whole story. I commend the minister for the things he has done, but it is not enough by any stretch of the imagination. The Minister of National Defence has not listened.

If this is to be a co-ordinating function then let it be a co-ordinating function. Let them listen to all the people. Let the Department of National Defence, let the Minister of Health and let the Minister of Natural Resources hear what the situation is in British Columbia and in other parts of Canada. Why is it that they will not respond to the people? That is the issue.

With all due respect, the minister may be trying but it is not enough. It does not go far enough. I am not sure that this is the best vehicle to use. I am not at all convinced that is the case. It may be but I need more evidence than what we have today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will be very brief.

I want to ask the Canadian Alliance member if, instead of spending some \$20 million through the CIO and several millions to organize the Canada Day celebrations—I have nothing against celebrating Canada Day in Quebec and against the fact that the government refuses to give the total budget for Canada Day celebrations across the country, because I am under the impression that it spends more in Quebec than elsewhere—it would not be more appropriate to invest that money in health, education and other services for which taxpayers have a real need?

• (1150)

[*English*]

Mr. Werner Schmidt: Madam Speaker, the answer is that money can be spent better than it has been spent. First, we clearly need to fix our health care system. Second, we need to cut taxes. Both those things must happen. As to whether \$20 million should be spent on CIO, there is enough information out there to know that if the government did those things it would not have as big a communication problem as it has now.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to say a few words about the motion before the House today. I say at the outset the our party supports the idea of having a Canada Information Office.

In other words, we disagree with the Bloc motion that the office should be disbanded altogether. There should be a Canada Information Office to help provide information about government programs across the country. That is a legitimate role. It is bit of a double standard for the Bloc to say that it should be closed entirely. There are similar agencies in the province of Quebec that provide information about Quebec government programs to the population of that province. That is where we stand as a party.

I hope the minister would agree that we have to make very sure and clear that this is a government information office for the Government of Canada and not for the Liberal Party or any other party. That is a fine line that can sometimes be crossed. It may not be by this minister or the next minister, but it could be the next minister or next party thereafter.

When there are government information offices in any democratic society it is always very sensitive that the role of the office be very clearly defined in terms of providing legitimate information and facts about government institutions, programs and policies to the population of a particular country and that it not cross the line into partisan politics. Once that happens we all have problems in terms of the legitimacy of governments programs, government spending and the whole national unity cause, which is the most important aspect here.

The Canada Information Office was established after the 1995 referendum, which was nearly a disaster. It was very close indeed.

There was a feeling among many people including myself that there had to be a co-ordinating office for the Government of Canada to provide information, not just in Quebec but across the country, about federal institutions and federal programs.

Maybe we should take a look at its mandate and make sure that issues are more clearly defined. I think that is a legitimate question. These things should always be reviewed. Maybe we should look at the budget of \$21 billion. Perhaps it is not necessary today. Perhaps it is a bit high.

By the way, I am told that amount would be enough to keep the CBC on air in the four Atlantic provinces, which is important to Canadians. It is also enough money to keep many thousands of hospital beds open for many months in all parts of Canada. That is extremely important to our citizens. There are many other priorities.

As I said at the outset, we need a Canadian information office. We need a co-ordinating body to provide information. Most provinces do that. Certainly the Government of Quebec does that. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with the idea, but this agency has to be scrutinized like any other agency of government.

I have some concerns about some of the activities undertaken by that office, for example, the monitoring of some activities of certain journalists, a lot of which is legitimate, in terms of keeping tabs on what certain journalists say about the important issues of federalism and national unity. Sometimes it goes a bit overboard.

Edison Stewart is a very prominent reporter for the *Toronto Star*. Many members of the House and I know him well. He was monitored by the Canada Information Office because he had written pieces that were skeptical of the office in terms of its role, mandate and spending. I do not think some of the things said about him were necessary work for the Canada Information Office. By the way, he is no longer an employee of the *Toronto Star*. He has taken a job with the treasury board. He is hardly a person who is not supportive of the overall institutions of federal government and the promotion of legitimate government policies in the country.

• (1155)

I would watch those kinds of things in terms of not going overboard as has been done. The Bloc has released the names of some journalists where there has probably been undue monitoring of people in the media and the press. That being said, I think there is a legitimate role for the agency.

In the 1995 campaign the criticism was on the other side. Many people were very critical of the Prime Minister and the federal government not being better prepared for the referendum, not having their ducks in order and not having the plan in place for that referendum. That referendum was almost lost. That is why we need

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an agency like this one which is a bit of a quarterback in terms of providing government information. It must be stressed that it has to be government information, not propaganda for the political party in place. That is a fine line.

[*Translation*]

I must also tell my Bloc Quebecois friends that, if I am not mistaken, there were Quebec government agencies doing the same thing in that province, there were agencies promoting government programs in Quebec. The same thing is done in my province of Saskatchewan and in every Canadian province. It is important to have an agency that tells people about the policies of the government, not those of the political party forming the government.

In Saskatchewan, it is the NDP, and also in Manitoba and British Columbia. Here, it is the Liberal Party. In the Province of Quebec, it is the Parti Quebecois. It is important to have an agency that represents legitimate government interests, and not the partisan position of one political party or another.

The CIO was established after the 1995 referendum because we almost lost the country. This was a referendum where the results were very close, split almost 50-50 between the yes and the no vote.

It is important to remember that national unity is not just about information. We must have a very strong country, and an economy that is very strong and very fair for all Canadians.

When I look at the government right now, I see that it has cut too deeply into our social programs. I am thinking in particular of medicare, which has been slashed by the Liberal government. The one big difference between this country and the United States lies in social programs such as medicare. This is something that unifies the country from coast to coast. It is very important. Right now, we have a federal government that is only contributing 13, 14 or 15 cents out of every dollar spent on medicare throughout Canada.

I remember very clearly how, years ago, Tommy Douglas, the leader of the federal NDP, as well as the premier of my province of Saskatchewan, established medicare. In the 1960s—1966 or 1967—medicare was introduced Canada-wide by Lester B. Pearson. At that time, the federal government paid 50% of the cost of medicare in our country, and the provinces paid the other 50%. Now, the provinces are paying almost 85% or 87%, while the federal government is paying between 13% and 15%.

It is the lack of confidence in our federal government—I am not talking about the Liberal Party here—the lack of confidence in our social programs, such as medicare, and the lack of confidence in our education system and many other things that are contributing to the lack of national unity.

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• (1200)

In our country, we can now afford to rebuild our social safety net, to have the best health care system, the best social programs, the best transportation system and the best communications system in the world. We have the money to do all that. With a very strong economy, we also have the flexibility to reorganize the federation immediately. We can recognize Quebec as a distinct society.

I was in favour of the Meech Lake accord and worked very hard on that proposal ten or twelve years ago. The current Prime Minister was against the Meech Lake accord. My friends remember vividly the role he played, ten or twelve year ago, with Clyde Wells and even with Mr. McKenna, who was the Premier of New Brunswick at that time. We saw the beginning of a rift during the Meech Lake discussions.

In this country, we still need to have an open mind and recognize Quebec as being different, unique and distinct. It is something we can celebrate everywhere in Canada. We also need some flexibility in our federation on the part of the other provinces, in another sense, and we need to recognize the right of aboriginal people to self-government. This is very important.

We can do all that since we have the money and we have a population that is diversified and open to new ideas. It is easier to have new ideas in a strong economy. It is easier to be generous when there is money in one's pockets. It is easier to have new ideas when there is money in one's pockets.

That is why national unity is not only about information on government, not only about having a new constitution, not only about such things but also about social programs like health insurance and a communications system such as CBC and Radio-Canada to unify this country.

What we have now, however, is a government that is in the process of slashing the budget of CBC and Radio-Canada. The Liberal government has reduced their budget more than Brian Mulroney's Conservative government. It may be a bit surprising to see a Liberal government doing this, to see that it is more conservative than the Conservatives, but such actions do not promote national unity.

We need the CBC and Radio-Canada. They are part of our national unity. We need a good communications system in what has become the largest country in the world. Now we are bigger, in terms of geography, than Russia. In this country, when we talk of national unity, we need a public broadcasting system, a public communications system.

[*English*]

The Canada Information Office is important, but it is only a small step toward national unity. As I said in French, the one thing

that really sets us apart as Canadians from Americans is the fact that we have good, progressive social programs in Canada. I am talking about the national health care program, which is progressive.

There are a lot of things that unite us.

• (1205)

I look at my friends in the Bloc Québécois and I see many similarities between Quebec and western Canada, in terms of the co-operative movement, the credit unions and the caisses populaires. I see many similarities in terms of community spirit and people working together. I see many similarities in terms of the social democrats of the New Democratic Party in western Canada and social democrats in the province of Quebec. If we could somehow organize and strengthen our similarities we could create a very strong and powerful country.

Too often we concentrate on the negatives, on the things that divide us. Too often we have politicians who practise the politics of division. We see that particularly in this parliament. Basically, we have five regional political parties, with Reform being the party of the three western provinces and the Conservative Party being the party of the Atlantic. My party represents the west and the Atlantic. The Liberal Party is basically the party of Ontario.

[*Translation*]

By definition, the Bloc Québécois is the party of Quebec. We are all divided.

[*English*]

We tend to speak for regional interests. We could get rid of some of that. We could change our electoral system and bring in a mix of proportional representation so that whatever party gets 20% of the votes in the country would get roughly 20% of the seats. That would foster national unity because it would force each party in the country to have a national vision of where it wanted to go. A vote in Quebec for the Canadian Alliance would be as important as a vote in downtown Calgary. It would be the same thing for the NDP, the Liberals, the Conservatives or the Bloc Québécois. It would force political parties to have a national vision. We are one of only three countries in the world with more than eight million people which does not have some semblance of proportional representation in our electoral system.

Along with electoral reform, we could reform this place to make the role of members of parliament more meaningful. We could strengthen the committees of the House and provide them with more independence. We could have more free votes and fewer confidence votes. We could take away power from the executive and the prime minister and restore power to parliament, where it belongs, to make this place more democratic and more accountable. Those are the kinds of things that would foster national unity,

a stronger country and a sense of nationalism and Canadian identity from one ocean to the second ocean to the third ocean, right across the country. Those are the things that have to happen.

For example, why should a prime minister have so much power that the prime minister by himself, and except for one brief exception it was always by himself, appoints not just cabinet ministers, but the heads of all agencies, crown corporations and supreme court justices without any kind of democratic vetting of those appointments and without any kind of democratic accounting by the relevant parliamentary committee? That is too much power to focus in one person's hands.

I have not even said a word about the Senate, which is probably the most important place of political patronage in the history of the country, where the prime minister appoints his or her friends every few months to an office where they can serve until they are 75 years old without any democratic accountability or legitimacy whatsoever.

The whole question of national unity is one which involves more than simply proper information about what the federal government is doing. In fact, that is only a very small part of it. It should involve constitutional change, electoral change and democratic change in terms of our institutions. We should have a vision of an economy that is more equal and more just for each and every citizen; a vision of a country where the ordinary working family gets a more equal part of the national pie, where we have social programs that are fully funded, where unemployment insurance is fully funded, as well as health care, and where we have money for post-secondary education. If we did those things we would do more to foster national unity than anything else.

I look back on the heyday of national unity, which was really in the 1960s with the great celebration in Montreal of Expo '67. We had prosperity. We had great visions. Social programs were being born. The Canada pension plan was being born. People were happy. They were celebrating this country. The Victoria Charter was introduced, which would radically change the country. Six or seven provinces had agreed to become officially bilingual. There was all kinds of movement in the country, with inspirational leadership from people like Tommy Douglas, Lester Pearson and Bob Stanfield, who were in this House, and premiers like Robarts.

• (1210)

There were dreams. They did things then which made the country better, more progressive and more sensitive to diversity. They celebrated diversity, bilingualism and multiculturalism, and they tried to build things for our aboriginal people.

If we did those kinds of things in the future, we could have more national unity.

Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech of the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle. I cannot help but find some incredible contradictions between what the member says and who he is.

The hon. member waxes nostalgic when he talks about the Meech Lake accord. But is he not the one who, while at the Privy Council Office, between 1993 and 1997—when his voters apparently sent him to purgatory for a while—worked very closely with the real killers of the Meech Lake agreement on developing the current plan B? That is one contradiction.

There is a second contradiction. The member talks about democracy. Democracy is the backdrop for today's opposition motion. This motion is about democracy. When the government slashes the CBC's budgets, it does more than just that; it interferes in the day to day management of the CBC's activities. The Lester affair is the most recent example, but there were many others before. The government is beginning to control the information.

Since 1960, we have gone from tailored to ready-to-wear clothing and from restaurant to ready-to-eat, fast food. Now, they are working on the ready-to-think, and the member is involved in the process.

The government is trying to manipulate the information in Canada. They talk about the greatest country in the world, about the greatest democracy; that is another contradiction in what the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle says. How should we interpret the member's position on Bill C-20? He talks about democracy, but this legislation will create an imbalance and arbitrarily set a majority for a future referendum.

Is the member aware that, when Ukraine decided to separate, the Russian government voted a law similar to Bill C-20 to prevent it from doing so?

I would like the member, who had the opportunity to work in the Privy Council Office and who is familiar with plan B, to tell us if he worked on that plan. I would like to hear him on this.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I did not work on plan B, because I have been an MP since 1997 and I was an MP before 1993. I worked as a consultant for many people and organizations in the intervening years, but I had nothing to do with plan B.

The member spoke of the Meech Lake accord. I was a supporter of Meech Lake, because I thought it was important to recognize Quebec as a distinct society, and the vast majority of Quebecers supported this proposal.

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Former Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa signed the accord. I remember very well when he signed it. The Quebec National Assembly supported the Meech Lake accord and voted for it. I remember that day very well.

After the failure of the accord, through the fault not just of the current Prime Minister, but of Clyde Wells and many others, we went through a crisis, and then, we had the Charlottetown accord and another referendum. I was a Meech Lake supporter.

He also referred to the CBC. Our party is the only one in this House to have pushed long and hard for more money for the CBC and Radio-Canada.

• (1215)

We asked a lot of questions in the last four, five and six weeks on the federal government's positions. We wanted to know why it cut funding to the CBC and Radio-Canada, because it is vital to have a public communications system. We did a number of things like that.

[*English*]

Ms. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague. For those who do not know, he represents the riding in Saskatchewan where I spent most of my years when I was growing up. I am extremely proud to be here at the same time as he is, knowing that he has been involved in Canadian politics for so many years and has had the opportunity to meet and work with a number of the people he spoke about, those Canadians who had a real vision for Canada, not a vision of the decimation of a country, piece by piece by piece.

There is the old saying of death by a thousand cuts, which ends up destroying a nation or a life. That certainly has happened within Canada, with the cuts which were made to programs. The country has felt the brunt of those cuts.

We hear provinces saying "Why do we need the country? If we do not have a government that will be there to support each and every region equally, we will gradually lose the country".

I know the member touched on this, but I would ask him if he feels that the government's cuts to the CBC are once again cutting off another region, piece by piece by piece, by not showing support for each and every part of Canada.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, the CBC is very important. The reason for the CBC in the first place, many years ago, was to provide a linkage from coast to coast via a public broadcaster by which Canadians could get to know their country better.

Part of its mandate was to provide regional broadcasting so that one region could hear about another region of the country. That was

a very important part of the mandate of the CBC originally. We could hear more about the Newfoundland fishery, or the prairies, what was happening to aboriginal people, the north, the province of Quebec and so on. Those were all very important parts of the CBC mandate.

Much of that is disappearing. The federal government over the last number of years has made numerous cutbacks, which have put pressure on the CBC to make cutbacks and lay off people. That is very unfortunate in terms of national unity.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if he did it maliciously or because he is misinformed, but, at the beginning of his speech, the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle said that there was an information agency in Quebec. If this is the case, I would like the member to name that information agency, because I live in Quebec and I have never heard of such an agency.

Was he mistaken or was he referring to Communication-Québec? This is a government agency that is responsible for promoting all Quebec government programs and that was responsible for providing information on federal programs until the minister took that away from Communication-Québec. He decided to go through the CIO because it was easier to manipulate than Communication-Québec. I would like the member to correct what he said or to give me the name of the agency.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, maybe I was not clear enough. I said that, in all Canadian provinces, there are departmental agencies that provide information on government programs to the public. There may not be one agency that provides information on everything, but each department provides information.

The Quebec government is no different than any other provincial government. I know that because I have often seen information from the Government of Quebec in *La Presse*, *Le Droit* and other newspapers. It is perfectly normal for a government to do that.

But I said in my speech that it is one thing to provide information on government programs, but quite another to provide information on the party in office.

• (1220)

In some cases, the federal government crossed the line, promoting the position of the Liberal Party and not the position of the federal government. It is altogether different.

I know each province has its own way of providing information to the public. I am not aware of the details of how it is done in Quebec, Newfoundland or Manitoba, but I do know each province has its own way of providing information to the public.

Supply

[English]

Mr. Mark Muise (West Nova, PC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague from Kings—Hants. I am pleased to speak to the motion put forward today condemning the government for using yet another federal agency, this time the Canada Information Office, to hand out lucrative, untendered government contracts to friends of the Liberal Party in exchange for support or donations.

I would like to start by reviewing some of the history behind the Canada Information Office, the forces behind its creation and its mandate. I then want to examine some of the evidence that has been presented to the House in recent days showing that, contrary to treasury board policy, large contracts were given to individuals and companies without going to public tender. These individuals and companies, in turn, gave money and resources to the Liberal Party of Canada. Finally, I want to link the questionable practices of the Canada Information Office with similar conduct of this government in other departments, such as HRDC and public works.

I will show that incidents at the Canada Information Office are not isolated, but part of a larger picture that shows consistently and convincingly that this government in its dying days has lost its moral compass and that this is a government which is corrupt.

The Canada Information Office was born out of the failure of the Prime Minister to deal with the 1995 Quebec referendum. As members will recall, in the six months leading up to the referendum the Prime Minister's strategy for winning the vote was like so many other issues of vital concern to Canadians, and that was to do nothing. Don't worry, be happy, the Prime Minister reassured us. We all remember how the referendum turned out. The Prime Minister came within one-half of a per cent of destroying this great country founded by the Conservative Party and built through the hard work of four generations of Quebecers and Canadians.

Canadians were outraged at this great failure by the Liberal Prime Minister. In the wake of his self-made disaster, the Prime Minister did what all good Liberals do when faced with public demand for action on an issue. He created a new government program and threw millions of dollars at it. Thus, the Canada Information Office was born.

He did this not because it would provide some long term national unity benefit, but because Liberals always do what is good for the Liberal Party first, not what is good for the nation.

There is an important distinction to be made here. Unlike previous Conservative prime ministers, such as the Right Hon. Joe Clark, who always did what was best for the country first, this Prime Minister ignores the serious problems facing Canada by giving voters the perception of doing something constructive.

Following the fine Liberal tradition of creating taxpayer funded bureaucratic solutions, on July 10, 1996 the Minister of Canadian Heritage announced that she was going to be the saviour of our country. How was she going to save the country? She would create this new government agency called the Canada Information Office. She would find \$20 million to run it and solve all of our national unity problems.

When the minister made the announcement, she could not say what kind of information the office would provide, how it would distribute the money and where its budget would come from. She was also at a loss for words to explain why the Liberals were creating a new bureaucracy that would duplicate public information operations already in place.

• (1225)

Just about everything the heritage minister announced that day was already being done by the federal government in other departments.

Apparently it did not occur to the Liberal brain trust that public outrage following the 1995 referendum might be an indication that the current propaganda bureaucracy was ineffective and should be scrapped or replaced. Of course not. It meant that the Liberals should spend even more taxpayer dollars on a brand new government agency. Let me quote Toronto *Star* columnist Rosemary Speirs, who summed up the minister's announcement like this:

The journalists quickly realized that the Canadian heritage minister had only the vaguest notion of what this new \$20 million-a-year 'non-partisan' agency is supposed to do. She couldn't give examples, couldn't break down the budget, and when she finally called her press conference to a close, she left exasperation and puzzlement in her wake.

And so the Canada Information Office was born. What happens when we have 50 government bureaucrats sitting around with no mandate except that they know they have \$20 million a year which they must spend? Is it within the realm of possibility that some of these millions of taxpayers' dollars might end up in the pockets of friends of the Liberal Party?

As hard as it might be for us to believe it, it appears that is exactly what has happened. Access to information documents released this week show that of the millions of dollars spent by the Canada Information Office each year, more than 20% of the contracts awarded by the office are given out without competition, including many that are worth more than the \$25,000 threshold set by treasury board to go out for public tender.

In the previous two years \$2.6 million was given to two businesses whose owners have in turn given substantially of their time and money to the Liberal Party of Canada. More than \$1.6 million was handed to Communication et Strategie Inc. of Mon-

Supply

treating in a joint contract with Groupe Cible between April 1, 1997 and December 31, 1999. Groupe Cible is headed by Serge Paquette, a defeated Liberal Party candidate and a long time party organizer in Quebec. This money was used to plan tours and handle media relations for Quebec ministers, a function normally done by the staff of the minister.

Another beneficiary of the Canada Information Office was Tremblay Guittet Communications Inc. of Ottawa, a company owned in part by Michèle Tremblay, who was press secretary to former Liberal Prime Minister John Turner, and a long time supporter of the minister responsible for the Canada Information Office and the Quebec political minister. Tremblay received an annual contract of \$53,500 to advise the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, which has been renewed every year since.

Other Liberals have also benefited from contracts given out by the Canada Information Office. Richard Mongeau, through one of his companies, gave \$15,000 to the Liberal Party. In return he received \$389,000 in legal and communications contracts. He was handed \$144,000 for advice he gave to the Canada Information Office in 1996-97 and was paid \$160,000 to provide legal advice to the office in 1997 and 1998. On January 13 of this year he was appointed as a Quebec superior court justice. That is not a bad return for a \$15,000 investment. The list goes on. These revelations are shocking, but unfortunately they are not isolated.

I would only make one conclusion from the evidence we have examined today. This is a corrupt government, rotten to its core. Canadians would be well served if the Prime Minister were to call an election this fall so that voters could show this group the door and replace it with a government led by the Right Hon. Joe Clark, who is dedicated to solving public policy problems through honest means.

[Translation]

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is criticizing the ministerial tour. Perhaps he should speak to his colleague, the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

• (1230)

For example, in the local newspaper for the Victoriaville-Bois-Francis area, *La Nouvelle*, I read the following comment from September 26, 1999:

This visit to Victoriaville by Alfonso Gagliano was part of the tour the ministers are taking around Quebec, not to make announcements, not to talk election or referendum, but to take the pulse of the communities—

Again quoting, this time from the April 19, 2000 issue of *La Voix de l'Est*, which mentions his colleague from Shefford:

The Conservative MP for Shefford, Diane Saint-Jacques, who was in attendance, voiced her satisfaction on this exchange with the ministers. "It is", she said, "important to get to the grass roots and to meet people where they live".

[English]

I believe the hon. member should speak to his colleagues who are supporting these ministerial tours in Quebec so that we can inform Quebecers of these programs and the programs of the Government of Canada. At the same time, we could receive information and advice from Quebecers so that we can have programs that they really need.

Mr. Mark Muise: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to see the minister stand up and speak to things that we should be looking at. There are many ways of strengthening Canada and its institutions. One way we could strengthen the institutions is by ensuring, through proper funding and proper organization, that the CBC continues to represent its various regions, not just from a Toronto and central Canadian perspective, but from Atlantic Canada, Quebec, the west coast and the prairies.

We have an institution that was the pride of Canada for so many years. It showed Canada from various parts of the country. What is happening to the CBC at this point is simply unacceptable. It is an affront on the Canadian people. It is an affront on what we have built in this great country.

One of the things that we should keep in mind is that the CBC, by being broadcast only from a central region, does not show Canada to Canadians. It shows Canadians what central Canada and Toronto see Canadians to be. That is one of the ways the government could move ahead and make Canada better and its people more proud of who and what they are.

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my hon. colleague from West Nova for his extremely timely and effective remarks about this very important issue.

The motion today, which identifies the problems with the Canada Information Office, particularly in terms of evidence suggesting that the government is using the Canada Information Office as a means to direct lucrative contracts to appropriately placed Liberal Party supporters, either financial supporters or supporters in kind, is very disturbing given the degree to which the information being assembled and utilized by the Canada Information Office carries with it some very significant ramifications in terms of national unity. Clearly, the Canada Information Office cannot be used as a Liberal trough from which supporters can drink and feed themselves.

Government is not a make work program. The Liberals are prone to utilizing these agencies as make work programs for supporters,

whether it is HRDC, CIDA or, in this case, the Canada Information Office. The government is clearly out of control.

• (1235)

In lieu of some general policy direction, a coherent and cohesive set of policies and the vision to lead Canada in the 21st century, the government has focused and continues to focus, on an increasing level, on simply funnelling as much largesse to its supporters as possible. It is displaying the classic signs of a government ready to be defeated. At the time of the next federal election I think there will be a very sound message from across Canada.

In the last election there was a very sound message from Atlantic Canada. We all know that in Canada some of the greatest shifts and some of the greatest revolutions begin in Atlantic Canada, and the last federal election was an indication of that. We believe that in the next election Canadians all across Canada will follow the leadership demonstrated by Atlantic Canadians in the last election when they said that they were tired of a tired government and that they were ready for a new vision and a more ethical and visionary leadership at a very critical time in our history.

The government's manipulation of information and manipulation of the media is not confined simply to the Canada Information Office. The fact is that every government department has become pervasively focused on spin doctoring and media manipulation. There has never been a government as visionless and as focused on next week's polls as this government.

The government is so focused on next week's polls that it does not even try to provide policies and directions for the next century. Unfortunately Canadians are going to pay a significant price for that in the next 20 or 30 years as they realize, and as the report last week from McGill University professors indicated, that the government ranks dead last of all the governments since the second world war in terms of economic performance and vision.

The McGill study also identified the government that ranked first. The number one government in terms of economic performance and vision on economic issues since World War II was none other than that of the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney. It must be terribly embarrassing to members opposite, in particular to the Prime Minister with his very thin skin and his inability and distrust of anyone who is even vaguely critical of him, to have to read in the newspapers and in the reports from erudite academics and economists that his government has been dead last.

Instead of trying to manipulate information and manipulate the media, maybe his government should actually try to do something about that abysmal record and actually start trying to develop some of the same vision and long term focus that the previous government had.

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I referred to other departments and agencies within government that are also manipulating information and manipulating the media as much as possible and, most offensively, using taxpayers' money to do that.

In February, at the time of the budget, the finance minister's speech, the speech that ultimately was provided and ended up as part of the budget document, the budget speech 2000, was different in several areas from the actual speech provided. I have the *Hansard* here in front of me.

We have reason to believe and sources to suggest that the reason the finance minister deviated significantly from his text and added several paragraphs that seemed almost incongruent with the rest of the text, was because of information coming from the media in terms of how the policies or the budget was being spun, what the focus was for the media, what policies the media was actually taking hold of and demonstrating a greater level of interest in and, alternatively, what policies the media was less interested in.

• (1240)

According to our sources, the finance minister actually changed his speech for the House to try to focus more on what would get the greatest level of media hits that night. He changed a document prepared by the finance department people for him to provide the budget speech. He changed it directly to try to further manipulate the media.

This is a government of spin doctors. This is what we call focus group economics and poll driven policies. The nation is suffering from a lack of vision and poll driven incrementalism. Canadians need bold, visionary, courageous leadership similar to the leadership of the previous government under the Progressive Conservatives and the leadership of Brian Mulroney.

This is a government by polls, certainly not guided by principle. I would suggest that the media plays an extremely important role in the democratic process in terms of showing that information is disseminated to the public in as clear and unbiased way as possible. For the government to intentionally manipulate the media, either through the Canada Information Office or through other Byzantine and circuitous means as those that allegedly occurred with the finance minister, and probably every ministry opposite, really compromises our democratic framework within which the media plays such a very important role.

I also believe that if the media realized the degree to which this government was playing the media collectively like a Stradivarius to try to spin its messages out and also minimize any negative political fallout, the media would be increasingly offended. The journalistic integrity of the media is being challenged by a government that is certainly not interested in promoting the types of ethics that should be an integral part of any government.

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It is very important that we are addressing the issue of the manipulation of information and the use of the Canada Information Office as a Liberal Party trough in the House. It is also very important for us to recognize the degree to which spin doctoring and media manipulation has become routine for the government in every department and every ministry.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. I hope all members, including backbenchers opposite in the Liberal government, would agree that this type of obvious manipulation needs to end and that the government needs to significantly improve its ethics in this regard.

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I cannot believe I heard the hon. member say that the previous Conservative government was good in economics. It really takes courage to say that.

After nine years of trying to reduce the deficit, when the Conservatives were turfed out of office across the country, they left us with a \$42 billion deficit and high unemployment. I also remember at that time that every financial institution around the world was telling us to clean up our act or they would put us into bankruptcy.

We have taken a \$42 billion annual deficit and turned it into a surplus every year. Unemployment rates are at record low levels. Inflation rates are down. We are one of the leading countries of the G-7 in terms of creating wealth and economic growth.

• (1245)

I do not understand how the hon. member could say such a thing. He should have been here. I have been here since 1984. I lived through the Mulroney government years. Thank God, finally after nine years Canadians had the good sense to throw them out of office. They left the country in a terrible state.

Mr. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, the minister referred to what he called my courage in raising this matter. I expect that he should also thank the previous government for having the courage to implement policies that were controversial, politically risky, but in fact enabled the government to reduce and eliminate the deficit.

Those are not simply my opinions. *The Economist* magazine said that the credit for deficit reduction in Canada belonged to the previous government's structural reforms, including free trade, the GST, and deregulation of financial services, transportation and energy.

I am glad the hon. minister cited that he had been a member of the House since 1984 because he and his merry band of opposition members at that time were actively fighting and trying to thwart the attempts of the Conservative government to bring some level of economic vision into the Government of Canada. He was fighting the GST. He was fighting free trade. He was fighting the policies

the Liberal government has embraced and utilized to eliminate the deficit.

Last week the report of several McGill University professors and economists ranked the Liberal government as being dead last in economic performance since World War II and ranked the Mulroney government as being number one. It cited several issues. It cited the courageous government of Brian Mulroney that had the vision and energy to implement the policies Canada needed, even though there was significant political risk. It also cited the blatant failure of the current Liberal government in losing nine cents of value in the Canadian dollar over the last seven years, nine cents in the share value of Canada. Under the tenure of the Liberal government nine cents in the Canadian dollar have been lost. This is disgraceful.

It also cited lagging productivity under this government. Woody Allen once said that 80% of life is just showing up. For this government and for the Prime Minister it is about 95%. Canadians are tired of a government that is merely interested in just showing up. They are tired of a caretaker government, a cruise control government, at a time of unprecedented global change in a hypercompetitive global environment.

It is time for the government to get off its collective duff and to do something to try to build a better Canada as we enter the 21st century, not just simply sit back and take credit for the policy successes of the previous government while it hypocritically attacks that government.

This government, this minister and this Prime Minister opposite should be thanking Brian Mulroney and his government for the types of policies that enabled them to do nothing for seven years and look fairly good on paper despite that fact. The Canadian economy is actually doing fairly well despite their best efforts to have it do otherwise.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Beauharnois—Salaberry.

I am pleased to speak to this motion brought forward by the Bloc Québécois. I find it extremely important because my constituents in the riding of Jonquière also find it very important. What the government is doing is unacceptable. The people of Jonquière are very surprised and very sad to see how the government is completely out of touch with reality.

As everyone knows, our near victory in October 1995 sent shock waves throughout Canada. In this context, the Liberal Party of Canada put its plan B into action, which included the creation of the Canada Information Office, the "grab bag" propaganda and patronage agency that takes care of the Liberal government's

buddies and where contracts are often awarded twice or three times.

• (1250)

Initially, the CIO was the responsibility of the heritage minister, but since June 1998 it has become the responsibility of the public works minister, who happens to be the chief organizer of the Liberal Party of Canada in Quebec.

Is this just a coincidence? I find it very hard to believe. The opportunity to crush the sovereignists is too good and the minister is certainly not holding back. In fact, when looking at the money that was given out, it becomes obvious that that money was given out mostly in Quebec, to incite us to change sides. When the proponents of a particular ideological option get to that point, it means they are desperate.

Currently, the CIO has a \$20 million budget and 85 full time employees. I do not understand how the government can tell people that these 85 employees are not competent to do the work they were hired to do. Why is it saying that? Because it is contracting out work that could be done by CIO employees.

Take, for example, the case of Michèle Tremblay, who was awarded contracts in the amount of \$53,000 from public works to advise the minister responsible for the CIO. During the same period she was awarded contracts from the CIO to organize visits by federal ministers and to write speeches.

I think there are competent individuals within the CIO who could do that kind of work. Even the minister has on his own staff people who could do it. That is why we have political attachés and assistants. This is part of their job.

The Government of Canada, with its high-mindedness and infinite gratitude to those who have contributed to it, awards contracts and underestimates the ability of the people working for it.

During this time, communications and strategy obtained contracts as well for the ministers' visit to Quebec. Could this overlap be an error by officials? I strongly doubt it. The Minister of Public Works told us earlier that the CIO is his responsibility.

There was as well the case of Richard Mongeau, which is also interesting. He was awarded contracts by the Canada Information Office as a legal adviser. In the same period, he served as acting executive director of the information service, and his communications firm billed the CIO for these activities.

It is clear, therefore, that improvisation is the watchword at the CIO and is the creation of the person in charge, namely the Minister of Public Works. Despite what the Minister of Public

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Works said, a number of contracts were awarded without tender. Between June 1997 and March 1999, over 30 contracts worth over \$25,000 were awarded this way.

Permit me to quote an article that appeared in *Le Devoir* on June 1, 2000 under the byline of Manon Cornellier, who said:

Since the present minister assumed his duties, 28 contracts have been awarded without call for tender, and some companies have benefited from this approach more than once. They include the Groupe Cible, \$27,000, Média Q, \$37,500, Ekos Research Associates, \$53,500, Muséobus, \$27,750, Densan Consultants, \$60,000—

And I could name even more.

We might think we were back in the age of patronage under former premier Louis-Alexandre Taschereau. Small favours were numerous in exchange for a small contribution to party coffers. The situation became totally ridiculous with Louis-Alexandre Taschereau even appointing his son to his office.

• (1255)

Tremblay Communications received a one million dollar grant after donating \$2,000 to the Liberal Party of Canada between 1997 and 1998. Groupaction, which received \$46,000 worth of contracts, donated \$6,000 to the Liberal Party of Canada during the same period of time.

There is more to this tragicomedy. Through access to information, the only way we can get information from this government, we learned that CIO has files on some reporters. After learning that the HRDC big brother had a longitudinal labour force file on 34 million Canadians, we now learn that an information office which was to disseminate propaganda for Canada also has that kind of information.

That reminds me of George Orwell's *1984*. I loved that book and I still consider it a masterpiece, though I hope very much that its content would remain in the realm of fiction. George Orwell was right however. Apparently, he was some sort of visionary.

Three months ago, I thought I had a right to some privacy but I now realize that the Canadian government has databases on things which are part of my private life. This is a serious situation.

Coming back to files on reporters, we learn that Pierre Maisonneuve has a tendency to be relatively neutral; that Vincent Marissal rarely makes editorial judgments; that the editorial team of *La Presse* is very critical toward the federal government, and there is more.

How can the existence of such a file be justified? What is its purpose? Why should we have files on the ideological content of the media? Are we living under a dictatorship? I would like to get some explanation from the government.

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I feel even more concerned when I think that there could be similar files on intellectuals, artists, politicians and sovereignists.

The federal government violates the intellectual freedom of people and intrudes on our privacy. What has become of this government's sense of ethics? I find this situation unhealthy.

Yet the public works minister sees this as a simple press review, while the Prime Minister considers it is a compliment to journalists.

Time flies and I will now conclude. I would simply like to remind our viewers that it is very important, from an ethical point of view, that the CIO be dismantled as soon as possible. This office is only concerned with handing out lucrative contracts to those close to the Liberal Party.

I believe that the 20 million dollar budget would be better used in various programs that would be much more beneficial for Quebecers and Canadians. All of this propaganda and search for an identity is shameful. We all know that we are Quebecers and we do not need to hand out flags.

There is no longer any economic justification for Canada's existence. Let us look at its history. Canada was built solely on economic considerations. The railway was built to link the provinces at a time when trade flowed from east to west. Now that it flows from north to south and that protectionism has given way to free trade, the Canadian government is using culture to stir up national sentiment.

I trust and hope that all my colleagues will vote for this motion. However, the Liberals will have to pay the price of their mismanagement in the next election, because Canadians will not accept being manipulated by a propaganda office.

Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the motion moved by the Bloc Québécois, which is part of our job as an opposition party.

Our job is to make the government accountable for its actions and the way it carries out its responsibilities. Our job is also to make the government accountable for how it spends taxpayers' money and the fees for services it collects from its citizens. The government must serve the people who voted it in and elected members of parliament such as us, in the Bloc Québécois, so that we in the House control and monitor government activity.

• (1300)

As such, we are going our duty today reasserting accusations against a government which in our view—and it is a view shared by a number of opposition members in this House—is mismanaging public funds.

It is using it for purely partisan ends to help friends of the regime, friends of a particular party, buddies who are getting rich thanks to said party which is looking out for them, giving them jobs and contracts, making things easy for them even though it does not need the services of these consultants. Civil servants who are paid to provide a public service cannot do their jobs because the work has been contracted out to friends of the regime.

We will never apologize for playing this role, for fulfilling our obligation to monitor, putting questions to the ministers and demanding answers from them, asking the citizens, when the time comes for them to elect new members of parliament, to punish the lack of answers, the government's failure to account for the way it spends taxpayers' money.

Beyond the numbers, the contracts and the identity of the people who benefited from these contracts, which were made public in the House, the propensity of the government to spend money on the so called "national unity" issue, on informing citizens about Canada, is part of a greater plan, plan B. This is what I want to talk about.

Quite obviously, the activities of the Canada Information Office, established in 1996, a few months after the October 30 1995 referendum, are part of a comprehensive plan aimed at countering sovereignty and the rise of the sovereignist feeling.

This plan is aimed at countering a project which, as I was saying earlier, is legitimate and supported by Quebec political parties that have members elected at the national assembly and at the House of Commons. These parties are suggesting eminently democratic means for Quebec to attain sovereignty and believe such attainment of sovereignty must be done with the enlightened consent of Quebecers in a democratic framework and according to democratic rules.

Plan B, which includes this Canada Information Office and its activities, is specifically directed at countering that march of Quebecers on sovereignty. That is what is disturbing and shocking for Quebecers in general, not only for those who support the sovereignist option but also for those who, even though they choose Canada as an option for the future, are seeing to what extent public funds are squandered on the promotion of Canadian unity, which does not need public funds to be promoted in such a way.

With a sensible plan A competing with the plan sovereignist Quebecers have for Quebec, the debate might be held in more interesting and stimulating conditions for those Quebecers who have still not made up their mind and want to know what is the best option for the future of Quebec and its citizens. No, it seems there is now a need to resort to a Canada Information Office and to excessive amounts spent on all kinds of ludicrous contracts.

I mentioned this morning as an example a contract to study the status of provincial legislation with regard to the constitution amending process.

• (1305)

This has already been done by academics and constitutional experts. It has certainly been done by the Department of Justice as well as officials from the Privy Council, but it had to be redone by the Canada Information Office. No doubt this was done as well by the Council of Canadian Unity, in which this government also invests major amounts to promote Canadian unity.

An element of this plan B is the activities of the Canada Information Office. But the government does not stop there when it comes to plan B. It spends millions of dollars to promote identity through the flag, which must be shown in all public events where the government has invested money. It even wanted to have it displayed in the works of every Quebec writer who receives a federal grant from the Department of Canadian Heritage. Writers and publishers in Quebec forcefully opposed this, until the government withdrew its idea of imposing the Canadian flag in all books published in Quebec.

When the government scares Quebecers with the issue of partition, with the idea that the Quebec territory should be divided in several parts, this is also part of a plan B that does not lead anywhere, since the support for sovereignty is stable and is even increasing these days.

The Department of Foreign Affairs, which was probably inspired by the architect of plan B, even offered a catechism to its diplomats to teach them how to answer sovereignists who are abroad to promote their democratic project all over the world. People abroad have the right to know that, in Quebec, there are some of us who support that option for Quebec's future.

Plan B culminated with Bill C-20 on the so-called clarity. This is a bill that we reviewed here, in totally unacceptable conditions, conditions that violated the most elementary democratic practices.

The senators are now questioning the bill, because they too feel that it is absolutely unnecessary for the promotion of Canadian unity. On the contrary, it could hinder those who want to promote that unity. Bill C-20 also poses major constitutional problems and puts into question, as argued by the senators, the equality of the two houses of parliament.

We did not need big brother. The Minister of Human Resources Development finally realized that she should not keep a database on Quebecers and other Canadians. We do not need the BIC/CIO brother either. We do not need an office that will hold information about journalists and will probably have information on people like the Bloc Quebecois members in this House who promote sovereignty. We do not need an office that does this kind of work. Canadians do not have to pay for that and nor do Quebecers.

Through its propaganda disguised as information, the Liberal government will not succeed in winning Quebecers over, identify-

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ing them to or having them identify to the Canada that the Liberals want and are building. This is not how they will succeed in promoting Canada. This is not how they will contribute to a truly democratic debate on the future of Canada and Quebec.

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I congratulate and thank the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry for his vivid depiction of the situation. He has demonstrated how this plan, this approach to the establishment of this office was concocted after the near defeat of federalist forces in the 1995 referendum in Quebec.

• (1310)

I have an additional question for my colleague. The motion before us, by the Bloc Quebecois, expresses very clearly its wish to have the CIO dismantled. Could my colleague tell us how, why, and on what basis this office should be quickly dismantled?

When we see the Prime Minister of Canada travelling the world over to say that we have the best country in the world, and spending \$20 million to convince Canadians that what he says is true, I really have to wonder whether the government is out of touch with the grassroots.

The Liberal ministers came to my region with their great speeches. Where I come from, we are polite and when people come to visit, we welcome them with tact. So, they came. What did they do? They invited people who agreed with them. Unfortunately for them, they did not know we also wanted to be there. So we showed up. However, we noticed that as soon as they saw us, they no longer had anything to say. They did not say why they were there, which was to meet their political friends.

I think this amounts to taking Canadians for fools. Yet they too might want a piece of the pie.

Mr. Daniel Turp: Blueberry pie.

Mrs. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold: Blueberry pie, even better. In my region, we have the finest blueberries of the whole world. I must say that I find the government's behaviour insulting. I ask my colleague to tell us why the CIO must be dismantled without delay.

Mr. Daniel Turp: Madam Speaker, I will answer that quickly. If there are good reasons to dismantle the Department of Human Resources Development because of the abuses there, there are even more reasons to dismantle the Canada Information Office, with the abuses we are revealing and will continue to reveal in the near future.

It gives us an opportunity show that this government is using old methods, trying to reward the friends of the party, who contribute unlimited amounts to its coffers, with no thought for the public, which is paying these people, who then turn around and hand some of the money over to the Liberal Party.

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Madam Speaker, I would like to add something else, which concerns you. One result of these tours organized by the Canada Information Office is that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs can come to my riding and speak to community groups. Two weeks ago, he came to my riding of Beauharnois to meet with members of community groups. He did not invite me. He did not have the courtesy to invite the member who knows these communities very well, who works with them all the time.

When he visited Saint-Lambert, he invited the member for Saint-Lambert. He wanted her to be there when he spoke to community groups, at taxpayers' expense, at the expense of citizens, who were treated to a visit by the government. Through the work of the Canada Information Office, they saw the government investing in tours that gave ministers an opportunity to talk about the government's ideas for supporting community groups with a member such as you, but not with a member such as me.

There is something very partisan about what this government is doing and about the manner in which it wishes to inform the public about its services. It excludes Bloc Québécois members when it comes to tours but includes Liberal Party members. There is something very unhealthy about the way this Liberal government delivers government services.

Mr. Jacques Saada (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this extremely important debate, which goes to the very heart of one key challenge of the Government of Canada and indeed of all democratic governments on this planet, that of communicating with Canadians.

• (1315)

In that context, I would like to briefly discuss this challenge and the role of the Canada Information Office, or CIO, in helping the government address it.

First, why is the government increasingly focussed on communications? There are many reasons. One of them is that it is important to all Canadians, which public opinion polls have shown convincingly. Not only are Canadians receptive to the information provided to them but they want more. Furthermore, it is the government's responsibility, and I insist on the word responsibility, to explain its policies and programs to Canadians.

Let us be practical. What good are the best programs and services if Canadians do not know about them or how to access them? It would be like a hockey coach who would prepare a wonderful game plan in his office with his assistants but who would forget to tell his players about it.

Canadians have the right to get this information. I repeat, they have the right. They want to be informed, which is totally legitimate. Therefore, the question is not whether we must provide the information. The question, and I was going to say the challenge,

is to figure out how to get that information to them and make sure it is useful and relevant. As I was saying earlier, this is a challenge that is facing all the communications agencies in all the democracies throughout the world.

People are literally bombarded with a multitude of messages. We all know that. We just have to walk through the streets of Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver, or go to the movies, or watch television, or listen to the radio, or read the newspapers. Our senses are inundated with hundreds if not thousands of poster panels, advertisements and messages.

To be effective, the Government of Canada, or any other government for that matter, must compete. It must compete if it wants its communications to be useful, especially if it wants to reach all Canadians.

One can easily understand that the fragmentation of audiences makes this all the more difficult. The government can no longer mass communicate with a "one size fits all" approach. It must learn about the particular information needs of different segments of the population. It needs to know which methods work best to reach each of these segments, whether it be television, print, radio, direct mail, the Internet, etc. The government must learn how to harness new technology which offers new possibilities while at the same time creating a whole new set of challenges, imposing new ways of doing things.

Faced with the complexities of modern communications and a heightened expectation by citizens to be informed about and involved in the governing process, many democratic governments around the world and provincial governments here in Canada have reviewed their communications approaches or are in the process of doing so.

It is in that context that the Government of Canada, which is no different from other democratic governments, has given a specific mandate to an ad hoc cabinet committee on government communications, which was struck two years ago. The mandate is extremely clear. The objective is to bring greater oversight to government communications and foster a more corporate, citizen focused approach. By corporate we mean communicating with one voice, that of the Government of Canada as a whole, as an entity.

• (1320)

While individual departments communicate quite well about their respective programs and services, we need to communicate about the government's overall program, key priorities, and a wide array of programs and services. Canadians want this overall picture so they can assess whether they feel the government's agenda reflects their own needs and priorities.

It was in that spirit that the Canada Information Office was created in 1996 and has become one of the government's primary tools in listening to and speaking with Canadians. In that capacity, it provides corporate communications advice and support to the

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Government of Canada. It collaborates with other departments and agencies as well as with partners outside government, fostering innovation and the sharing of best communications practices. It develops communications products.

For example, it develops citizens' guides to government programs and services. The CIO also undertakes public opinion research and media monitoring activities. These are essential corporate tools to help the government understand and respond more appropriately to the information needs of Canadians.

The ministerial tours in Quebec are another tool used to communicate with citizens.

An hon. member: To do propaganda.

Mr. Jacques Saada: It provides an opportunity to listen to their views, needs and concerns.

Community-based outreach activities also provide a two-way flow of information to and from citizens. For instance, workshops on Y2K preparedness, the so-called Y2K bug, electronic commerce, and other topics were conducted last year in response to an expressed need for this kind of information. These are but two examples. I could go on with many more.

I want to talk about another area of activity of the CIO, the organization's support of government activities relating to national unity. I say this with great pride: National unity continues to be a key priority of this government, and as such, all departments and agencies have a role to play in that regard. Obviously, if the Canadian public does not know what its federal government is doing, it has every right to ask whether the Canadian federation is relevant.

The value of our federation is rooted in feelings and sensitivity, but it is also an ideal to reach for. All of this should be expressed in initiatives and actions. The Canadian government has the responsibility to inform Canadians on these initiatives and actions.

The CIO's role in this regard involves promoting the value of Canada by providing information to Canadians on what the country has to offer. It supports various projects that demonstrate how the government's programs and services are relevant to citizens and that encourage Canadians to exchange their ideas and experiences about the greatness of Canada. This too is about communicating, communicating the value of Canada, and therefore the importance of its unity.

Since my time is almost up I will have to cut my remarks short, but I am sure my colleagues opposite will give me a nice opportunity to develop more fully what I have to say.

I would just like to give quickly a few examples. The 1-800-O-Canada, another program—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): I am sorry, but I have to interrupt the hon. member. The indication I have is that the hon. member wanted to make a 10 minute speech. If that is not right, the hon. member can go on for another 10 minutes.

Mr. Jacques Saada: Madam Speaker, I was explaining that I would have liked a bit more time to talk about other CIO activities, and I thank you for giving me this opportunity.

The CIO is a national organization, with projects and activities all across the country that benefit Canadians from every region.

• (1325)

I know very well that the comments of members opposite are not committed on record, but I find it quite disturbing that people who promote democracy would be trying to disrupt my right to speak by their constant commentaries.

The Canada Information office is only one of several measures and organizations helping to demonstrate our commitment to improving communications with Canadians. I am coming now to the other examples to which I have briefly referred and which include the 1-800-O-Canada toll free information line launched last year, the redesign of the Canada website to make it more user friendly and the service Canada initiative which seeks to create single points of access for citizens across the country to information on Government of Canada programs and services.

The Canada Information Office is an integral part of this overall effort to improve communications with Canadians. It has a duty, an obligation and a responsibility to take this on for all Canadians. The role and responsibility assumed by the Canadian government in this regard are not only a responsibility on the governmental action just because it gives us great pleasure to do it or because we feel like it, it is a matter of strong democratic values.

A government that does not communicate with its population is a government that is failing in its democratic duties. The CIO is one of the tools at our disposal to fulfil our democratic duty and responsibility to inform the Canadian population on what it is we are doing.

The CIO is doing such a good job that just last week, it received an award of excellence from a very credible organization known as the International Association of Business Communicators. This award was given to the CIO for a particular project, The Rural Guide, produced last year.

This Guide, featuring programs and services available to rural Canadians, was distributed to rural households across the country. It was the collaborative effort of 26 departments and agencies

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under the leadership of the Canada Information Office. That is the kind of collaboration that is innovative, productive and in the interests of all Canadians.

That is why the International Association of Business Communicators recognized the merit of the CIO and awarded them this prize.

I am really looking forward to the questions that the members opposite will be asking me, because when I arrived here, before I spoke, I heard the member opposite talk about the CIO. He talked about everything. He talked about human resources. He talked about the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, in terms that were not very elegant or respectful for that matter. He talked about government administration. He talked about plan B. He talked about the constitution.

An hon. member: Oh, oh.

Mr. Jacques Saada: They are so lacking in arguments, so obsessed by a totally indefensible option that they are taking advantage of a debate on an organization stemming from a profoundly democratic initiative to shoot down all that the government is doing. I am wondering to what extent it is not a normal process for an opposition party to oppose for the sake of opposing.

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask a question of my colleague from Brossard—La Prairie.

During his speech, he moaned about not being listened to. I hung on his every word and noted that our hon. colleague was not really familiar with the Canada Information Office. I saw that he was totally disconnected from our reasons for wanting this office completely dismantled.

• (1330)

I would take care if I were he, because the CIO may have personal information about him.

As for what he said concerning my colleague for Beauharnois—Salaberry, that colleague's words to all those in this House were elegantly delivered. His comments on the CIO were elegantly and intelligently set out.

I find it immensely regrettable that this hon. member should be telling us things that are not true. He must be the only person who has not been reading the newspapers the past few weeks, I think. He seems to be the only one who thinks he possesses the truth. All this has been in our newspapers. Even the Minister of Public Works has admitted that contracts had been awarded, but now the hon. member is telling us the opposite.

I would like to ask him if he knows exactly what the CIO is, apart from the propaganda he has been dumping on us for the past 20 minutes?

Mr. Jacques Saada: Madam Speaker, once again I see that when the party over there is talking about something, it is called information, but when I do, it is called propaganda. It is always very interesting to see the imbalance.

My hon. colleague over the way faults me for moaning. I did not. I merely pointed out that I kept getting interrupted.

I picked up one extremely interesting thing in what my colleague just said, and it was repeated in the question. It was the word dismantled. It is remarkable that they want to dismantle the Canada Information Office, Human Resources Development Canada and Canada itself. What we have here in this House is the dismantling party. Quite remarkable, that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Jacques Saada: As far as the contracts are concerned, because it is easy to make allegations without necessarily being able to support them, I would like to confirm for my colleague quite earnestly, as did the minister in his response in the House on several occasions in this regard, that all the contracts awarded in the context of the terms of reference of the CIO were awarded according to treasury board standards.

These standards are very similar to those found in each of the provinces of our country. To criticize treasury board standards or their application is to move onto very slippery terrain, I would suggest, because these standards were established to ensure a certain transparency—

An hon. member: They are used for interference.

Mr. Jacques Saada: Madam Speaker, I think before such comments are made, an effort should be made perhaps to not play the looking glass game.

Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would remind my colleague from Brossard—La Prairie that it is not my practice to refer to my colleagues, including himself, in disrespectful terms.

We are in opposition to one another. We hold divergent opinions on the future of Quebec and Canada. I was pointing out that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, the architect of plan B must indeed count on the Canada Information Office to implement his plan B.

It is one of the tools for plan B, which seeks to block the march of Quebecers toward sovereignty, but not with much success. In the weeks, the months and the years to come, we will see how this strategy used by the minister, the Prime Minister and all those who shared that vision, how that way of planning Canada's future, of imposing certain views about the future, will not produce the

results anticipated by those who came up with that idea of a plan B, at the expense of plan A, which was based on reconciliation.

The slippery slope, and I say this with all due respect for the member for Brossard—La Prairie, is the one used by the Canada Information Office, the one which consists in buying off people with contracts, in making friends by awarding contracts, in wooing them, in getting them to promote Canadian unity by spending hundreds of thousands of dollars, and sometimes even millions of dollars. That is the slippery slope in democracy.

• (1335)

By contrast, we sovereignists in Quebec cannot be criticized, because we have legislation respecting the financing of political parties whereby individuals and, more recently in our case, businesses can only contribute a maximum of \$5,000 to help and support parties that promote sovereignty.

Let me tell the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie and all the Liberal members that the slippery slope, the dangerous thing to do is to use public funds for promotion and, indeed, propaganda. We are not afraid to say it and we will continue to show how the awarding of contracts is closely related to how those who get these contracts contribute money to the Liberal Party to campaign and stay in office.

But this party will not remain in office for long with practices that show so little respect for the public. Canadians must be better represented here than they are by the Liberals, who want to help their friends and make this government one that helps its friends.

Mr. Jacques Saada: Madam Speaker, I listened with great attention what my honorable colleague just said. I must say that I was surprised by the tone he used when he spoke of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, because I know that it is not the tone he usually uses.

I find it absolutely fascinating to hear the hon. member talk about propaganda whereas I just said, and he may not agree with me, that informing the public about government activities is an indispensable condition of democracy.

If a government does not explain to the public what it is doing, it lacks openness. If a government does not explain to the public what it is doing, it is not providing people with the means to avail themselves of all the programs and services that are available to them. If a government does not explain to the public what it is doing, it prevents people from knowing what it is the government is doing with their tax money.

I repeat, informing the public is a basic principle of democracy. I would like to know if members opposite agree or not with this principle. I would like to know if they think that any information coming from the government is necessarily propaganda, but when

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but when it is condemned by the opposition doing its job as the opposition, it becomes legitimate information.

I would like to know where this double standard is coming from.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member a question. He asked where this double standard is coming from.

If, as he claims, the government must absolutely explain everything and inform the public about the achievements of the greatest government of the best country in the world, is it only Quebecers who do not understand and need to be informed? Why is all this information from the best and greatest government in the world targeting Quebec only, and why are nine provinces spared this propaganda?

Mr. Jacques Saada: Madam Speaker, if my hon. colleague had been kind enough to listen when I was speaking—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Jacques Saada: If he takes the time to read the official transcript of my speech, he will find that I gave many examples that apply to the country as a whole.

The 1-800 number is not for Quebec alone. The Y2K bug workshops were not for Quebec alone.

His question is warped and self-serving, and I condemn it for what it is.

• (1340)

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Repentigny.

I am pleased to rise to speak to this motion, and to have the opportunity to shed some light on a few things. Of course, I appreciate the efforts made by the member who spoke before me to try to justify the government's approach, and try to explain why using taxpayers' money to its own ends, through the Canada Information Office, was a good thing. My hon. colleague did what he had to do, but his arguments were not very convincing.

I have to say that not only the sovereignist party, but also the other opposition parties support the motion. Well, the New Democratic Party has decided to support the Canada Information Office. The member for Regina—Qu'Appelle spoke for this party. Unfortunately I must point out—and this somewhat weakens his argument and the position of the New Democrats—that this member's name can be found on a list of people who received grants from the Canada Information Office in 1997. It is obviously hard to speak out against something from which one is benefiting personally.

If indeed the New Democratic Party wants to associate itself with this propaganda tool known as the Canada Information Office,

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I would have thought that parliamentary ethics would have at least prompted one of the member's colleagues to take the floor.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Michel Gauthier: I am not in the habit of interrupting people when they speak and I would like to be able to continue.

I wish to say that the Canada Information Office is the ideal place to spend money without worrying about the rules. Most of the CIO's contracts go out untendered. That is a fact. It is not something I made up. If it were, the members opposite would be on their feet immediately. During Oral Question Period, the government would have said "That is not true. You are mistaken".

But no, there is no denying that most of the contracts awarded by the CIO, which were paid for by the public and which should normally go out to public tender, because that is the ethical way of spending taxpayers' money, were not put out to tender. That is a fact, not idle speculation. That is a verifiable fact.

The second point I would like to make is that not only were contracts awarded without calls for tender, but they were awarded primarily to Liberal Party buddies. This also is a fact. I challenge anyone on the other side of the House to put generalities aside and prove me wrong.

Here is a partial list of contracts awarded by the Canada Information Office: BCP, headed by John Parisella, the former executive assistant to Robert Bourassa, former Liberal Premier of Quebec, Administration Leduc et Leblanc, the famous firm where Judge Mongeau worked, an administrative office connected with a firm of lawyers, as is generally the case, but which did communications contracts. We will come back to this.

I like lawyers and respect them. But as communications experts, they sometimes leave something to be desired. The list of contracts also includes the firm GPC, headed by Rémi Bujold, a former secretary of state of the Liberal government and a generous contributor to the Liberal Party. And the list is growing. The paper and notes I have here refer throughout to people close to the Liberal Party.

So, contracts were awarded with public money and without tender, that is, contrary to the rules, contracts were given to government buddies and contracts were given to firms whose connection to the mandate given them is not always obvious.

• (1345)

In fact, I mentioned Administration Leduc et Leblanc. An honourable judge has just been appointed by the government, a man who was at the same time the lawyer, the legal adviser, for the Canada Information Office, with an annual salary of \$192,000. That is not exactly peanuts. It is more than he is currently making as a judge.

This same gentleman collected \$40,000 worth of travel expenses in a year. One would imagine he travelled up to Ottawa every morning and back to Montreal every evening, ate in the best restaurants, and managed to do errands in town between the two.

This is also someone with a lot of communications contracts from the CIO. We have checked it out. I challenge my friends over there to prove me wrong.

We have checked it out. We called communications firms, because we have connections with some. There are a lot involved in government work. "Are you familiar with a communications firm called Administration Leduc et Leblanc?" we asked them. Not a soul in Quebec, not a single person in communications, knows the communications firm Administration Leduc et Leblanc. Not a single communications specialist in Quebec, in Montreal, knows this firm, but the Minister of Public Works did.

Or at any rate, he knew Mr. Mongeau. Knew him so well that they appointed him to a judgeship, this Mr. Mongeau, who was on the Liberal Party's legal commission, a close buddy since way back, someone close to the seats of power. On top of his \$192,000 annually as legal adviser to the Canada Information Office, on top of his \$40,000 in travel expenses for that same year, he was doing communications. He fixed up the commas and periods in the CIO's documents. That is ridiculous.

My colleague from Chambly asked the government a question "Is it normal to award a contract for x thousands of dollars to someone who will report back as follows: We have fixed up the commas, periods and spelling errors in this or that document?" What is more, this will be over the signature of a lawyer who works for the Canada Information Office, who is a legal adviser to the RCMP, who had major civil cases going on at the same time, and who did \$40,000 worth of travel in a year, at 38 cents a kilometre. The man worked 28 hours a day; there can be no other explanation.

If this is not going overboard in using public funds for partisan purposes, what is it?

There is a fourth element. Not only does the CIO award contracts without going to tender, not only are these contracts awarded to buddies, not only are they awarded to people who do not have the skills to fulfil them, but the CIO creates files.

Thanks to the insight of the hon. member for Chambly, we have discovered that the CIO has created files in which we find the names of the most famous journalists on Parliament Hill. I was able to find out, because I am nosy and I admit it, which journalists are considered good or bad journalists by the government.

I was able to see that some journalists are considered harmless. They report the facts. They are objective. Others are good because they promote the views of the government on Quebec's sovereign-

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ty. They will probably get the government's press releases during the next referendum.

There are also bad journalists. They are those who do not accurately reflect the views of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. They interrupt him. They sometimes use irony. All this information is on the CIO's files.

I will conclude on that note, because I want to leave the floor to my colleague. We cannot accept that such an office continues to exist at the expense of the taxpayers, of our viewers.

• (1350)

[*English*]

Ms. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, I cannot help but respond to the criticism of my hon. colleague from Regina—Qu'Appelle by the hon. member from the Bloc. It had to do with when he was not a member of parliament doing work representing the province he had lived in for years. Having been here in parliament years before representing that province, my colleague from Regina—Qu'Appelle could make a very good point of how westerners view Canada. My colleague from the Bloc indicated a lucrative contract to be something less than \$5,000, because the contract ended before the full year was up.

Ideally the government should be looking across Canada to get ideas from all regions as to what is better for Canada. It should not be looking just to people within Quebec or Liberal supporters; ideally it should be looking to all areas of Canada.

He should not question the credibility of my colleague or the position of the NDP. There is no question that the New Democratic Party believes in Canada. As westerners we have fought very hard to continue to have a Canada that is united from coast to coast. We are not like the Quebec separatists who say anybody who does not agree with the separatists or the Bloc are undemocratic, that if people do not agree with the Bloc then they are traitors to Quebec.

Westerners have learned to fight. We believe in Canada and we are not giving up on Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier: Madam Speaker, I do not wish to upset the hon. member, but I have no choice but to dot the *i*'s and cross the *t*'s, and to do it now. I am going to explain something.

I am not calling the member's credibility into question. On the contrary. He is very credible when he defends the CIO; he works for it. I will merely say that, unless the figures I got from the CIO

are not accurate, this member was paid \$7,200 for work done between November 10, 1996 and November 10, 1997.

These are the figures from the CIO. They are clear and they cast doubt on the impartiality of someone who rises in the House and says on behalf of a supposedly puritan political party that they agree with the CIO. I guess so, since he works for it.

[*English*]

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I want the hon. member to listen very clearly. He referred to my name and said that I worked for the Canada Information Office. That is not true.

What the Bloc Quebecois supplied me with was information from the freedom of information office. At one time I did a small contract for it, before the last federal election. If those members were to read their own information, they would see that it is marked with an asterisk and states:

As some contracts are 'as and when requested', the actual expenditure can be lower than the value of the contract.

That was certainly the case in my situation. I did nothing for that office after the writ was dropped on April 27, 1997. I resent the implication that I did something after that and the absolute untruth that I am now doing some work for the Canada Information Office. That is not true. I expect the hon. member to get up and apologize to me for that.

The Speaker: This would probably come under the heading of debate. One member says one thing and another member says another. You are both looking at the same set of facts and you are interpreting facts as you will.

• (1355)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I merely wish to say that there is no ambiguity. Let us be clear.

I did not say that the member worked there now. If it sounded like that, it is not the case. I said he worked there, and I gave the dates and amounts, between November 10, 1996 and November 10, 1997 for \$7,200. That is exactly what I said and if it was not what was understood I repeat that that was what the documentation from the Canada Information Office said and, as for all the rest, I did not wish to say anything more than that.

The Speaker: Instead of resuming the debate for now—I think it is the member for Repentigny's turn—we could perhaps proceed to Statements by Members. This will give us a chance to hear one or two more.

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STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

GULF WAR SICKNESS

Mr. John Herron (Fundy—Royal, PC): Mr. Speaker, after tremendous public display of remembrance, respect and gratitude for our Canadian war veterans with the recent repatriation of the Unknown Soldier, Canadians wonder why the government is doing so little to address gulf war sickness which plagues our Canadian troops today.

A recent British report has clearly and positively recognized that the disease is real. In addition, the Minister of National Defence recently stated publicly that the Canadian forces members who have loyally served their country in war zones must be fairly treated.

Currently, military personnel who have the disease are being released under 3B, which is a release for medical reasons not attributed to the Canadian forces. This means officers are being dismissed with no benefits. I ask, is this treatment fair?

I strongly urge the Liberal government to address gulf war sickness as other countries are now doing and provide the Canadian forces with fair and equitable treatment and access to benefits.

* * *

A&E NETWORK CANADA

Ms. Sarmite Bulte (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize A&E Network Canada and its cable in the classroom programming.

On Sunday, May 28 I had the privilege of being the keynote speaker at the seventh annual A&E Canadian Teacher Grant Awards in Toronto. This grant award program recognizes Canadian teachers who apply innovation in the classroom and rewards them for creative and enriching methods of instruction inspired by A&E productions.

This year's award recipients are: Monique Martin of Saskatoon, Mark Bridges of Kitchener, Patricia Elliott and Dale Mays of Barrie, and Carol White of Kingston. These teachers are to be commended for their dedication to their students and their craft. The award winning submissions inspired CD-ROMs, web based communications, documentaries, an art exhibit in support of a soup kitchen, and even the re-creation of a medieval feast.

A&E's cable in the classroom programming offers teachers an excellent tool to open the door to creativity. Congratulations to A&E Network Canada on its leadership and also its vision in recognizing teaching excellence.

PRISON PEN PALS

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, how would you like a new pen pal to correspond with on the Internet? Maybe an armed robber. Or perhaps you would prefer a rapist or an American murderer waiting on death row. It will be free to you and will only cost the convict \$30 a year to post his photo and a brief and no doubt very sympathetic biography. The small fee even lets inmates post a short message, perhaps looking for legal advice, a delightful flirtation, or maybe even more.

The prisoners get a birthday card, a holiday card and two newsletters a year so they just do not feel bad while serving their time for destroying somebody else's life and imposing a life sentence of pain on the victim's families and friends. They can even get a T-shirt or a mouse pad emblazoned with the web site's logo.

Today's lesson for the solicitor general is: prison is supposed to be about punishment and rehabilitation, not special perks and privileges that most families cannot even afford for themselves or their children.

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[*Translation*]

THYROID MONTH

Mr. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House and all Canadians that June is Thyroid Month in Canada.

Over one million Canadians of all ages suffer from some form of thyroid disease. Undiagnosed and untreated, thyroid troubles can often lead to serious physical and emotional problems. Women are five to ten times more likely than men to be affected.

The Thyroid Foundation of Canada has 23 volunteer chapters throughout the country. This organization provides information and support to thyroid disease sufferers and their families.

• (1400)

It also promotes public awareness of thyroid disease through publications and information meetings at the community level right across the country.

I urge you, Mr. Speaker, and all members of the House to join with me in wishing the Thyroid Foundation of Canada all the best on its 20th anniversary.

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[*English*]

OCEANS DAY

Ms. Sophia Leung (Vancouver Kingsway, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week is Canadian Environment Week and today is Internation-

al Oceans Day. I should like to take this opportunity to remind all hon. members and all Canadians of the great importance of the environment and oceans.

Oceans day was first declared on June 8, 1992. It inspires and challenges us to become caretakers of our ocean environment. The earth summit created a greater awareness of our ecology and our environment. This awareness extends to marine life in our oceans.

Regardless of where we live we must respect oceans, for what happens in the marine environment affects us all and what we do affects the marine environment.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S GAMES

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the spirit of amateur sport has taken hold in Hamilton. Just last week over 150 people met in my riding to discuss the future of sport with the Secretary of State for Amateur Sport. This event took place as the final preparations were being made for the International Children's Games that are being held next month in Hamilton from July 1 to 7.

The International Children's Games is the single largest sporting and cultural event for youth anywhere in the world. This year an amazing 32 countries and approximately 2,000 Olympic hopefuls between the ages of 12 and 15 will be competing in nine events.

Sports should be part of every child's life because they help them acquire confidence in themselves and develop a sense of pride in their achievements. Sports also teach them important Canadian values such as team spirit, fair play and honesty. The friendships made during these seven days will last a lifetime.

I encourage all members to join me in wishing the athletes success in their games.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday when I asked the Minister of the Environment he could not name one reserve where they had fixed the water supply.

The auditor general blew the whistle three years ago on how a \$26,000 water problem became a \$2.3 million bungle, and the problem still was not solved. How many more millions will it take to solve even that problem?

We support clean water for all Canadians. We are prepared to pay for clean water for all Canadians, but what we cannot support is the gross incompetence of the government when it spends \$2.3 million and still has not fixed a \$26,000 problem.

The government is tired, irresponsible and needs to clean up its act, not just the water supply on reserves.

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[Translation]

NUCLEARENERGY

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is Environment Week and the announcement by the Ukrainian government that the Chernobyl nuclear plant will finally be shut down as of December 15, 2000 is wonderful news.

With countries the world over, even the heaviest users of nuclear power, questioning this kind of energy and planning to progressively dismantle power plants, Canada is stubbornly promoting nuclear power as a source of energy, selling Candu reactors to countries that lack the resources we have to manage them, and blindly pursuing its plan to import Russian and American MOX fuel in order to burn it in the Chalk River power station.

At a time when the promotion of renewable energies such as hydro, solar and wind charger systems is vital, will the government finally listen to the great majority of the public, stop its nuclear journey and at last begin really promoting real renewable development?

* * *

OCEANS DAY

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is World Oceans Day.

The idea for oceans day dates back to 1992, at the Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro. It quickly went on to become an event celebrated every year on June 8.

Canada is a maritime nation. Our oceans have shaped our history. We rely on them for transportation, fishing, tourism and recreation. They are as vulnerable as they are important, however, and their vulnerability makes us vulnerable as well if we do not take the necessary steps to preserve and protect them. Sustainable ocean management is an important international issue which requires international co-operation.

● (1405)

Oceans day is an opportunity to send our message the length and breadth of Canada, and to the entire world: we share one world, one ocean, one life. While Canadians everywhere are taking part in activities aimed at raising public awareness of the importance—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Prince George—Peace River.

* * *

[English]

PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Canadian diplomats are supposed to be non-partisan. However it seems Kim Campbell has grown tired of

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hosting cocktail parties in Hollywood and has decided to re-enter the political fray.

Yesterday in Edmonton the architect of the two seat caucus unleashed a rant that alleges intolerance in the Canadian Alliance. Kim Campbell should look back to her own 1993 campaign ads attacking the current Prime Minister's appearance by saying "Is this the face of a Prime Minister?" What a low point in Canada's political history.

In a desperate attempt to stop the exodus from their ranks the Tories have resorted to mud slinging. First it was the member for Compton—Stanstead calling us racists. Now it is Kim the socialite calling us, and those who have left the Clark party, intolerant.

Canadians see through these desperate acts. While the Tories drag out politic relics from the past to sling mud, the Canadian Alliance with over 100,000 members is forging ahead, building coalitions committed to giving Canadians a brighter, more prosperous future.

* * *

CANADIAN ALLIANCE PARTY

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning I picked up the *Globe and Mail* and this is what I read about the new alliance, old Reform Party.

I read that Stockwell Day said the federal government cutbacks in 1995 were too timid, in particular that Health Canada should have more cutbacks. He said that the department did not pay a single nurse or administer a single hospital. In fact the department provides services to veterans hospitals, prisons, Indian reserves, the RCMP, and many other services.

He said he wanted to privatize VIA Rail, CMHC and Atomic Energy. He also said he wanted to use the notwithstanding clause to override the supreme court and enforce some of his more extreme social views.

To top it off, I read this morning that the defence critic of the alliance party said "We have compromised our combat capability in this country because of the women, aboriginals and visible minorities in the military". That sounds to me like Fred Flintstone or Barney Rubble. That is only in one day, in one newspaper: same party, different name; same policies, the same game.

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[Translation]

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT CANADA

Mr. Maurice Dumas (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is a report in *La Presse* concerning the case of Mrs. Irene Parry, aged 78, who has fallen victim to Human Resources Development Canada policies.

HRDC did not think it worth mentioning to Mrs. Parry that there had been a two-month overpayment of her late husband's pension. The department paid itself back by directly withdrawing the amount from Mrs. Parry's bank account, but it mistakenly took ten times the amount owing. This they call an administrative error.

This is not an isolated case. Projet Génèse, a community organization, held a press conference yesterday to reveal two other cases of victims of the scandalous attitude of HRDC. The cases of Mr. Spence and Mr. Georgantas took close to two years before they were settled, and there was no acceptable reason for the delay. The two men were left in deplorable living conditions and without income.

Given all this, I believe that the minister needs to move beyond public excuses and apologies and to take steps to ensure that such situations are not repeated.

* * *

[English]

PROSTATE CANCER

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among Canadian men. In 1999 it is estimated that over 16,000 men were diagnosed with prostate cancer. More than 40,000 Canadians died that same year of this disease.

Overall, one in eight men will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime, and those diagnosed too late to be cured must live with the complications of the disease and of the side effects of life long treatment.

There are many unanswered questions about prostate cancer, but one thing we do know is that early detection of prostate cancer before symptoms are present or while it is confined to the prostate gland offers the best chance of cure and control.

The Canadian Prostate Cancer Network strongly recommends that men over 50 speak to their physicians about early testing with a PSA blood test and examination as part of their regular check-ups. Canadians should inform themselves about prostate cancer and get a check-up.

* * *

HOCKEY

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, Jon Sim of the Dallas Stars and Colin White of the New Jersey Devils are both competing for Lord Stanley's Cup in this year's NHL final.

Both these fine young athletes are residents of the riverfront town of New Glasgow in the riding of Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough in Nova Scotia. Last year thousands turned out to attend a thrilling welcome home for Jon as a Stanley Cup champion. This

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year the famous trophy will be making another visit to New Glasgow. However it is yet to be decided who will bring it home.

• (1410)

Who could have imagined when Colin and Jon were teammates in the Pictou county minor hockey system that they would one day face off against one another for hockey's most coveted prize? The county has produced other greats such as Lowell MacDonald and Tiger Mackie.

It is every Canadian's dream to compete for the Stanley Cup. As the nation watches this year's final, two of Pictou county's finest young men are living that dream.

On behalf of the PC Party of Canada and the Right Hon. Joe Clark, I extend congratulations to Colin and Jon and their families. No matter who brings the cup home, they can rest assured they are both great champions. I congratulate them.

* * *

SOCCER

Mr. Joe Jordan (Leeds—Grenville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a result of the MPs-pages soccer game I must perform the following function:

My fellow MPs, it is a sad tale I tell
Our page-MP soccer game did not go well
Stop reading *Quorum*, put down your water
Listen to me as I recount the slaughter.

Sprints were high, we were rarin' to go
After all, we had won this two years in a row.
But the pages were ready, and showed us no mercy,
And raced 'cross the field in their bright orange jerseys.

They scored once in the first half and twice in the second,
The pages were giving us more than we reckoned.
We tried our best, but we were unprepared
For once in our lives, we ran out of air.

They outran us, outpassed us, outscored us, it's true,
So I guess it's high time that we gave them their due
For the shutout, their goalie deserves all our praise
And for their winning spirits, let's give them a raise.

* * *

[*Translation*]

JEAN LESAGE

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, before the Quebec National Assembly, the leaders of the Quebec political parties and Mrs. Corinne Lagarde-Lesage paid tribute to the former Premier of Quebec and father of the quiet revolution, Jean Lesage, by unveiling a statue of him.

When he took office in 1960 with his "équipe du tonnerre", which included a young journalist by the name of René Lévesque,

Jean Lesage launched an era of major social, economic and cultural reforms that would turn Quebec into a modern state. These reforms included a renewal of institutions and policies, including in the areas of health and education.

In 1962, when he called an election on the nationalization of electricity, which was to provide all Quebecers with the necessary tools to fulfil their ambitions, Jean Lesage won a tremendous victory under the theme "Maître chez nous", master of our own house.

Today, the Bloc Québécois, along with the National Assembly, wants to pay tribute to a great statesman and democrat who forever marked Quebec's history by promoting the growth of the collective conscience of an entire people.

* * *

[*English*]

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Bill Graham (Toronto Centre—Rosedale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to draw the attention of the House to a very important announcement for my riding of Toronto—Centre—Rosedale, for the region of Toronto and for the citizens of Canada. This announcement concerns the redevelopment of Union Station and its partnership with VIA Rail, one of Canada's busiest stations with over 2.3 million passengers per year.

The key elements of this plan include increasing the number of trains operating out of Union Station from 42 to 54, for an increase of 700,000 passengers per year travelling through the station.

The establishment of a high speed air-rail link connecting Union Station with Pearson International Airport is a very important component of this plan. This venture will connect passengers travelling between the two transportation hubs in approximately 20 minutes. As someone who has battled the traffic getting to Pearson airport for many years, this will be a welcome relief.

This major expansion coincides with the current improvements being proposed for the downtown waterfront and will assist in—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

* * *

[*Translation*]

STEELWORKERS UNION

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely pleased to rise in this house today to congratulate the steelworkers union and its members.

As a former steelworker, it was a pleasure for me to meet them this week on Parliament Hill. They spent two weeks here, meeting with members of parliament and explaining to parliamentarians how important it is to have legislation requiring the top executives of companies to introduce safety measures for workers, to prevent

Oral Questions

tragedies like the one at the Westray mine. They have demonstrated to members of parliament that there is a great need for such legislation in Canada.

This week, the Minister of Justice announced that she was prepared to examine the committee's recommendations. I want to extend my sincere congratulations to the steelworkers union and its members, who have spent two weeks here to present the views of Canadian workers on this workplace health and safety concern.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

• (1415)

[*English*]

AIRLINE INDUSTRY

Miss Deborah Grey (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Air Canada's pilots are threatening to go on strike in just over a week. Thanks to this government's mismanagement of the airline industry, this could leave thousands of Canadians stranded.

Will the government draft and have ready back-to-work legislation if these pilots decide to walk?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary explained this very well to the House yesterday. Either we believe in the right to collective bargaining or we do not. There is a process going on and they are negotiating. This is not the time to tell them that we will take away their rights under the law. If the Reform Party would like to take away the normal process, they should say so. Yesterday the critics said that they believed in the bargaining process between the union and the company. Let the process come to fruition. We will decide, if there is a strike, not before.

Miss Deborah Grey (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I think it is a matter of trust. We agree with collective bargaining, but this government has allowed a virtual monopoly on national airline routes. This government has the responsibility and the obligation to ensure that travellers are not left stranded across the country. They will be held hostage if this happens, and this government should wear the shame of that.

Why will this government not prepare draft back-to-work legislation so that it is ready if need be so the people will not be left stranded across the country?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a purely hypothetical question. The parliamentary secretary explained very well the position of the government yesterday and she was backed by the critics of the Reform Party,

who should have a little consultation with their leader at this moment.

Miss Deborah Grey (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, maybe the government should have a little consultation with those people who will be left on the ground when pilots are on strike.

The parliamentary secretary can brag about the fact that this government is really looking after things well. How about a few solutions? How about acting on something? What about a 90 day cooling off period for the workers? How about final offer arbitration? How about allowing foreign competition in the industry?

Instead of just hoping for the best, will the government be prepared in the contingency that a strike happens next week?

Mrs. Judi Longfield (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if members opposite truly believed in the collective bargaining process they would let the collective bargaining process work. They agreed yesterday that a negotiated settlement was the best settlement for all concerned. We are talking about things that are premature. There will be a negotiated settlement.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: Order, please. Perhaps the front benches could let us get on with our work.

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is fine for government ministers who have access to a government plane when they need it, but a strike at Air Canada is a threat to the travel plans of thousands of Canadians. Canadians want to know that when they show up at the airport this summer the pilots will be in the cockpit, not on the picket line.

While everyone hopes for a negotiated settlement, is the government really prepared to see 85% of Canada's airline industry behind a picket line?

Mrs. Judi Longfield (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, members opposite are asking us to bargain in bad faith. They are asking us to prejudge the collective bargaining process. There is a process in place. There is a mediator who knows the file, who is prepared to sit down with both sides. I urge the party opposite to let the collective bargaining process run its course. We are in very delicate negotiations and this wild speculation is just jeopardizing those negotiations.

• (1420)

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, now that Air Canada controls 85% of passenger airline service in this country, its importance to the Canadian economy is undeniable.

Oral Questions

The minister is well aware that this is only one of many labour disputes facing Air Canada and its employees.

Why is the government prepared to allow Canada's economy to be threatened every time there is a labour-management dispute at Air Canada.

Mrs. Judi Longfield (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only thing this party is prepared to do is to abide by the collective bargaining process. We are not going to interfere in a situation that is on the table, where there are negotiators and the bargaining process is in place.

* * *

[Translation]

PARENTAL LEAVE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, only 42% of those who contribute to employment insurance are entitled to benefits, as we know. This means 58% of contributors, primarily young people and women, are excluded. The Quebec parental insurance program, which is much more generous, provides full access to all employees and to the self-employed.

What has the Prime Minister got to say to the thousands of young families that will be excluded from the Quebec program because of his old habit of seeing reality in confrontational terms?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the program has been in existence a long time. At the end of the year, on December 31, we will extend the period from six months to a year. The program was announced in the February budget. It is an extension of the program we had before, which had served the citizens of Canada well.

If the Government of Quebec has other social problems to resolve and has the money to do so, so much the better. Our program has been around for a long time, and, obviously, if it is a program the Bloc Québécois wants to advance—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that 58% of women and young people are excluded from his plan. Self-employed workers are not covered by it either.

Instead of starting another fight, this time on the backs of families, why does he always dig in his heels with the Government of Quebec, which is trying many different ways to create an environment favourable to young families? Why not negotiate in good faith rather than insist on hogging the spotlight to the detriment of young people and young families, in particular?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for a number of years, we offered to discuss this with them.

Funny that they discover this problem after our program was announced. During the two years before, their concerns were different.

If they are concerned about the people the Bloc Québécois leader mentions, they should look after them, and we will continue with the better program we have been developing for many years.

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the first chance he gets, the self-proclaimed champion of compassion finds nothing more to say to Quebec families than that there is no question of engaging in discussions with Quebec to facilitate implementation of the Quebec parental leave program.

Can the Prime Minister not understand that, unless he takes a significant step in favour of parental leave, all his fine words about compassion are nothing more than empty electioneering?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they are more than just fine words to those who will be getting the parental leave.

Starting December 31, 2000, parents will be getting 12 months instead of 6. I believe this is a program which demonstrates very clearly this party's compassion for people who want to add to their family.

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I invite the Prime Minister to set aside his usual knee-jerk responses and to look at what the two governments can do to reach agreement.

Is the Prime Minister prepared to open up his mind a little to these new realities, which are intended to provide young families with complete access to parental leave, and will he commit to working with Quebec in order to finally settle this matter?

● (1425)

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the Government of Quebec claims that there are problems that need addressing, let it address them. We have put a considerable amount of money into parental leave for people. Everyone felt this was a good thing.

Quebec only saw that there was a problem after our program was announced, and now they are suddenly trying to improve what they did not want to see improved before budget 2000.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Dennis Gruending (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of the Environment was asked why his government failed to table an annual report on Canada's water supply, as required by law since 1996.

Oral Questions

Lo and behold, this morning he did table reports for 1997 and 1998, but we are still waiting for reports for the last two years.

Will the minister tell us why the first two reports were kept from this House and the public until today? Will he tell us when his government will provide the reports that are overdue for the last two years?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for drawing attention to the fact that 20 hours after the request from his party leader I did table the two documents in the House for 1996-97 and 1997-98. I hope he has had an opportunity to look at them.

The other reports will be tabled in the House when the material is ready, when they have been checked and when they have been translated. I should add for his information that this does involve a lot of consultation with the provinces.

Mr. Dennis Gruending (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is three years too late on the tabling, but it is not just about delayed water reports, it is also about delayed action.

The Prime Minister wants action to protect Canadians' drinking water, but the Minister of the Environment says it is not his job. He is wrong.

The Canadian Environmental Protection Act gives him explicit powers to ensure that toxics like the E. coli at Walkerton are not released into the water supply. This can be found at page 39, section 64, and at page 68, section 94, if he would like to look.

He can issue an order today to protect the health of Canadians. When will he sign the order?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, part II of the act to which the hon. member refers is an area on which we are working with the provinces. The large part of the actual subject area falls under provincial jurisdiction.

We have to recognize that there are provinces that have jurisdiction established by the constitution and we respect that constitution.

I would ask him why it is that in an area on which we are working with the provinces, that is, on the accord and on the transfer of water from one water basin to another, all three NDP provinces have failed to come on board with the other nine jurisdictions.

* * *

FIREARMS ACT

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, given that to date over \$350 million has been pumped into the government's ineffective and expensive bureaucratic gun registry scheme, with estimates reaching \$1 billion by completion, it is disheartening to hear that the government has now

spent additional resources on a nationwide campaign in the hopes of getting up the dismal registration numbers.

Could the minister please inform the House just how much money has been spent on this desperate ad campaign to cajole compliance, and is this new money that is being put into this scheme?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yet again the hon. member just does not get it. Gun control is about public safety. In fact, when we look at gun control, at what our licensing and registration program is doing, we are keeping guns out of the hands of those who should not have them. We are saving lives in this country.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to resources, it is our policing agencies that just do not get it.

No one in this House is opposed to gun control. It is the registry scheme. It is an important nuance.

There is an openly expensive and discriminatory practice involving this registration scheme. It is a cash grab. It is meant to prevent criminals from attempting crime, but they are not going to participate in this registry.

This system has already failed in the United Kingdom. The overall violent crime rates have increased 2.2% since putting it in place. Muggings have increased 19%.

Will the minister listen to Canadians and listen to the provinces that oppose this registry scheme? Will she stop wasting money on an ineffective gun registry?

• (1430)

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are in fact listening to Canadians. In poll after poll support for gun control, licensing and registration continues to grow. Canadians want their families and communities to be safe. That is what this side of the House is committed to.

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HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that over 40,000 Canadians have asked to see their own personal files from the big brother database. Canada's information commissioner charges that HRDC has started to delay access requests.

Over 40,000 Canadians have played by the rules and have put in their access requests. They expect the minister to play by the rules, too. Will she come clean with the information within 30 days, as required by law?

Oral Questions

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we know, the database is being dismantled. In the meantime, we have received many requests for people's personal information. Indeed, the privacy commissioner said that the measures outlined by the minister balanced Canadians' right to privacy and the government's need to information on which to base policy decisions.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, a lot of these 40,000 citizens will want to know for one thing about whether their government file includes their bank account number. Just this week HRDC sneaked into someone's bank account and ripped off thousands of dollars. People are getting nervous about how much Liberal big brother can really control their lives.

Will the government be honest and forthcoming in response to the 40,000 access requests? I ask again—

The Speaker: Order, please. Colleagues, on both sides, it is not a question of honesty. I think that word should be used sparingly.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite refers to an unfortunate circumstance that happened around a bank account.

I want to assure the member and the House that the situation has been corrected. Both verbal and written apologies have been given to this family and the family has accepted our apologies.

Nonetheless, the minister takes the situation very seriously and has asked our officials to ensure that such a situation never arises again.

* * *

[Translation]

PARENTAL LEAVE

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if the Government of Quebec clearly identified the whole problem of parental leave, and if the negotiations broke down, it was because the federal government refuses to look at the full scope of the existing problem.

Will the Prime Minister not admit that assistance to young parents has much more to do with family policy and that he would therefore be much better advised to go along with Quebec's program than work from the EI program?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been using the EI program for years.

A few years ago, we agreed to hold talks with the Government of Quebec, which wanted to change things at the time, and we were unable to reach an agreement with it.

We therefore had to make some decisions; the time had come for us to do so. In the last throne speech, we addressed this issue and we followed through in the budget. The program, which extends the period from six months to twelve, will take effect on December 31 of this year. If the Government of Quebec—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Roberval.

• (1435)

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, however interesting any program the Prime Minister might offer young parents might be, he must understand that he is about to treat them as though they were workers who had lost their job, by requiring a waiting period and excluding at least 50% of young families because they are not eligible for EI.

I appeal to his common sense and ask him to be a bit more open-minded. Could he not temporarily set aside his unending wish to pick a fight, take a more open-minded approach, give families a break and go along with Quebec's program? That is what we are asking him to do.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder who is picking a fight.

We clearly stated what the government's position was in the throne speech and in the budget. And when we are about to implement the program, suddenly the Government of Quebec wakes up.

If it has money, it can use it to provide assistance to those whom the member for Roberval tells us need it. The provincial government can very legitimately do that.

* * *

[English]

TERRORISM

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday Canadians were horrified to see that a suicide bomber suspected by police of being a member of the Tamil Tigers killed a cabinet minister and 20 bystanders in Sri Lanka.

Ruth Archibald, Canada's senior diplomat in Sri Lanka, confirmed yesterday that the Liberation Tigers are active fundraisers in Canada. The Sri Lankan government also claims that there is ample evidence the Tigers are using Canada as a fundraising base. CSIS and the RCMP have warned that the Tigers have established extensive fundraising bases to finance weapons purchases here in Canada.

What is Canada doing to stop terrorist organizations like the Tamil Tigers from using Canada as a base to raise funds for international terrorism operations?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada and the people of

Oral Questions

Canada deplore the act of terrorism that claimed 21 lives in Sri Lanka. The government strongly condemns terrorism and any group that uses violence to forward its goals.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, condemning a terrorist is a good first step but it does not stop the fundraising activities from happening here in Canada.

CSIS, the RCMP, the U.S. state department, the Sri Lankan government and our own diplomats all say that fundraising continues every year and raises a huge amount of dollars that are sent from here to help fund terrorist organizations there.

What is the government doing to stop this fundraising activity so that terrorist activities are not financed with Canadian funds?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out to the hon. member that Canada has been the chair of a successful negotiation to establish an international convention on the suppression of financing terrorist organizations and we have signed that convention. We have taken leadership internationally to ensure that people do not abuse that right.

As a result, we have within the criminal code provisions that enable us, with proper proof, to make those kinds of prosecutions. That is part of what we are doing.

We do not condone in any way those terrorist activities. That is why we took the lead in signing and getting that international convention—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. It is a lot easier to hear the responses if we are not heckling all the time.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the CR Bronfman Foundation produced the *Heritage Minutes*, but the necessary money was provided by the federal government.

My question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage. Do the role played by the CR Bronfman Foundation and the source of funding not demonstrate that, in fact, the CR Bronfman Foundation is nothing but a frontman for the federal government?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I said yesterday that we should appreciate the fact that, thanks to the Bronfman Foundation, 43 videos were produced celebrating Canadian heroes such as Maurice Richard, La Bolduc and many others. The Government of Canada is very proud to have a partnership with the Bronfman Foundation.

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in this whole issue, will the Minister of Canadian Heritage come to realize that what is disturbing in the Scully RDI and *Heritage Minutes* affairs is the hidden role played by the government?

• (1440)

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said a few days ago, the member recommended that the Government of Canada logo appear in the Bronfman Minutes, and I welcomed his suggestion.

I will follow up on this to make sure that all Canadians—I believe 23 millions of them have seen the Bronfman Minutes in all Canadian theatres—know that it is the Government of Canada that works in partnership with a great organization. I thank the hon. member for his recommendation.

* * *

[English]

TERRORISM

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, in June 1998, CSIS director Ward Elcock said “there are more international terrorist groups active here than any other country in the world.”

In spite of the piece of paper that the foreign affairs minister was just talking about, these organizations continue to collect money and it is not chicken feed. They tell us it is over \$20 million a year.

Rather than just talk, we want to know specifically what the government is doing to shut down the collection of terrorist money in Canada.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are not engaged in talk. We are engaged in a major effort internationally to get an international convention that will require all countries to criminalize the raising of funds for terrorist purposes. That is what Canada is doing.

If we want to talk about rhetoric and—

The Speaker: Order, please. I appeal to members. We deserve to hear the answers.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, let us take a look at some of this.

The Canadian high commissioner in Sri Lanka admitted that the terrorist Tamil Tigers are using front organizations to raise funds in Canada today. The solicitor general, in 1998, however, went to the cabinet to get the laws changed but the person who is currently the fisheries minister said “Oh, I do not think we have a problem with this”.

I want to know specifically what the government is doing. Funds are being raised in Canada for guns, bombs and weapons. What is the government doing?

Oral Questions

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first let me clarify that the high commissioner in Sri Lanka said that it was also part of the Canadian law that we would have to have adequate proof in order to lay charges. We do not go around making allegations without making sure that there is proper proof for those allegations.

What we do recognize is that under the convention that we helped negotiate, there may have to be amendments in order to provide for the requirements of that legislation. That is what the government is working on right now.

Let me make it very clear that we have no tolerance for groups that raise money for terrorism. We also have no tolerance for groups that make false allegations.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CINAR

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by the end of the 1997 investigation into CINAR, the RCMP had accumulated enough evidence to support the laying of charges against this production company.

Yesterday we learned that the crown brought in an independent expert to validate this evidence. The person used was none other than the sister-in-law of one of the CINAR vice-presidents. Imagine, Mr. Speaker. If one had wanted to bury the whole case, one would not have acted any differently.

My question is for the Minister of Justice. How can the government explain such indefensible behaviour?

[*English*]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously this is a matter under current police investigation and therefore I can say very little about it.

I will simply say that in fact additional information came into the possession of the crown prosecutor on June 6 of this year. That information was immediately turned over to the RCMP.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Susan Whelan (Essex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 4, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans announced \$15 million in funding for much needed dredging assistance to dredge marinas and marine access areas devastated by low water levels in the Great Lakes basin.

Can the hon. minister tell the House what has been done since that time to assist Ontario's marinas that have been left high and dry by low water levels?

Hon. Harbance Singh Dhaliwal (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for Essex for the excellent work that she has done, along with the Ontario caucus.

The government recognizes the difficult problem that marina operators are having in Ontario. That is why the marine operators put their \$15 million on the table. The federal government put its \$15 million on the table.

• (1445)

We are waiting for the Government of Ontario to come forward and put its \$15 million on the table so we can deal with this issue. I wrote to Minister Snobelen to respond urgently because this is a very important issue for the marine operators and for the Ontario economy.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Canadian navy divers are in place to survey, secure, inspect and protect military and other national underwater sites. Navy divers make up a very small component of our armed forces. They are overworked and face demanding and dangerous work hazards.

Can the Minister of National Defence tell the House if cleaning the hull of the commanding officer's private yacht at HMCS *Discovery* in Vancouver is now part of their regular duties?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bertrand (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the commander of the Canadian forces would never put divers' lives in danger. I have taken note of the hon. member's words and will look into the matter.

[*English*]

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the commanding officer at HMCS *Discovery* not only abused his position, his deck officer also used the same two navy divers to clean the bottom of his 22 foot tub.

Can the minister tell the House what he has in mind for these two abusers who have abused the system and taxpayers' dollars in cleaning a commander and a deck officer's private ship and yacht at the HMCS *Discovery*?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bertrand (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, I thank the hon. member for bringing this matter to my attention and I can assure him that we are going to look into it.

Oral Questions

[English]

WESTRAY MINE

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today many members of parliament are wearing a lapel pin of a canary in a cage given to them by the United Steelworkers of America for their support over the Westray bill, a bill that the Pollara poll says has the support of 82% of Canadians.

Yesterday, the justice committee tabled its unanimous report calling on government to amend the criminal code so that when corporate greed leads to corporate murder there will be corporate accountability.

In memory of the Westray miners and on behalf of the three Canadians a day who are killed at work, will the minister heed the justice committee and present Bill C-259, the Westray bill, as legislation in this session of parliament?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government acknowledges and understands that this is a very important issue. That is why we have taken this matter up with the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. I am also discussing this matter with my colleague the Minister of Industry, who obviously has a very direct concern and interest in any changes to our laws, be they criminal or otherwise, that deal with liability of corporate directors.

I appreciate the work done by the justice committee. We will be reviewing its recommendation in a timely fashion.

* * *

DEVCO

Mr. Peter Mancini (Sydney—Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a member of that committee will be watching.

On another matter, last night the Liberal government and Conservative Party joined forces to pass Bill C-11, an act dismantling the Cape Breton Development Corporation, which will have devastating effects on the Cape Breton economy. At third reading, I offered the government concrete suggestions to help rebuild the economy of Cape Breton, including making Cape Breton a location for public research facilities, like the National Research Council.

Will the government agree with my suggestions and commit to make Cape Breton a centre of environmental research excellence by locating any new research facilities on the island?

Hon. George S. Baker (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, not only do we have ACOA, we also have the Cape Breton Economic Develop-

ment Corporation. That corporation is doing a fantastic job in Cape Breton for the unemployed.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, a recent McGill University study ranked Canadian prime ministers since World War II in terms of their economic performance. That study found that Brian Mulroney was the best prime minister in terms of economic performance since World War II. It ranked this government and the Prime Minister dead—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

• (1450)

The Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member has just said would be the same as if he said because his grandmother has wheels, she would be a bus.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. We will hear the question.

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, a McGill University study ranked the Liberal government dead last and the Conservative government under the leadership of Brian Mulroney as number one because of policies like free trade and the GST which the McGill study credited as being responsible for the elimination of the deficit.

Why does the government not stop distorting the record of Brian Mulroney and start trying to improve its own economic record?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are \$42 billion, in other words 42 billion reasons why the hon. member is wrong, wrong, wrong. I think his question was written for him by the tooth fairy, if that is what he really believes in.

* * *

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Natural Resources.

Ontario Power Generation is currently negotiating the sale of Canada's largest nuclear reactor to a foreign owned corporation. Given Canada's dependence on energy, is it appropriate to have our nuclear industry owned and controlled from outside our borders and is public safety being sacrificed on the altar of profit maximization?

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

Speaker, any sale or lease of any such facility to any other party, either domestic or foreign, would be subject to regulatory approval by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission.

Dr. Bishop, the president of the commission, has confirmed that a licence cannot be simply transferred from one person to another; rather a new application must be made. Such an application must follow completely all commission procedures and be open to intervention by interested stakeholders. Indeed the full regulatory regime in Canada would apply to ensure that in every respect the Canadian public interest is protected.

* * *

WORLD PETROLEUM CONGRESS

Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we know that there are foreign civil disobedience experts training protesters in Alberta in preparation for the World Petroleum Congress in Calgary.

After the experiences in Seattle and Windsor, I ask the solicitor general why is the government not rounding up these people and deporting them? Does it really think that Canadians support foreign agitators coming into Canada for the sole purpose of causing violence?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the responsibility of the RCMP to provide public safety in this country and to support the other police forces across the country. That is exactly what the RCMP has been doing and what it will do.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA DAY

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Canadian Heritage neglected to respond to my question on the budget for Canada Day celebrations outside Quebec.

However, since Quebec has received \$5 million, the other provinces can expect to receive proportionally large amounts.

Unless this is a state secret—one never knows—would the minister do us the kindness of telling this House how much she intends to spend in the other provinces on Canada Day celebrations?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to say once again how pleased we are at our partnership with Quebec in Canada Day celebrations, beginning with Quebec's national holiday celebrations on Saint-Jean-Baptiste day, whose budget the Government of Quebec doubled this year.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Oral Questions

• (1455)

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): I am again very proud to be in partnership with the Saint-Jean-Baptiste society, which, through its president, contributed \$350 to Canada Day. A fine partnership—Saint-Jean-Baptiste and Canada Day—a celebration for all Quebecers and for all Canadians.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the government has just announced a new infrastructure program for municipalities to improve water safety, first nations are still waiting for their water issues to be addressed. Garden Hill in my riding of Churchill has a population of over 3,000 and no running water. Communities like Tadoule Lake, Oxford House and God's Lake Narrows are still waiting for modern water service and waste disposal systems.

Why is the Liberal government risking the lives of people in first nations communities by delaying the first nations water infrastructure program?

Hon. Robert D. Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am shocked to hear the hon. member say this about her own riding, when in fact just last month I was up in her area talking to the first nations people, including the chief from Garden Hill.

The hon. member knows very well, or should know, that we are building a new water plant and have agreed to a new sewer and water system over three different phases worth \$42 million. She should know that as the member representing that particular community.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, not only did the McGill study credit the former Mulroney government for its success in free trade and the GST and the success of those policies in turning the country around, but the *Economist* magazine, the world's foremost news magazine, has said that the only reason the current government was able to reduce and eliminate the deficit was the structural changes made to the Canadian economy by the previous government, that is, free trade and the GST.

How can the government take credit for the successes of free trade and GST when it was the Liberal Party and the current Prime Minister who actually campaigned against those policies?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really feel sorry for the hon. member and his party if that is the

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best they can come up with for question period. No wonder they are running so far behind everybody else. What a sad relic of a once great party. It is too bad.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. John Herron (Fundy—Royal, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment saw yesterday that Irving Oil, one of Canada's largest refiners, is not only producing low sulphur gasoline for its own stations, but it is now distributing its product in Ontario.

If the minister wants to get the other refiners on board faster, then he should do what the automakers association, the refiners, health and environmental groups, and the Progressive Conservative Party want to do and that is to reduce the excise tax on low sulphur gasoline, thus reducing prices to consumers and protecting human health. We did this with lead.

Why will the Minister of the Environment not lower the taxes on low sulphur gasoline so we can protect the health of Canadians?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hesitate to give yet another lesson to the Conservative Party, but as I must, it is in fact the Minister of Finance who handles taxes and not the Minister of the Environment. Perhaps this is lost on them.

Nevertheless, we are reducing the sulphur content of gasoline from the average of 360 parts per million to 30 parts per million. I applaud Irving Oil for taking steps in advance of the regulations coming into force.

● (1500)

That is the way we could work with progressive companies and the way we could indeed improve the health of Canadians. I would add that 15 parts per million is the figure—

The Speaker: That would bring to a close our question period for today.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we are winding down toward the end of the parliamentary calendar this spring and we have some important legislation that needs to be completed before we adjourn in the weeks to come.

I wonder if the government House leader could tell us what kind of schedule he has for the rest of this week and for the remainder of next week, and if we plan to extend hours next week so we can accomplish some of the necessary legislation before the House adjourns.

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is an agreement to

continue to sit after 6.30 p.m. today to debate third reading of Bill S-10, the DNA bill, and Bill S-3, the tax convention. I thank the House leaders of other parties for having agreed to this extension of hours. We will likely have similar ones, and I will get to them in a minute, concerning other evenings.

On Friday, tomorrow, we will consider report stage of Bill C-19, the war crimes bill, and of Bill C-27, the parks bill. I understand that there is disposition to deal with report stage of those two bills tomorrow.

On Monday, we will debate second reading of Bill C-33, the species at risk bill. This would be followed by report stage and third reading of Bill C-5, the tourism bill, and Bill C-24, the GST technical bill. If we have not completed those bills on Monday, I would seek consent to continue in the evening to try to move them forward. I will be consulting with House leaders on that topic.

On Tuesday, it is my intention to deal with report stage and third reading of Bill C-18, the impaired driving bill. That would be followed by third reading of Bill C-19, the war crimes bill to be dealt with at report stage tomorrow, and Bill C-27, the parks bill at third reading, which is also at report stage tomorrow. Again, if we have not completed that agenda, it would be my intention to seek the agreement of colleagues to continue that in the evening as well.

On Wednesday, it is my intention to call report stage and third reading of Bill C-34, the grain transportation bill.

Next Thursday shall be the final allotted day in the present supply period. The House would probably have to sit, unless we collectively decide otherwise, until 10 p.m., which means that we would also sit in the evening on Thursday of next week.

● (1505)

At the present time, but subject to discussion with other House leaders, it would be my intention to call Bill S-18 on child soldiers on Friday of next week.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS*[Translation]***SUPPLY**

ALLOTTED DAY—CANADA INFORMATION OFFICE

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague from Roberval indicated to you, I am sharing my time with him.

Supply

It gives me great pleasure to speak to the motion tabled today. Since we have heard speeches that were all over the map, I am going to take the liberty of rereading the motion in order to reorient the debate somewhat, as much for the government members as for the opposition.

We heard some exaggeration from the NDP, something that is fairly rare. But with a motion like today's, they let loose a bit. Subsequently, thanks to the member for Roberval, we understood why some NDP members were rather excited about our motion.

I will read the motion:

That this House condemn the government for having established the Canada Information Office, which gives lucrative contracts to those close to the government party for, among other things, the purpose of gathering, analysing and collating information about a large number of citizens, and that this House urge the government to close that Office.

The only potentially debatable word in this motion is the word "lucrative". To some, a \$100,000 or \$200,000 contract is perhaps not really lucrative. Others need \$1 million or \$2 million.

The rest of the motion remains unchanged. As we have clearly shown with facts and not opinions, thanks to a new creation that emerged after the near defeat of the federalist movement, the Canada Information Office was established.

This whole issue deals with a much more serious question that Canadians could ask themselves. The basic question is: Where do our tax dollars go?

The Canada Information Office is one answer. Here are a few examples of what the government is up to. The people of Canada can wonder where their money is going. We are not talking about federalists or sovereigntists here. We are not talking about separatists or about those who appreciate the "best country in the world". We are talking about facts.

We all have to agree that close to \$1 billion is missing at Human Resources Development Canada. Ordinary Canadians, those who work so hard to make a living, are really at a loss to understand how the federal government could lose \$1 billion so easily.

We are told that it is not \$1 billion, but rather \$152 and so on. However 22 investigations have been launched by the RCMP about HRDC. Most of these 22 investigations involve Shawinigan. This has nothing to do with a political party. It is a fact. There are 22 investigations. Nobody knows where the tax dollars go.

A grant which first appeared in the riding of Rosemont disappeared, and then reappeared in the riding of Saint-Maurice. That is also a fact. Where did our tax dollars go? This is another question that could be asked.

Another grant was given, again in a Liberal riding. This might be mere chance, if not a fact.

• (1510)

A grant was given to a textile company in the riding of Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies. The company got a great idea. It changed its name, thus leading us to believe that jobs had been created. But in fact no jobs were created. Again, where is the taxpayers' money going?

After so many blunders at HRDC, the minister came up with a bright idea. She decided to hire a spin doctor. It cost \$50,000 to have someone tell the minister how to dress and how to answer questions. Later, after having wasted and lost taxpayers' money, this same department sent public servants for group relaxation therapy, because these people had been under some stress after having lost several million dollars worth of Canadian taxpayers' money.

Then, as if it were not bad enough to have one department in hot water, another one found itself in an embarrassing situation. Usually it is the Department of National Defence, but not this time. It is the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, where hundreds of millions of dollars were paid to CINAR, a company run by friends of the government. There again—and this is not because we are nasty separatists—the RCMP launched an investigation. As this point, a total of 23 investigations have been launched.

Probably the government's intention is to get into the *Guinness Book of Records* as the government investigated the most times during its mandate in a supposedly democratic country. This is a real problem for this government, but it will perhaps be worth it to have earned such a record, having had such a huge number of investigations into the mishandling of public funds.

It has recently been learned that another department, one about which we had certain suspicions that have now been backed with concrete examples, the Department of Canadian Heritage, has sunk \$7 million of Canadians' tax dollars into Scully's "Heritage Minutes" on RDI. That this was done in an underhanded way is a proven fact. Those "Heritage Minutes" swallowed up \$7 million.

If I were merely to add up all these figures—and that is not even touching on the CIO—the total of the taxpayers' money that has gone to recognize the contribution of buddies, ex-candidates, candidates, ex-official agents, ex-workers, ex-Liberal MPs, would be \$500 million, \$600 million or \$700 million.

We were not the ones who said, after the election in 1993, if my memory does not fail me, "Anyway, all Liberal Party candidates will end up with jobs afterward". It was a now-deceased senator from the Liberal Party who spoke this truth, which everyone suspected, but he came out and stated. His soul is now with God.

He was frank enough and honest enough to come out and say what everyone knew: all Liberal MPs, all defeated Liberal candi-

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dates—and there were many of them in Quebec—could count on a job afterward in gratitude for their efforts. A job was already a nice reward, but they are also getting government contracts.

How does one get government contracts? We see John Parisella, who heads BCP and who got \$20,000. It is a very small contract, but it helps when one is starting up a business. It is one more contract under administration. BCP is not an SME; it is a fairly large company. But a friend of the government gets a little something anyway.

The list of contracts includes Administration Leduc et Leblanc. The member for Chambly, who went over the file with a fine-tooth comb, put it very well. Administration Leduc et Leblanc, a firm that contributed \$15,000 to the Liberal Party of Canada in 1997 and 1998, obtained a contract worth \$85,000. GPC, headed by Rémi Bujold—the member for Roberval mentioned him earlier—a former secretary of state in the Liberal government, received a grant of \$87,000 from the CIO. But he was very generous with the Liberal Party and gave them \$25,000.

Canadian taxpayers are fed up. When we ask ourselves why—I see the government House leader, who has parliamentary procedure down to a fine art—when we see that the public has so little confidence, so little respect for politicians, this is the number one reason. This is why people have nothing but contempt for all things political and do not trust politicians; they know only too well that money is wasted.

The government members say that they cannot be prevented from promoting the federal government, the Canadian government. The government can promote government policies.

• (1515)

When it is a matter of promoting party policy and platform, this has to be done by the party with the money that was generously donated to it. They say they want to explain government policies; but how come only Quebecers do not understand them? Why is the Canada Information Office—which as far as I know is not called the Partisanship in Quebec Office—not informing all the Canadians?

Are we a distinct society for the CIO? Maybe at the CIO they have understood that Quebec is a distinct society and that is why they are granting all CIO contracts to firms belonging to Liberal friends or former Liberal candidates, to people close to the Liberal Party, since it seems that contracts are given only to them.

I continue. Leroux and Associates, \$23,000; Mr. Leroux has been nicknamed “the Deputy Minister of Heritage Canada” by a journalist in the National Capital. Everest Communications; that firm was also close to the Conservatives, but eventually they understood; when a political party is dying, you get closer to the other one. That firm got a \$75,000 contract and quickly gave back \$20,000 to the Liberal Party. How long is it going to last?

I hope everyone will understand—

The Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but I have to give the floor to the hon. member for Chambly.

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the famous CIO the member for Repentigny is talking about is probably the acronym for cronyism and influence office, or something of the sort.

Is this agency accountable to the public? Do we have details on this? Are those things secret? Did the Auditor General of Canada examine the management and the administration of this agency? In his recent reports, did the auditor general mention certain points that brought about the question the Bloc is asking today? Are there some sources of mismanagement or undue influence or are we talking purely and simply about patronage and cronyism? Really, we should call the agency the cronyism and influence office.

I would like the member for Repentigny to elaborate a bit on the contracts that were awarded without going to tender. To whom were these contracts awarded and why? It could be interesting for the House and particularly for the Speaker who is listening closely.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Chambly for his question, and also for uncovering this patronage haven for the Bloc Québécois caucus, and then, through the House, for all Canadians.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts and the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs are currently considering a new process to make the allocation of funds to all federal departments more transparent. Unfortunately, and this is another tactic used by the federal government, when parallel agencies and offices like this one are created, they are not bound by the same financial audit standards that apply to other departments and that are monitored by the treasury board.

My colleague from Chambly is right when he says the creation of parallel offices and agencies like the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency and the millenium scholarship program is a way for small entities like the Council for Canadian Unity and the Bronfman Foundation to hide money from auditors and avoid federal accounting standards.

Members of parliament can rest assured that, with these speeches and allotted days, the information will get to the people in the auditor general's office, who are doing an excellent job of making sure the taxpayers' money is well spent.

• (1520)

I can assure the hon. members that we will formally request a review or an audit of the funds spent by the Canada Information

Office, or cronyism office for the friends of the Liberal Party of Canada. Members can be sure of that. Unfortunately, too often, those organizations are not subject to the same accountability standards as the official departments.

[*English*]

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise today to speak to the Bloc motion. I should like to read, as my colleague on the other side did, the motion so that everyone in the House is quite clear as to what it is:

[*Translation*]

That this House condemn the government for having established the Canada Information Office, which gives lucrative contracts to those close to the government party for, among other things, the purpose of gathering, analysing and collating information about a large number of citizens, and that this House urge the government to close that Office.

[*English*]

Before one can speak directly to the motion and determine whether or not it has any basis in fact, whether or not it has any utility for Canadians and for the good governance of Canada, one has to look at the context of the Canada Information Office.

By the way, I will be taking the full amount of time. I rise today to speak about the achievements of the Canada Information Office. In order to do so we need to briefly review the context against which they were realized.

In 1998 the Government of Canada took steps to strengthen its capacity to communicate with Canadians from coast to coast to coast. To strengthen its capacity to communicate with Canadians it gave the Canadian Information Office a mandate for delivering initiatives that reflected the corporate vision of the government.

More specific, the CIO or the Canada Information Office has the mandate to improve communications between the Government of Canada and Canadians. As I mentioned, that means Canadians from coast to coast to coast, including Canadians who live in Quebec, all the Quebec population, of which I am one.

It does this based on three broad objectives. The first is to provide corporate communication, advice and support. The second is to improve co-ordination of regional communications. The third is to strengthen the operational capacity of the Government of Canada on such issues as national unity.

Let us look first at how the Canada Information Office has been improving corporate communication. It continued to survey Canadians to determine their concerns and their information needs. The findings of these surveys have been released publicly over the past year. Our surveys have come up with two important findings. First, Canadians are not very aware of the programs and services of the

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Government of Canada. Second, they want to know more about them.

Let me repeat for members of the opposition, particularly those who tabled the motion we are now discussing. The first finding of the surveys was that Canadians are not very aware of the programs and services of the Government of Canada. The second finding was that Canadians want to know more about the programs and services of the Canadian government.

• (1525)

The CIO through the various activities it undertakes is working to bridge the gap indicated in the findings of those surveys.

[*Translation*]

We believe that Canadians have a right to information. We have an obligation to ensure that they know about the services available to them and their families and to take all necessary measures to ensure that they are informed about them. The Canada Information Office is one of these measures.

Other products have been developed in this context. For instance, the CIO helped to produce a Guide to Government of Canada Programs and Services which was sent in June 1999 to 2.6 million homes in rural and remote areas of the country. It was done in co-operation with Agriculture and Agri-food Canada. A total of 26 departments and agencies were involved.

The document was very much appreciated by those who received it. Half of them saved it, 68% thought it was informative, 78% found it easy to use and 56% agreed it helped to improve understanding of what the Government of Canada does.

Not only that, 68% agreed that it was important for the Government of Canada to provide information on its programs and services to Canadians through direct mail brochures sent to their homes or business.

As a result of the guide, there were thousands of calls to the 1-800-O-Canada number and thousands of hits on the Canada site.

The CIO recently piloted the idea of a similar guide for urban Canadians. They were distributed in May and June to nearly 370,000 homes in Quebec City and Saskatoon. The early analysis is showing results similar to the rural guide. This pilot is another example of how the CIO is helping the Government of Canada inform Canadians about its programs and services.

Also in 1999, the CIO successfully tested the idea of letting Canadians know about government services through ads in the weekly newspapers. The CIO will continue this campaign with improvements.

The first wave of ads focuses on concrete priorities such as finding a job. It also promotes the 1-800-O-Canada number, the Canada site, and Service Canada access centres. The ad is being

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inserted into 1,400 weekly newspapers and will run for three separate weeks during May and June.

With respect to CIO's second objective, improving regional communications, there have been great strides. The CIO is working with the federal regional councils to strengthen the government's on-the-ground capacity to communicate with Canadians.

We believe that it is essential that we become more aware of regional issues and be better able to communicate with Canadians in ways that work most effectively in their part of the country.

• (1530)

[*English*]

With respect to strengthening our operational capacity, the Canada Information Office reaches out to inform Canadians in their own communities. The partnership initiatives program supports local initiatives which inform citizens about government services which are relevant to them. In the past year for example, the CIO worked with other government departments and community partners to support 50 activities and projects of interest to communities, ranging from workshops on the Y2K bug, to a youth project on the elimination of racial discrimination, to a national conference of the community futures development corporation.

Every institution needs to communicate its overall vision. The Government of Canada is no exception. Since receiving its new mandate in 1998, the Canada Information Office has been meeting its challenges with vitality and dynamism. It is to be congratulated, in my view, for that achievement and for positioning itself as a key communications agency in a few short years.

I would like to mention a few other achievements of the Canada Information Office.

[*Translation*]

As I have already said, the office also helps better inform Canadians about their country. To this end, it contributes to many key events, such as the Canada Conference '99, which marked the 50th anniversary of Newfoundland's entry into Confederation. Who in the House cannot applaud such an activity?

The CIO, together with other federal agencies, organized and sponsored this conference which helped make better known this chapter in our history. Newfoundland's entry into Confederation was indeed an important chapter in our history.

Another activity was veterans' week. The Canada Information Office, together with the Department of Veterans Affairs, prepared a promotion campaign for veterans week and the role played by Canada and its veterans during the first world war. What was the result of this activity? The media coverage of veterans week increased by 57% in 1998 as compared to 1997. One cannot say

that this event was not a success. It is an event that was successful and that met the goals of the CIO's mandate.

Related activities were held with the help of the CIO. These activities encouraged Canadians to co-operate with the government and other partners in order to promote understanding among citizens.

Here are some examples: South Carleton High School created the website "Unity Peak" this was the first school to be allowed to name one of the mountain peaks in the Lake Louise area of Alberta. The office contributed to the creation of the website, which enabled the students of this school to tell everyone from sea to sea to sea about their trip up the mountain.

Another activity, "Chez Nous 1998", was a series of television programs showing the lifestyles, activities and culture of Canada's francophones. Francophones are, as we all know, found from sea to sea. They are not just in the province of Quebec.

The theme of the series was to show such things as Canadian history, current events and sports, and it showcased rising young francophone musicians. Average audiences totalled around 170,000.

• (1535)

Then there were the Y2K bug workshops, which I have already referred to.

The office set up Y2K bug workshops for heads of small businesses and professional corporations. In post-workshop feedback, 95% of participants praised the appropriateness and quality of the tools and information.

Now, I want to return to the motion by the Bloc Quebecois, who allege that the Canada Information Office was created by the government solely for the purpose of awarding contracts to friends.

Since its inception in 1996, the office has adjudicated all its contracts in keeping with treasury board policies. Let me repeat: since 1996, the office has adjudicated all of its contracts in keeping with treasury board policies.

What is more, in 1999-2000 there were public calls for tender for all contracts over \$25,000, in compliance with the directives of the minister responsible for the CIO. Contracting out must meet two criteria: ability and deadlines.

What, in reality, is the Bloc motion all about?

[*English*]

It is so clear that yet again the Bloc is out of step with Canadians, that the Bloc is out of step with Quebecers.

We see with the statistics, and I will repeat them, what Canadians think about the work BIC is doing. With regard to the guide that was distributed to over 2.6 million homes in rural and remote

regions, 68% of Canadians thought the guide was very useful. Over half of them kept the guide. Seventy-eight per cent found the guide was easy to consult. Fifty-six per cent stated that the guide helped them to better understand what the Canadian government actually does. Sixty-eight per cent indicated that to them, to those Canadians who received the guide, it was important that this kind of promotion of the Canadian government's services and programs take place.

The Bloc is calling for censor of the government for having created the office and is calling for that office to be closed. Yet Canadians have said that the information the office actually produces is not only useful to them but needs to continue. They said that the office is doing a good job in making sure Canadians are better informed about government programs and services.

Yet again, the Bloc is completely out of step with the majority of Quebecers and certainly with the majority of Canadians. But then what else can one expect from the Bloc? It is still advocating the division and breakup of Canada, notwithstanding that for years now the overwhelming majority of Quebecers have said they do not want another referendum. They do not want to know about another referendum. They do not want to hear about another referendum. They want both the federal government and the provincial government in Quebec to get on with the work of providing Canadians, particularly Quebecers, with a good quality of life and good services.

• (1540)

BIC has shown through its achievements over the last four years that it is assisting the government in ensuring that its programs and services meet the needs of Canadians and are known by Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the comments by my hon. colleague across the way, who no doubt managed to convince herself of what she just said. This had to be a speech that was contracted out by the CIO to someone who wrote it and was probably paid handsomely to do so.

The hon. member said that the CIO was the Canada Information Office, and that Canadians wanted to be informed. I do not deny a government must keep its citizens informed about its policies. But why is that, after the CIO was set up, the first decision that was made was a ministerial order exempting the office from the application of a number of provisions in the Public Service Employment Act and its regulations, especially with regard to hiring?

The office did not want to go through the normal public service channels to do its hiring. It wanted to hire people who espoused its doctrine, who were able to do its dirty work, and shamelessly compromise themselves, people like the infamous Serge Paquette and Richard Bélisle, who were both former Liberal candidates, one

in the 1988 general election, the other in a provincial election. One of them was a political attaché to a Liberal MP.

I want to ask the hon. member, who is so concerned about keeping Canadians informed, if she informs them when she is invited to a ribbon-cutting ceremony with the minister in charge of the CIO? Does she inform the taxpayers present at the event that, when Mr. Paquette and Mr. Bélisle attend such events, they are paid \$2,500 each, plus 38 cents a kilometre for travelling expenses? Does the Canada Information Office inform taxpayers about these things?

Could she tell us why the CIO does not abide by the public service hiring regulations?

Mrs. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I am a member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. We receive weekly reports from the auditor general. I have been on this committee only since September 1999.

From what I have seen, some government agencies have enabling legislation excluding their employees from the public service. The CIO is not alone in that. I see nothing mysterious in that. I see nothing hidden or harmful in the fact that the CIO does not have to follow the hiring and promotion policies of the public service.

In fact, this is not at all what bothers the Bloc. The Bloc is irritated because the Canadian government found an effective way to provide information on what it does in Quebec, to make Quebecers understand what the Canadian government represents and how they can benefit from federal programs.

• (1545)

This is why the Bloc is irritated. For many years, even decades—although the Bloc did not exist then—those who want to break up Canada had a kind of monopoly on the information provided to Quebecers.

This gave them the opportunity to paint for Quebecers a nightmarish picture of the Canadian government. It gave them the opportunity to make Quebecers believe that the Canadian government was robbing them of their money, that all Canadians except Quebecers were benefiting from the tax dollars that Quebec was sending to the Canadian government.

Today, by communicating through the various departments, and also through agencies like the CIO, the Canadian government has found ways to make Quebecers aware of federal programs, to explain to them how they benefit from these programs, how their tax dollars are being spent and how these programs are to their advantage.

This frightens the Bloc members. It frightens them because, when people understand what is going on, when they are faced with facts, and not with allegations, fantasy and fiction, they see through what is going on.

Supply

Hon. Jim Peterson (Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, who has done so much for her electors, within the Liberal caucus or in parliament, and who has great visions for all Canadians, including Quebecers.

Could the hon. member tell us more about the programs we have created for all Canadians and make a comparison between the efforts of the Canadian government, those of the Quebec government and of Ontario government, which has spent so much money to promote very partisan issues which are not beneficial to all Canadians?

Mrs. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. I appreciate it very much, because it will allow me to elaborate a bit on the partisan advertising we have witnessed in Quebec, for decades, and during the two mandates of the Harris government in Ontario.

Here is an example I have witnessed personally as a federal member of parliament from Quebec. Human Resources Development Canada contributes to literacy program for Canadians across the country. We know, as my hon. colleague does, that illiteracy is a serious problem in Canada. Despite the fact that Canada is a highly educated society, we still have a unacceptably high percentage of Canadians who are functionally illiterate. We live in a new economy based on technology and we are all aware of the necessity of having a highly educated population.

• (1550)

We must create programs to help Canadians who have difficulty reading or who can read, but not well to understand somewhat complex documents. We must help these people to improve and increase their skills.

In Quebec, the federal government is an important contributor to this kind of program. In my riding, there are two organizations in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and two in Lachine. Before I entered politics, electors and residents in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce knew that their programs were funded by the federal government. In the other part, Lachine, people did not know it.

Today, thanks to my efforts and those of CIO, everyone in my riding knows that the programs there are funded, at least in part, by the federal government.

[*English*]

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak to the motion today, which is a Bloc motion to talk about the Canada Information Office.

The fact is that Bloc members have been hostile toward this exercise since its inception in 1998. They saw it as a rather clumsy or transparent tool of the federal government to intervene in the debate about Quebec sovereignty, separation, whatever we want to call it. They have attacked this office since day one for that reason. They have seen it as an extension of the government using its spending power in Quebec to skew or influence the results of any future referendum. That is the Bloc's concern in a nutshell.

I suppose we could get into that debate. The government contends that it has every right and responsibility to intervene in these debates and to get information out. In one report a government member said that the purpose of the information office would be to correct what he called separatist lies spread in the provincial election. Of course the separatists responded and called this a propaganda exercise for federalism. The federal government retorted "We will defend the country. We will defend the record of the government. It is not participating in the provincial campaign; it is telling the truth". We have this big war about the good guys and the bad guys. It depends upon one's point of view who the good guys are and who the bad guys are.

I will not get into that. Many speakers have done that in this debate. They have their point of view and Canadians should listen.

I would like to approach the debate from a little different angle, which is to have Canadians ask themselves whether an information ministry, so to speak, of the federal government is in our best interests.

The Liberal member who just spoke talked about the fact that many people do not have the skills or ability to get information about issues or are not able to understand issues, and that it is up to government to help citizens get a better handle on issues, et cetera. That is really the argument of "Does the end justify the means?" In other words, almost anything government does can be justified. Goodness knows, the Liberals are masters at putting a pretty face on some very disturbing exercises of government.

The question is a very important one. Do we want to have a ministry of the federal government which is devoted to information?

• (1555)

Other countries, of course, have a ministry of information. Some people would say a ministry of government propaganda. The point I am making is that there is the very clear potential for abuse in government having such a tool at its disposal.

We have seen abuse by these government ministries of information, these propaganda producing departments, in other countries. I think many of us in the House from all parties would be very concerned and would decry the ability and the exercise of some governments having this control and proactivity in shaping the message that goes out to citizens.

Supply

This is a very important principle in a democracy, because democracy means that the people rule. However, people's decisions are only as good as the information they have. I think we would all agree on that. Therefore, the question becomes, how do we make sure that people have good information so they can make good decisions in a democracy? The question then becomes, who has the best and most proper role in providing that information to citizens?

I will give an example using members of parliament. Members of parliament can send out a mailing to every household in their riding four times a year. These are called householders. Many members send out these householders to every household in their riding several times a year, up to four if they wish. I have read many of these householders, as I am sure, Mr. Speaker, you have done.

I have seen householders from members of parliament which are extremely objective, which give very objective and balanced information to constituents, saying "This is what is happening in parliament. These are some of the pros and cons of some of the issues we are dealing with. Opponents of the measure say this; proponents say that. I invite you to take this information as citizens to be more informed about what is happening and about what debate is looking like in the House of Commons".

Other householders are, shall we say, much less objective in presenting information to constituents. I am not being partisan. I think that is true of householders from members of parliament from all parties. Some are much more objective than others.

However, in every case the constituents who receive this information have to place some reliance on it. Some are more objective than others. That is just the way life is. That is a very critical issue in a democracy: the ability of citizens to get balanced, objective views and perspectives on important issues of the day.

The Canada Information Office was quite roundly criticized at its inception. One headline read: "An office where spin is in". I do not think that very many Canadians want to be the victims of spin doctors. All of us know that when information is provided there is generally some kind of bias or agenda or perspective behind it, but there is some desire to not be fed a line, to not be propagandised, and this office was not necessarily seen as being very objective.

Here is another headline: "Putting new shine on government line". Even the pundits had concerns as they watched the Canada Information Office being set up about just how objective the information would be and just what agenda would be pursued by the office.

The government, of course, had some positive reasons for putting this into place. We have many departments of government. Most of those departments have their own communications department, secretariat or whatever it is called. The human resources development department, for example, which I follow as a shadow critic, employs 150 to 180 communication specialists.

• (1600)

The government has argued that instead of 35 different ministries all trying to get their message out, that it would be better to have a central information department whereby government could speak with one voice. It has said that this office would not be where policies are created but about how information about policies would be shaped and communicated; in other words, communication specialists. That does make some sense. We all know that co-ordination is important. We all know that singing from the same song sheet is important for any organization.

The question really is whether government is inclined to go past that sort of objective, efficient, effective co-ordination of message and into a deliberate attempt to use government muscle, government resources, government money and government clout to actually shape the thinking of the public in a way that is not appropriate. It is very difficult to bring the right balance about.

I think it is fair to say that I have seen the present government become less careful about giving objective information to the public and more concerned about spin doctoring, about managing the message. Again I point to my experiences with the HRDC department where it used to be that the department responded promptly and fully to all access requests. However, after the boondoggle audit, that all changed. Memos starting going out saying "Do not send anything out until it has been vetted at the top and our message has been shaped, the communications have been written, the storyline has been decided and then we will put that information out once we have decided how to manage that message".

I think Canadians have a right to be very concerned about that approach to government communications. There is a line between efficiency and effectiveness and a genuine desire to provide clear and accessible information about key issues to all Canadians and a desire of government to spin the message, to propagandize, to shape, shade and bend Canadians' thinking along lines which suit government purposes.

This debate is important because it gives us an opportunity to explore the lines we want to draw in the government's ability to inform the public in an open, honest, helpful and public spirited way and the government's tendency, unfortunately, to want to use that ability to plant its own message and its own way of thinking into the public consciousness.

We have to remember that this whole question is important because the resources of government are enormous. If government decides to cross the line beyond good information and helping people know the facts, and giving people necessary facts in important matters to actually try to shape people's thinking and to spin doctor them—and some people use the word brainwash, which I think is a little strong—and move over to what we might call the dark side, it has a pile of resources available to do that.

Supply

• (1605)

We, as citizens, must think very long and carefully before we allow the resources of government to be used to shape our way of thinking in a way that we would think is inappropriate, dishonest, self-serving or politically tainted.

I think what the Bloc is saying in its motion is that it has a real fear that the Canada Information Office has been, and certainly could be, used for that purpose. We might argue whether the Bloc comes to that argument with clean hands. We might argue whether the public good that the federal government is trying to achieve with the Canada Information Office in the case of the sovereignty debate would outweigh the disadvantage of not having that kind of information out. We can get into all that but I think we need to be careful. Once we set the juggernaut in motion, once we start down the slippery slope for all the good reasons, such as pride, national unity, patriotism and caring about our country, we will have created a tool that can easily be abused.

My own conclusion, from being in the House now for over six years, is that there is a regrettable tendency on the part of the government to abuse that kind of power and abuse its opportunity to use its resources. I do not say that gleefully. I do not say that to be unkind to the government. I am saying that honestly. That is my honest conclusion. I do not believe that is always the case. At times I think the government honestly does try to reach the objectives that Liberal members have talked about by giving good, efficient and effective information that Canadians need and desire. However, I do think there is a tendency to stray over the line.

I commend the Bloc for giving us an opportunity to be very vigilant on that issue. I would say that the role of government in gathering information and disseminating that information to Canadians should be very carefully monitored and even limited because it is the nature of power to corrupt and information is power. People who control information have tremendous power and influence. I do not think I need to give a lot of examples, but the information flow and the control and shaping of it places enormous power and potential for misuse into the hands of whoever has the resources to control it.

On this motion, we have to recognize that government has a legitimate role in providing information. In fact, we have argued strenuously in the House that government is not meeting its obligation to provide information to citizens, particularly because it has now begun, in many cases, to flout the legal requirements of providing information through the Access to Information Act. It is a different thing from providing documents and facts to moving in the direction of packaging that information and shaping it in a way that is very influential on the thinking of citizens and doing that without any checks and balances.

I believe we need to be very strong about open, honest, transparent and full disclosure in government. We also need to be very

aware and vigilant. We need to put proper and appropriate limits and checks and balances to curb the potential for abuse in the kind of government activities like the Canada Information Office.

• (1610)

I hope these remarks will be helpful to Canadians in judging this issue and helpful to members of the House. I thank the Bloc Quebecois for the opportunity to consider this important principle.

Ms. Carolyn Parrish (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I never fail to be impressed with how the party opposite can suck and blow at the same time.

I can remember back to the last referendum when members of the Reform Party said that we should engage all Canadians in the issue of Canadian unity, not just politicians from Quebec. They went on to say that we should take a tough line with the separatists, refute their lies, talk directly to Canadians and give them the straight facts without the filter of provincial governments.

I suggest we have done that on a very modest scale to the tune of about 60 cents per person across the country, both to collect their opinions and to impart information. However, I warn the member opposite that she is courting the prime information dispenser of two former leaders, Mr. Mulroney, and Mr. Harris who is currently in Ontario. Mr. Long, who is fighting for the leadership of the member's party, dispensed over \$100 million before the 1999 election in Ontario. That was pretty outrageous material that was not exactly not seen through a filter of political taint.

If Mr. Long democratically and fairly wins the leadership of her party, will the member put up or will she not and suggest that he cannot use \$100 million of money either from that party opposite or from any party to dispense his venom to the country?

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, that was pretty venomous. What the member is pleased to call sucking and blowing is an honest attempt to reach a balance, not to simply condemn full sail the distribution of information. On the other hand, we do not want to make it a completely open process with no checks and balances and no hesitation about the kind of resources that are available to one perspective in putting forward a message.

As the member rightly pointed out, our message during the last election campaign was that all Canadians should be engaged in the important debate about the future of our country, not just leaders from Quebec. We made that very clear as part of our approach to government, and we will continue to do that.

I deplore the member's partisanship in talking about one of our leadership candidates and one of the provincial premiers. This is

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not only the pot calling the kettle black, but it illustrates my point perfectly. The Liberal government is happy to spend millions of dollars a year on getting their side of the story out, but if other people want to spend money on getting their side of the story out suddenly they are evil and must be stopped. That is ridiculous.

My point is that there has to be honesty and objectivity in putting forward information and a variety of perspectives need to be put forward, which is exactly the principle that we believe government should operate under. The oversight of something like the Canada Information Office is absolutely critical.

Yes, there will be other voices in the debate and there should be. If people want to support those voices coming forward with their own resources, then they are at liberty to do so. I certainly would not support the hon. member's suggestion that we should muzzle other voices or prevent other voices from bringing their point of view forward. I would remind the hon. member that this is a democracy and I am going to fight for it to stay that way.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague from the Canadian Alliance if she does not find it strange that this information is targeted at Quebecers?

• (1615)

Is it because the government thinks that Quebecers are a bit slow that they need more information to find out the truth? Did the member notice in her area, in western Canada, whether these "Heritage Minutes" and all this information was broadcast as widely as in Quebec?

If this is information, then all Canadians should be interested. But if only Quebecers are interested, it is not information any more, it is propaganda. Does my colleague from the alliance believe that this information is shared equally across the country for the benefit of all Canadians?

[*English*]

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, my friend from the Bloc has put me in an awkward position. Although I completely reject his agenda of breaking up my country, I cannot help but agree with him that it is very odd and very troubling that the activities of this multimillion dollar information agency seem to be trained mostly on Quebec. That is a rather puzzling circumstance.

I must say if federal propaganda or information were trained mostly on the province I come from, I would be a little upset too. I can see the need for the federal government in such a key issue for our country as the unity of our country wanting to make sure there is information going out to citizens and that it fights for the unity of the country, just as the Bloc Quebecois and the Parti Quebecois

are fighting for the separation of our country. However, I think there should be fairness and balance in the use of resources.

As our party has said, that discourse or debate should involve all citizens right across the country. It should not be a duking it out between the federal government and the separatists in Quebec because this does affect all of us. That is what one of our ads said during the last election, that this is such an important debate we do not just want a few voices being heard, we want voices from right across the country.

To answer my friend's question, I would say that if there is a clear perception or evidence of unfairness or imbalance, then that is a legitimate concern to raise. I would also say that he must then be prepared to live by his own rules and also be committed to fairness, balance and honesty in the information he brings forward in the debate, as well as demanding it from other people who are participating.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for some time now there has been a lot of talk about the Canada Information Office, the CIO. We have been seeing quite a disinformation campaign being conducted by the Bloc Quebecois, which is trying at all costs to discredit and distort the work done by the CIO, particularly as it relates to the organization of the Quebec ministerial tours.

It gives me great pleasure to rise today in the House to clear up a few matters, particularly in relation to the tours that the CIO has been organizing in the last few months.

First, I want to point out that the CIO's mandate is to assist in improving communications between the government of Canada and Canadian citizens. I would note in passing, with all due respect for the members opposite, that Quebecers have confirmed twice in fifteen years that they wish to remain Canadian citizens; accordingly, they have a right to expect that their government, the Government of Canada, will provide them with information about the programs and services that are available to them, and they are entitled to receive accurate information.

• (1620)

This is where the ministerial tours come in. This is a government initiative, prompted by the desire of Quebec ministers to ensure that Quebecers are better informed and by a willingness to listen to them and engage them in dialogue.

Communication is a two way street. The government must not only adopt approaches that will enable it to communicate better with the public, but it must also, to that end, adopt approaches that will enable it to listen to them, to talk with them, so that it can target its activities more effectively.

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That is what the tour is. It is not a secret, it is not propaganda, it is not party politics. It is a vehicle of communication that has been designed to promote the exchange of information between citizens and their government.

For the 1999-2000 fiscal year, the tour provided a vehicle of communication that enabled 12 ministers and secretaries of state to visit 128 different cities in Quebec in 122 days, and to hold 340 activities, meetings or visits.

When we get right down to it, it is not surprising that the members of the Bloc would be worried about this kind of initiative. It has been about ten years since they started using the Canadian parliamentary system and taxpayers' money to push a secessionist agenda that a majority of Quebecers reject. And to help them sell their option, the members opposite are spreading half-truths and disinformation. And now that we have ministers making an end run around them to set the record straight, it is only natural that they are nervous.

But, in fact, what makes the Bloc most nervous is not the fact that the government is outflanking them and correcting the falsehoods they are spreading. What makes them most nervous is that the Quebecers the ministers are meeting on the tour, the mayors and leaders of community organizations, the chambers of commerce, the organizers and decision makers in the regions, are all too happy to be able to talk things over with a minister or a secretary of state.

They appreciate the opportunity this gives them to tell the ministers about their concerns and to get more information about the services and programs their government makes available to them.

This fact is reflected in an editorial published in *Le Soleil* on September 24, 1999, which stated:

The beginning of this new era of co-operation is promising, and conveys a welcome spirit of co-operation in the Quebec City region.

Last November, following a meeting with the President of the Treasury Board, the mayor of Sainte-Agathe des Monts, Pierre Circé, who knows the member for Laurentides well, said, and I quote:

The minister is now more familiar with our situation here, and we learned more about the programs that are available.

This is definitely something that would make the Bloquistes nervous.

It makes them nervous because it is clear that this kind of initiative, and the positive responses it is receiving, help strengthen Canadian unity. In spite of what members of the opposition would

have us believe, there is nothing partisan in the government of Canada coordinating an initiative aimed at better explaining the advantages of Canada.

Yes, the ministers' tour in Quebec was financed with public funds and that is quite legitimate. The tour is one of the numerous information services that the Government of Canada provides to its citizens. It is a communication activity focused on a dialogue with local representatives, just as advertising campaigns, mass mailing or the 1-800-O-CANADA line are.

The government tour approach is not new. It is already well-known in Quebec, because it is an approach used by the Quebec government as well.

By the way, I cannot help but find it bizarre that Bloc members would call it information when the Quebec government goes on tour, but call it propaganda whenever Canada does the same thing.

As always, it is a double standard for our Bloc colleagues, and everybody knows why. The Bloc Quebecois absolutely wants to prevent the Canadian government from having visibility in Quebec, from being present in Quebec and from listening to Quebecers. It wants to deny Quebecers the benefits of their country, Canada.

• (1625)

In fact, both levels of governments have the right and the duty to inform Quebecers. Let me quote what my colleague, the president of the Privy Council and member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville said during a recent symposium on the quiet revolution:

We can and we must have two serious governments, each with its own perspective, two governments exposed to different influences and which... learn from each other and from the other governments of our federation... This way, we give ourselves the best development opportunities.

We should not be surprised that Bloc members would criticize a Canadian government initiative which will show Quebecers that it is possible to talk to each other and to work together, that the Quebec government does not have a monopoly on "dialogue" and "joint action" and that their government is there to serve them and provide them with services that are useful in their day to day life.

In a way, all this hustle and bustle we have seen over the last few days is sort of flattering: it shows that the Government of Canada has found an effective and successful way to better communicate with the citizens of Quebec.

[English]

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my hon. colleague on his speech. I believe it was his maiden speech in the House. He did a marvellous job in adding to the debate. I know he will be a

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welcome participant in what we all do here. Congratulations to him.

Not only our party but I believe most Canadians believe in a united Canada, but they cannot support the use of taxpayers' dollars to manipulate information to achieve an agenda if it only serves the government agenda. I think that is the difficulty. Canadians in Quebec as well as Canadians right across the country will be angry and they will have a right to be angry if the government is simply using taxpayers' money to manipulate an outcome for political reasons.

The information Canadians want to know is what the government is doing and how it is doing it. We believe that the Government should be prepared to demonstrate to Canadians that the Canada Information Office is achieving positive objectives that most Canadians support.

Can the member propose any way to demonstrate to Canadians that the Canada Information Office would serve Canadian interests and not the Liberal Party's own agenda?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for congratulating me and at the same time giving me the opportunity to give her more information.

I want to confirm that the Canada Information Office has also provided information to Canadians about their country by supporting key events such as the Canada Conference '99 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Newfoundland joining Canada. The Canada Information Office worked with a number of federal government organizations to sponsor and assist in the co-ordination of Canada Conference '99 which helped create cross-Canada awareness of this historic anniversary.

In partnership with Veterans Affairs Canada, the CIO developed a veterans week media promotion campaign to develop greater awareness of the contribution of Canada and its veterans during World War I. Media coverage of veterans week in 1998 increased by 57% over the previous years. There are other examples.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what bothers the Bloc Québécois is not the fact that the government party travels at the taxpayers' expense for so-called information purposes. What bothers us is that they are not providing information; they are handing out cheques for projects on which opposition members have worked. They show up in the riding just to hand out a cheque, and the information they have to give is so public that they forget to actually invite people.

• (1630)

If it were public information, why would the member representing the riding not be invited when the minister stops by? I would be

interested to hear the information government members have to give.

If it were real information, it should be public, transparent and clear. They should not be afraid to speak openly and publicly.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague is mixing carrots with potatoes.

When departments want to give good news, announce projects or give out cheques, they do so through their ministers or other ministers or members. When the CIO organizes tours for Quebec ministers, it is for a different kind of activities.

The Canada Information Office is there to better inform Canadians about government policies, priorities, programs and services. However, once again, when the Government of Quebec does it, it is called information, but when the Government of Canada does the same thing, my colleague calls it propaganda.

It is not quite the same thing. The CIO provides information to Canadians.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I was advised that the member was sharing his time. If that is the case, I will have enough time to make the statement before the member with whom the time is being shared gets back to her place.

It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Jonquière, Importation of Plutonium and the hon. member York North, Infrastructure.

Ms. Carolyn Parrish (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I should like to speak today to the whole concept of media monitoring which was raised by some of our speakers in the debate this morning.

Do we really need to be reminded that we are living in the information age? Every day we in the industrialized world take in a wide variety of information. Over the last 20 years we have been witness to the continuous acceleration and improvement of information technology. One need only think of the computer and the Internet which are part of the daily lives of so many Canadians and which make information increasingly and ever more quickly accessible.

In Canada alone we have four 24 hour television news channels: RDI, LCN, Newsworld and CTV News, which often provide live coverage of current events. The information age has substantially changed the relationship between citizens and the government. Elected officials are finding citizens to be increasingly well informed as most of them now have the benefit of sophisticated tools for finding out what their governments are doing.

Supply

The public is paying attention. We can never underestimate its interest in what we do here. For example, on the new immigration bill that is being debated and has now gone to committee, droves of people have come into my office in Mississauga asking when it will be implemented, when the process will start and when new people can be sponsored under the new rules. We can never underestimate citizens.

The citizens of Canada want a say in the directions adopted by the government. For this to be possible, there must be a dialogue between the government and its citizens. Let us remember the commitment of the government in this regard. The Government of Canada will demonstrate in its daily activities that it is listening to its citizens.

At the Canada Information Office, the Quebec ministerial tours are a success precisely because their purpose is to communicate with citizens. If they were out there simply to give one way information it would be a useless endeavour, but they are there to listen, and listening is equally as important as giving out information. The ministers meet with and listen to the concerns of mayors, presidents of chambers of commerce, and volunteer and community workers.

• (1635)

Is the Bloc living on the same planet as the rest of us? I must confess that I find it incredible that the Bloc should be surprised that the Government of Canada, like all governments serious about establishing a fruitful dialogue with their citizens, engages in media monitoring events in the news which in French is called suivi médiatique.

We are living in a world of information, and that is reality. It is a very palpable reality for governments which have to be able to keep abreast of the latest news developments so they can manage public affairs properly. When we get down to it, what is media monitoring?

I will disappoint the Bloc but I have no secrets to reveal on the subject. The CIO carries out reviews of the print and electronic media and of analyses of current events, very similar to the *Quorum* which we get in the lobbies every day. The Government of Canada needs these reviews to be appropriately informed to make the decisions that are necessary. Not to be thus equipped would be irresponsible.

All members of the House know that the people who come into our constituency offices, often to complain about something, are not representative samples of what the Canadian public is thinking. If we just depended on those who come into our offices and those that we choose to listen to, we would have a very slanted view of the world, indeed.

When the Bloc describes the CIO's media monitoring as secret surveillance, or says that it keeps personal information records on journalists, no one takes them very seriously, not even the

journalists who are being greatly underestimated. If the journalists believed for one minute this was happening, there would be a massive hue and cry.

I should like to quote Ms. Manon Cornellier, a journalist with *Le Devoir*, who stated recently:

It is common practice for departments and organizations to analyze media content and particularly the trends of their editorial pages.

No one is therefore surprised to learn that the CIO has analyzed the editorial evolution of the *Gazette*. No one is surprised. These documents the Bloc keeps talking about are nothing more than a failed attempt to create something out of nothing.

Let me be perfectly clear. There exists no personal records at the CIO, neither on journalists nor on anyone else. The documents in question date back to more than three years ago. They are simple media analyses that contain absolutely no secret or personal information.

These analyses turned out to be of very little use and the CIO does not prepare them any more. Using loaded words to try and instil fear in the hope of winning a few political points is becoming rather more typical of the Bloc. Though it is true it does need some points at the moment, there is always the double standard: what is good for one is not good for the other; what is good for the PQ government is not good for the Government of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. What the member of the government party is doing right now is unacceptable. She is making unfounded accusations against members of the Bloc Québécois and I just cannot accept that. I would ask her to withdraw her remarks.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): This is debate. Very often positions are taken on either side of the House which other members find offensive but are certainly in keeping with debate.

I invite the hon. member for Jonquière at the time available for questions and comments to put her question directly to the member for Mississauga Centre.

Ms. Carolyn Parrish: I learned a long time ago in local politics that we have to develop thick skins. If the member does not want to hear our opinions, she should not have suggested this subject as a debate point for the day.

The minister responsible for the CIO recently asked the following question in the House:

How is it that, according to the Bloc, when the Government of Quebec communicates with its citizens it is called information but when the Government of

Canada communicates with its citizens, especially those in Quebec, it suddenly becomes propaganda?

For the Bloc to attack the CIO because it feels its media monitoring is an irresponsible expenditure of public money is incredible, coming from an opposition party that uses federal and Commons public funding to promote the separation of Quebec from Canada.

Every department, every government, federal and provincial, and especially the head office in Quebec City, conducts media monitoring. One must be really trying to create a crisis where there is none if one would have people believe it is incredible and unacceptable for the Government of Canada to adopt and use the enhanced communication media that are a reflection and tools of our times.

• (1640)

The distinctive feature of this media monitoring is that it covers all subjects related to the institutional communications of the Government of Canada. Obviously all departments, whether it be justice, environment, or citizenship and immigration, have their own media monitoring unit.

The added value of the CIO's media room is that it shares with the other departments media coverage of a general nature, which allows those departments to better manage their own mandates while incorporating an overview of the issues. They are relevant to the Government of Canada. It is self-evident that horizontal communication is an asset which helps make the government's message coherent to taxpayers.

I would like to add that I came through a very long career, a very different career path. Each time I ended up in a spot in life, technology was always a half step ahead of me. I find it phenomenal in the House the excellent job done with *Quorum* and all the information provided by each department on what the public in Canada is thinking.

That is why I believe that the government is very responsive to the Canadian public. We use the tools available. We do not use propaganda. We share information. We correct propaganda. We make sure that every citizen in every community across the country has access to all government services, understands government services, understands their rights and are able to access them.

I am very proud of the CIO. I am very proud of the minister who is in charge of it. He is doing an extremely efficient job. I mildly resent the fact that we wasted a whole day talking about this motion.

[Translation]

Mr. René Canuel (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the hon. member and her arrogance reflects an inferiority complex. That is all there is to it.

Supply

She said that members of the Bloc are nervous, but we are not. The hon. member said it about 20 times: we are very calm. Things are going very well for the Bloc, whether the hon. members opposite like it or not.

When a minister comes to my riding of Matapédia—Matane, I am glad if he or she comes to give us information, but the fact is that what they give is not information. As my colleague said, when they do come, ministers meet with mayors and members of the chambers of commerce, who are extraordinary people, I agree. But why do they never meet with seasonal workers?

Why do they not talk about employment insurance, which I call misery insurance? People in my area are almost starving to death. In the Gaspé peninsula, there are 10,000 or 15,000 people who want the minister to visit. But nobody ever comes. The unemployed are not important.

What is important for the Liberals is to misinform the people, not to find solutions. If they were honest, they would have come to announce the cuts in the transfers to provinces. They would have said "We will cut x millions of dollars in health care and so many billion dollars in other areas". But they did not come to announce it. They should have come to give us the information. Why did they not come at that time to give the information they say they are giving today?

[English]

Ms. Carolyn Parrish: Mr. Speaker, I should like to address the first part of the question which was to do with seasonal workers and the EI changes. EI changes came in well before the last election. It is a three or four year review program. I must point out that the member's concerns, as well as the concerns of the Atlantic province MPs on this side of the House, are being very seriously entertained by the department. If modifications are required, I am sure they will be addressed in due time.

As far as making announcements on transfer payments, when we came into power in 1993 after a disastrous Tory government we cut every department. It was very clear in the second budget we brought in that the cuts were being done across the country in every department, including transfers to the provinces.

We made very clear that the reason we needed CIO was that those transfers were interpreted by the people in the member's party to the people in Quebec to be that they were being punished somehow and the Government of Canada was deserting them.

• (1645)

It is necessary and you just illustrated it. We have an appropriate vehicle to give the appropriate information to make sure that people understand it, rather than having it filtered through your interpretation.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Before tempers get a little too high, I would remind members to address each other through the Chair. It makes quite a difference.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very offended by the way the Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services views the attitude of the Bloc Québécois.

I was democratically elected by the people, and I represent 100 opposite question the competence and the actions of the Bloc Québécois members. We pay taxes and income tax to the Government of Canada and we have the right to come and sit in this House.

I do not understand how the member, who is a parliamentary secretary, can say such things. I find it disappointing coming from her. I have always held her in high esteem, and I do not understand why she is trying to make Canadians and Quebecers believe that there is nothing to hide. There is, because contracts have been given to buddies without going to tender. I would like her to respond to my comments.

[*English*]

Ms. Carolyn Parrish: Mr. Speaker, I am also offended, as the member for Jonquière is offended at my aspersions on her character. I am offended that her whole party is trying to break up my country. I am offended that they are questioning the integrity of my minister. I am offended that they are questioning the integrity of the information that the CIO puts out. I am also offended that many of them take many of the dollars we allocate to their ridings and they do not even say thank you.

I too am offended, and I am directing my remarks directly at the member.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to a very current issue. The Bloc, naturally, in recent days has mentioned a number of disturbing matters, so disturbing that two of us will explain them to you and give you more details. I will share my time with the member for Joliette.

I was saying, therefore, that this is a current matter, which follows more or less in the footsteps of that of the Human Resources Development Canada. There had been criticism of the big brother aspect of this department's megafile. It was apparently dismantled at the request of tens of thousands of people wanting to see their file to find out just what was in it. In order to avoid the issue, the government said "We will dismantle this immense data base and answer all requests on the information the department has on individuals".

Make no mistake. It was dismantled. So all the information that existed previously will not be available. Only partial information will be available. This is like what is happening with the CIO, a big brother of another sort.

There is a lot more behind the information we have on the contracts given to friends. It will be information especially that the government will be looking for, perhaps not directly from individuals, but from a nation, that is, a complete analysis of all information, values and behaviours to discover how to deliver a message that will slip, often insidiously, into the heads of all Quebecers.

• (1650)

It only made sense that we would present a motion on this opposition day. There are probably thousands of people who just joined us, so I will read the motion again, so that these people can understand clearly. The motions reads as follows:

That this House condemn the government for having established the Canada Information Office, which gives lucrative contracts to those close to the government party for, among other things, the purpose of gathering, analysing and collating information about a large number of citizens—

Here, of course, we are alluding to the journalists, but earlier I referred to the behaviour of the whole Quebec society. The motion ends with the following:

—and that this House urge the government to close that Office.

The Bloc Québécois is essentially asking for the closure of the CIO, because that office serves as an agency for the Liberal Party of Canada, because it engages in shameless cronyism and because, four years after being established, the CIO remains a catch-all service that awards all sorts of contracts to help define its mission and its organizational structure.

I want to relate two experiences that happened to me in my last months on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I wrote twice to the auditor general to ask him to evaluate the CIO, to shed light on its activities, to look at its performance and to examine its operations. Had that been done, we would have been in a position to validate all that we are saying today about the awarding of contracts and about all the information that the government is gathering on the Quebec people.

Of course, my request was rejected at the public accounts committee, and we were not able to have the evaluation done before the end of the CIO's mandate, on March 31, 2000. Such an evaluation would have been very interesting and it is likely that we could not decently have renewed the CIO's mandate.

My second experience came on May 4, when the Minister of Public Works came to testify before the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Government Operations. I will quote what he said "The Canada Information Office has a special mandate to

communicate from a corporate perspective representing the Government of Canada as a whole”.

This short sentence does have one quality. He probably did not realize this, but he did demonstrate quite a lot of transparency. When he says “to communicate from a corporate perspective”, what does corporate mean? A corporation is free to provide contracts to whomever it wants and whenever it wants. It is for profit. It sells a product. What product does the CIO want to sell Quebecers?

The minister also said to us “I’m pleased to inform you that it has made progress on a number of fronts in helping the Government of Canada communicate more effectively with Canadians”. Communication is a two way street. There is a transmitter and a receiver, but I think the CIO receiver is much more sensitive and voluminous than the transmitter toward the people.

He was also saying “To communicate better with Canadians, federal departments need to know what strategies and activities have worked best”, to be able to use them in the years to come, in future government actions.

The CIO has virtually become a huge communications, marketing and image business. It is an image maker.

• (1655)

That about sums up what the Minister of Public Works and Government Services told us when he appeared before the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Government Operations. Naturally, we had an opportunity to ask all sorts of other questions, but as usual we got no answers. Communication presupposes a two-way street but with the government it is all one way.

I would like to know how much time I have remaining, Mr. Speaker, because there are some important points I do not want to forget. I think that I could have managed it all. As I have two minutes left I will jump almost to the end.

Members on both sides spoke about information and propaganda. They had trouble making a distinction. It is not all that complicated. In response to a question I asked him, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services talked about visibility and publicity. When information becomes publicity involving such large amounts—in the case of the CIO, we are talking about \$20 million—what are the publicity budgets for all departments as a whole?

When such substantial sums are involved, tens, even hundreds of millions of dollars in publicity all over the place, primarily in Quebec, then it becomes apparent that this is no longer publicity, no longer information or communication, but propaganda, for example, “action exerted on opinion to bring it around to certain

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political or social ideas, to support a policy, a government, a representative”. *Le Petit Robert* goes on to say “propaganda from a political party, election propaganda, instrument or means of propaganda”, in other words, everything we saw in the contracts: speeches, newspapers, movies, television.

It is therefore not difficult to make a distinction between information, communication, publicity and propaganda. I think that we have everything here to help us see the difference and say that what this government is engaged in, through the CIO, is nothing other than propaganda.

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague had no choice but to deny us the opportunity to hear the last part of his remarks for lack of time, but I would be very much interested in hearing the tail end of the remarks he did not finish.

Could the hon. member take a few minutes to convey the message he could not deliver fully?

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Speaker, let me go back to what I was saying. I touched on this issue very briefly earlier. When the public works minister appeared before the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Government Operations, I gave him an example from my riding.

An organization had asked Canada Economic Development for a significant grant in order to hold a special and grandiose event. Following an economic feasibility study and analysis, CED rejected that request. The organization then went to the public works minister, asked for the same amount of money, and automatically got it.

I asked the minister “When you give grants to various organizations, do you take the economic feasibility and viability of the project into consideration?” His answer was “This is not about economy, but about government visibility. This is a publicity contract”. And this contract was awarded without considering the economic viability of the event, which suffered tremendous losses in the first year, was held a second year, and again suffered big losses.

• (1700)

There were flags everywhere, and the word Canada could be seen everywhere. For the minister, what matters is visibility and publicity. Why visibility? The opposite word says it all, invisibility. Why does he spend money to be seen? Because he is completely invisible when it comes to helping the unemployed, health and education. Since he has to be visible somehow, this is the way he has chosen.

There were many questions we could have asked the minister on that memorable day but once again it turned out to be a day of unanswered questions.

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Why does the CIO give its financial support to the Fédération des femmes du Québec for the walk of 2000? Does Status of Women of Canada not have the financial resources for its women support program? Is that the responsibility of the CIO?

How is it that Createc Plus was awarded a contract for printing anti-smoking material? Is that not the responsibility of the Minister of Health, considering what he is doing right now?

Why did GPC Canada, and Rémi Bujold, receive \$46,000 to do economic analysis? Should that not be the role of the Finance Minister? Why is it the CIO?

Why did Productions Les Arts receive \$20,000 for an exchange between francophone communities in Alberta and Quebec? Is that not the responsibility of the Council for Canadian Unity?

How is it that another company received \$20,000 for planning tours by the Canadian team of gold medalists? Does the Secretary of State for Amateur Sport not have funding available for that?

Why did Conseils et Vérification Canada receive \$55,000 for the seminars of 2000 in Laval and Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu? Is that its responsibility?

The CIO interferes in areas that do not come under its responsibility at all. Why? Visibility is used to conceal the government's lack of performance, the invisibility of its performance and its inability to fulfil the needs of Quebecers and of Canadians.

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the citizens of my riding who are doing me the honour of being in the public gallery today and whom I am pleased to greet, and for the benefit of the other citizens in my riding and in all other ridings in Quebec and Canada, I would like to explain what we are doing today.

Today is a supply day and on this supply day, the Bloc Québécois put forward for debate the following motion:

That this House condemn the government for having established the Canada Information Office, which gives lucrative contracts to those close to the government party for, among other things, the purpose of gathering, analysing and collating information about a large number of citizens, and that this House urge the government to close that Office.

The Bloc Québécois is essentially asking that the CIO or the Canada Information Office be closed. Why?

Because the Canada Information Office is being used as an agency of the Liberal Party of Canada. Because the Canada Information Office shamelessly engages in cronyism and because, since its creation four years ago, the CIO has always been a "grab

bag" agency and it has signed countless contracts to help it define its role and its mandate.

• (1705)

After four years, the CIO still does not know what it should be doing. And if it does not know what it should be doing, why are we giving it money? Is this wasted money? We are giving \$20 million a year to this agency that hired 83 people without complying with the normal hiring rules.

What we want is quite simple, it is transparency. We are telling the government that if it wants a propaganda agency for Canadian federalism it should create one but it should say so publicly.

This reminds me of certain drivers. Is there anything more frustrating than when the car up ahead signals a right turn, but abruptly makes a left turn? This is most irritating and even dangerous.

This is what the government is doing now. It says that the CIO is an agency that deals with information. If we follow the CIO, we would expect it to turn toward information. But, to our great surprise, the CIO makes a right turn instead of a left turn, as expected. The right side is the propaganda side. This is surprising, irritating and dangerous. It is a very powerful instrument that can be used to manipulate citizens.

If the CIO is transparent and wants to provide information to all citizens, why does it not spend the same kind of money in other Canadian provinces? Why is it concentrating its information and propaganda budgets in Quebec? Is it because the CIO thinks that Quebecers are not very bright, that they are deaf, that one must explain things to them more often, for a longer time so that they can understand the message? Is it because other Canadians are not interested in the country? Is it because the information that the government has to give out is not of general interest? Is it because the people of British Columbia should not receive the same message as Quebecers?

If it is about the provision of information, then the same information should be provided everywhere using the same means. If Quebecers are likely to be interested in what is happening in the Rockies, why would the people from the Rockies not be interested in what is happening in Quebec? Did the CIO think about marking the 20th anniversary of the first referendum in Quebec? No.

Yet, it spent tens of thousands of dollars to celebrate the 50th anniversary of one of the maritime provinces. It informs and brings attention to important events. That was such an event. Strangely, the CIO was established following a referendum that the government almost lost in 1995. The CIO was created in 1996.

In the beginning, that seemed to be normal, as the CIO reported to the Department of Canadian Heritage. We were told "The role of

Canadian Heritage is propaganda, informing all citizens". We found it almost normal. In 1998, however, all of a sudden, the government decided to take the CIO away from Heritage Canada and give it to the Department of Public Works. The Minister of Public Works told us this week that it was reasonable for the CIO to be his responsibility, since served as an instrument to build Canada.

• (1710)

The government was going to use the CIO to build Canada so it moved it. At the same time, however, Public Works Canada hands out contracts for publicity and all sorts of contracts for propaganda. My colleague from Sherbrooke gave a few examples of this earlier, and I want to mention another.

Everest, a company that received a \$75,000 contract, had contributed \$20,000, a coincidence, to the Liberal Party election campaign in 1997 and 1998, and one of its managers, Claude Lacroix, headed the Liberal Party's communications campaign in 1998.

Another distressing coincidence involves Le Groupe Action, which received a contract for \$46,000. Le Groupe Action has its offices at the same premises as Everest. Le Groupe Action contributed \$60,000 to the Liberal Party in 1997-98.

In all this transparency, I would like the government to explain how Le Groupe Action, which received a \$46,000 contract, was so grateful as to return \$60,000 to the coffers of the Liberal Party election fund. It got \$46,000 and it gave \$60,000. It must have got something somewhere else. I do not know any company that is generous to the point of giving a political party more money than it got. Something is unclear in all this. What other money did the company receive for it to be so generous with the government?

We want transparency. The ministers tour under the auspices of the CIO and visit our ridings. It was mentioned earlier that they had made 122 visits. When they come to our ridings to inform people, I am happy with their coming to inform people, but when one informs people, one informs everyone. They should not target an audience they have a cheque for under a grant program that would have benefited this audience in any case.

The ministers circulate, meet a small group of 10 or 15 persons represented by the chamber of commerce and certain mayors. The mayors are very well informed. The chambers of commerce are the best informed organizations in our communities. They do not have the greatest need for information. The people do.

Let the government come then and tell the people why they cut billions in health care, as my colleague from Matapédia—Matane said. Why did the government, which created surpluses for itself, soon to be worth \$25 billion, in the employment insurance fund by dipping into the pockets of the unemployed, not come and tell the people about that? This is interesting and useful information,

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because it enables taxpayers to judge the actions of the government. This is the role of information.

Mr. Speaker, you seem nervous. Has my time run out?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Unfortunately it has.

[English]

Ms. Carolyn Parrish (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have some very simple questions for the member for Joliette.

I noticed recently in the newspapers there was a glorious announcement in *L'Expression* that the member opposite accorded \$251,270 for HRDC programs for student jobs in his riding. I am wondering if he takes similar offence to the HRDC money that is going into his riding to create jobs for students as he does to the BIC money that is going to assist events that people would like to conduct in his riding.

Another question I would like to ask, and I do not mind in all the areas if the response is there, but when the funds go in for BIC projects, do they display a Liberal logo on the event, or do they display the Canada word mark? I just wondered if that was different in Quebec.

• (1715)

[Translation]

Mr. René Laurin: Mr. Speaker, when subsidies or money are handed out to some of my constituents, I am not shy to say it. I hold a press conference or send a press release, and it is mentioned in all the newspapers.

I tell my constituents "You were right to take advantage of this or that program." I do not tell them that they owe their funding to the Liberal government or their member of parliament. I say "The money comes from your tax dollars. It is yours. I am only here to serve you, to try to help you apply to the program and get some of the money." I do not seize the opportunity to engage in propaganda but that is what the Liberals do and that is why we are so hard on them.

If the Liberals wants to use the CIO to engage in propaganda, they should be blunt about it and not hide the fact. That has always been the trademark of the Liberal government: it is so open.

When we told the heritage minister at midday today that the government had agreed to spend \$5 million to celebrate Canada Day in the province of Quebec in the year 2000, she did not deny it. But when she was asked how much money the government was spending for those celebrations in the rest of the country, she declined to answer. That is not what openness is all about.

If the CIO is a transparent information tool, do we then need to ask her how many million of dollars will be spent in the other

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provinces of Canada? If the minister refuses to reply, there are grounds for suspecting that the \$5 million will likely be the largest amount earmarked for celebrating Canada Day, and it will go to Quebec. Do Quebecers have a greater need to celebrate Canada Day than other Canadians?

Are other Canadians not sufficiently proud of their country, “the finest country in the world” as the Prime Minister tells us? Are they not proud enough to benefit from certain amounts the Minister of Canadian Heritage might allocate to them in order to properly celebrate their national holiday, the birthday of their country?

Why this secrecy? It is simple. It is because they want to imply that it is a totally natural thing for Quebecers to wish to celebrate July 1, Canada Day. They want to make a show by using the money to buy banners instead of using it to let people express themselves. They are going to use it on things, things that will provide visibility and speak on behalf of people, trying to pass them off as great Canadian federalists. That is the intention, so let them come out and say so.

We are not hiding the fact that we are sovereignists. We say so to anyone. We have been coming to Ottawa for the past seven years just to say so. It is no secret. We say “Here we are, we are sovereignists”. We will tell it to everyone. We are prepared to go to the other provinces of Canada to explain our position. Unfortunately the CIO does not organize tours for us. The CIO does not give us any budget for that, whereas the ministers have a budget funded by the CIO. We are forced to pay for such things out of our office operating budget.

If the intention is to provide everyone with honest information, then why not use this money to benefit all members of this House, regardless of party affiliation? That would be honesty, that would be transparency. This not being the case, we are calling for this propaganda office to be closed and we will be vociferous in our demands.

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate, although my tone will be different from that of my colleague, who has an exceptional voice. He must surely be a mighty tenor. Since I do not have a lot of time, I will get on with my remarks.

• (1720)

I am extremely pleased that my party decided to use this opposition day to deal with the CIO. It is strange that this body would be called the Canada Information Office. What drew our attention, even though we are aware of the CIO’s existence and we know that it carries on certain activities, is the desire to hide the funding provided to this office. What was behind it all?

The government did not want us to know that the “Heritage Minutes” produced by Robert-Guy Scully were funded by the CIO.

This means that the government knew that the role of the Canada Information Office was not to provide information and that if it admitted that a journalist was getting funding from the CIO for its programs, that journalist would not be able to claim to be one for very long.

The fact is that today Robert-Guy Scully said that he was no longer a journalist. He decided to say so today, but some would say that he stopped being one some time ago.

That attempt to hide the use made of funds allocated for propaganda compelled us to search—and we are not done with our research—to find out to what extent the Canada Information Office is an unacceptable institution. I strongly support today’s opposition motion, which reads as follows:

That this House condemn the government for having established the Canada Information Office, which gives lucrative contracts to those close to the government party for, among other things, the purpose of gathering, analysing and collating information about a large number of citizens, and that this House urge the government to close that Office.

We think the government must close the CIO.

I would like to add a few more arguments to the strong arguments put forward by my colleagues. I heard the members opposite say “But is it not normal to inform Canadians?” The departments inform Canadians. They all have budgets for that. The Privy Council exists and we know that it is quietly doing studies and surveys of Canadians and that it is keeping the government informed.

A large number of agencies which deal at arm’s length with the government are also ways of giving publicity to Canada. I will give an example. The various regional economic development agencies throughout the country, with names like the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, or the Western Economic Diversification Agency, have continued to keep their names. In Quebec, the Federal Office of Regional Development for Quebec became—and I want members to listen carefully—Economic Development Canada.

This is rather odd, because the government agency that deals with economic development in Canada—we will get back to this some other time—or comes under the economic development department, instead of retaining a name with a connection with Quebec is now called Economic Development Canada. This is the only agency to do so.

Elsewhere, it is the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency or the Western Economic Diversification Agency, but in Quebec and only there, it is called Economic Development Canada. How much did it cost to change the letterhead, the publicity, the signs, and so forth?

• (1725)

We could do a study just of the period since this government has been in office, to count the number of “Canada’s” written in large

letters everywhere, including just across the Portage bridge in Hull. Then there was Via Rail's colour change and the addition of "Canada" and then the flag. I could mention others, because there are many such agencies.

What is the Business Development Bank of Canada doing? It has a publication that it sends out to all businesses in Canada, and there are 700,000 of them. How many copies of this publication are printed? It promotes Canada.

There are countless information and propaganda tools in Canada. There is something a bit special in seeing to what extent they have to put the mention "Canada" and the flag everywhere. The means are huge, nobody can question that. What was that CIO established for, as I have to remind the House, shortly after the 1995 referendum that we came close to win?

It is a tool that, as we found out, was not informing Canadians but informing the government about Canadians and Quebecers in particular. This week, thanks to the co-operation of people who wanted it to be known, we found out there were files on journalists. We were told that that practise had been given up for a year. But go and look for yourself. Files were kept on journalists.

This practise alone shows the true nature of that so-called information office. Some claim that analyzing journalistic practises for government departments is innocent. No, it is not. When we know how much the journalistic profession in Canada has deteriorated, when we know how much journalists are often unprotected where they work, when we know how much that situation can give rise to self-censorship, when we know how much that can influence journalists who want to be hired or have their contract renewed because they are casual employees, that alone is extremely serious. This is serious and clearly this qualifies the kind of information that so-called Canada Information Office wants to do.

Why then create the CIO when we have all those sources of information? There is another explanation besides the type of information they want to do. There is also the fact that they no doubt wanted to appeal more widely and more easily to private firms and thus, as was abundantly shown, to favour friends of the regime. That is how they were described in an editorial from the daily *Le Devoir*, using an expression that is well known in Quebec. We learned what "friends of the regime" meant under the Duplessis administration. One could say that the Duplessis administration has come back, but in Ottawa. Those who were most scornful about the Duplessis administration should worry about what is going on right now in this country.

• (1730)

The fact that the so-called information is intended for Quebecers should not make them less aware of it. Instead of focussing energies, resources and millions of dollars on trying to understand why, while they are quiet right now, an increasing number of

Private Members' Business

Quebecers are convinced that the only solution for them is to organize themselves in order to control their future, the government should shut down the CIO.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): It being 5.30 p.m., it is my duty to inform the House that proceedings on the motion have expired.

[English]

It being 5.30 p.m. the House will not proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

TREATIES ACT

The House resumed from April 13 consideration of the motion that Bill C-214, an act to provide for the participation of the House of Commons when treaties are concluded, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): When debate was interrupted the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean had eight minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphan Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to continue my speech on Bill C-214, an act to provide for the participation of the House of Commons when treaties are concluded.

I find it a little strange that my colleague from Beauharnois—Salaberry had to introduce a bill on this issue. It seems to me that this is so obvious that we should not even need to bring the subject up.

Major social changes are occurring worldwide. With the huge opportunities that are provided by the development of technology and transportation, our planet is getting smaller. Distances are increasingly shorter, so that trade, cultural and political exchanges among countries are increasingly a common occurrence. This phenomenon has social and political impacts.

Most people call this phenomenon the globalization of economies. This globalization necessarily leads to more treaties between countries. The increase in the number of treaties must be further examined at the parliamentary level.

Here, the government can sign treaties without consulting the House. So what are we doing here, as parliamentarians, since international treaties are becoming increasingly important?

Private Members' Business

The last time I spoke on this bill, I talked about what happened with the multilateral investment agreement, which was being negotiated secretly at the OECD. At some point during negotiations, someone leaked the document on the Internet. When groups of citizens around the world looked at the contents of the negotiations, they quickly opposed this project. Pockets of dissent developed all over the world, aimed at thwarting the agreement.

There is one thing that I wonder about: what would the role of parliamentarians have been in this? Why are members of parliament elected? Is it merely to enact national legislation? In a world that is becoming more and more international, a world where there are increasing numbers of treaties, it has become absolutely essential for the good of my fellow citizens that I be familiar with the contents of such treaties.

Taking the example of one very important treaty of the past decade, it is possible under NAFTA for companies to bring a suit against government. This has happened in connection with an environmental rule, when the government had passed legislation banning MMT, for the protection of the public.

• (1735)

A company that risked losing a market brought a suit against the Canadian government, and thus against the Canadian people, since the elected representatives of the people had passed an environmental regulation.

I believe that the bill we are looking at today lies at the heart of the reflection on democracy that must take place. This is a matter very dear to my heart. Moreover, I have tried to raise it in a highly visible manner, if I may put it that way. All of this issue of political power, the power of elected representatives, and the fact that it seems to be being whittled away at, is dear to my heart.

This week, moreover, in the *Hill Times*, a government MP spoke of how greatly over-centralized power was within this parliament. Is it the MPs who make the decisions, or is it the PMO? I believe that the 301 members of the House must be consulted. These members represent the interests of their fellow citizens.

The impact of international agreements on our fellow citizens is increasing. As proof of this, in my riding this week I had the case of emu breeders who will not be eligible for a reimbursement program because of an international World Trade Organization agreement. I refer to these cases merely as very concrete examples of the fact that the impact of international agreements on populations is increasing. Who represents that population? In my opinion, the members of parliament. It should not be only the Prime Minister with a few ministers who sign these international treaties without any prior debate.

The legislation presented by the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry is extremely relevant in these times of globalization.

This is only the beginning. There are many other issues that should be debated with regard to the role of members of parliament in a context of globalization.

We will eventually have to hold a debate—which I am in favour of—about the social impacts of globalization and also about who will determine the direction that globalization should take. As we know, more and more people are demonstrating everywhere in the world; they are not necessarily opposed to globalization but to the direction globalization is taking, and I am one of them.

I think a broad debate must be held about that. A major part of that debate relates to the whole issue of world governance or world co-ordination, call it what we may, or reform of current international forums which sorely lack for democratic legitimacy, in my opinion.

It is the same thing for the G-20 group chaired by the Minister of Finance of Canada. What legitimacy does he have in his actions when he goes on the international stage? Not only do they not consult members of parliament, they do not consult the population.

In this regard, where is democracy? Does it boil down to an election every four years to choose a government and a Prime Minister and a few ministers who will go on the international stage? I think there is a lack of democracy here.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. With all due respect for the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean, I do not think opposition members are the only ones who can consult the people.

As government members, our role when we meet with the people is to remind them that we are the government of the whole country and to express our viewpoint. We also consult the people.

Mr. Stéphan Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, I cannot overlook what my colleague has just said. A year ago, I tabled a petition signed by 50,000 people asking the House to set up a parliamentary committee to elaborate a process whereby the civil society would be consulted on the huge issue of globalization, a matter of real concern in this country and throughout the world.

Now I am told that the government is consulting the people. I have serious doubts about that and I think the government is trying to muddle the issues by making these assertions. Unfortunately, my time has run out. We have only seen the tip of the iceberg. I do want to congratulate my hon. colleague, because it is at least a step in the right direction.

• (1740)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Before the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville begins his debate, are there other

members who wish to enter into the debate? It was brought to my attention that, because this is votable, the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry would need the consent of those of us here to have the last five minutes. Is there consent?

An hon. member: Agreed.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from the Bloc for bringing forth this private member's bill for debate, Bill C-214, the Treaties Act.

I want to just briefly outline what we are discussing here today in the context of this debate because members may not have been able to pick it up from some of the commentary that has been made.

This bill provides that all important international treaties must be tabled in the House of Commons for approval by resolution and that no treaty may be ratified unless so approved.

The bill goes on to define an "important treaty" as: any treaty whose implementation requires legislative action by parliament; vests the government with new powers; imposes a new tax; imposes new financial obligations on Canada; affects the boundaries or transfers the territory of any part of Canada; calls for the imposition of economic or military sanctions against another country; affects trade or investment or Canada's place in the world economy; or involves participation in international institutions, including any transfer of jurisdiction to international institutions.

The bill also provides that every international treaty shall be tabled for 21 sitting days prior to ratification, along with an explanatory memorandum, including a summary, implications for Canada, new obligations undertaken, estimated expenditures to be incurred, proposed conditions for denunciation or withdrawal and a record of the consultations undertaken in Canada with non-governmental parties, an indication of any legislation required for implementation, and of existing legislation that requires amendment, and also, the provinces must be consulted in areas of provincial jurisdiction.

The bill provides for greater efforts to inform the public about what the treaties contain through publication in the *Canadian Gazette* and on the Internet.

Let me begin my response to this bill by saying, yes, this is good and it is a step in the right direction.

From what I have witnessed over the last seven years since I was elected a member of parliament, the government's approach to international agreements and conferences has been of major concern to me. The Parliament of Canada has not been consulted. The government does most of these negotiations and conferences behind closed doors with no meaningful public input. This con-

cerns me a great deal because it does in fact affect everyone in this great country.

Parliament, and in fact all Canadians, should be informed of the positions Canada takes at international conferences. The ideas and policies that our delegates promote at international symposia or meetings should be debated in parliament and approved.

United Nations conferences, such as the Beijing conference, the Kyoto conference and the conference we had in Brazil on the environment, are all examples of conferences held where the majority of Canadians did not agree with the policies that were advocated. This is most serious when these policies are approved by the UN and Canada signs on, we are then obligated to comply without these being debated or passed in parliament in a democratic way.

In other words, the democratic process in this country can be circumvented. Certain groups within the country can twist the arm of government, can get on some of these delegations that go there, promote policies that most Canadians would not agree with, get those approved or negotiated internationally, the government signs on and then it comes back and says that we have to put these in force in our country. This is deplorable. This gives democracy a bad name because we are not allowed to properly debate these things.

• (1745)

I am of the opinion that the wording in Bill C-214 does not quite go far enough. I do not think it adequately protects Canadians. For example, the wording is that the provinces should be consulted, but it does not ensure that consultation will be done in a meaningful way, nor does it say that the opinion of the provinces that has been expressed would have any impact on any of the agreements or the position Canada takes.

I have had a lot of experience with Bill C-68 and the gun control issue. The consultation the government claimed it had with the provinces was totally inadequate. We now have six provinces and two territories taking the federal government to court. The case is presently before the supreme court. If this had been an adequate and meaningful consultation process, of course that would not be the case. We probably would not even have the present legislation.

The last time parliament put forward a treaty of an international nature for ratification was the auto pact. Guess when that was. Back in 1966. NAFTA was signed without consulting the provinces in a meaningful way. International affairs have a huge impact on Canadian affairs. Why are we not allowed to debate the issues that come forward?

Since I was elected a member of parliament in October 1993 the government has signed 470 international treaties and has ratified 295 treaties. And they have not come before parliament in any meaningful way; 470 international treaties in the period from 1993 to 1999. Most of us have never seen these treaties and know almost

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nothing about them. It is difficult to access copies of the text of the agreements. It is difficult for us to even find out what positions the government is advocating at some of these conferences. The essence of democracy is that we have this information.

Our neighbours to the south, the Americans, are not in the same situation. Their international agreements must be ratified by their elected representatives.

Our international agreements are negotiated and signed behind closed doors. We often do not even know who is doing the negotiating. Groups of non-governmental organizations are hand-picked by the government. Groups of bureaucrats and others who make up these agreements are not accountable to the people of Canada through their elected representatives. We sometimes find out about them when they are leaked to reporters. We often never find out what is in these agreements or what has been agreed to.

We presently have a situation in the Sudan where the Minister of Foreign Affairs maintains policies that would not allow most Canadians to sleep at night if they knew about them. Genocide in southern Sudan is a terrible tragedy and the position of our government is not acceptable to most Canadians I am sure.

Canadians have the right to be told what is going on and to be consulted on our positions internationally. What assurance do we have that the positions advocated by our government are the best possible positions? In the last election the MAI agreement was an issue. Most Canadian people did not even know what it was all about.

Democracy is not something to be feared, but it is a protection for our leaders. People would take more of an interest in the affairs of our nation if they were allowed to participate. People often complain about the apathy in Canada. Why is that? It is because we do not have proper democracy. The people of Canada do not feel they have a say in what is going on here in Ottawa.

Time is also important. The Liberals often ram legislation through the House without adequate debate. This leads to cynicism and a lack of interest in democracy. We need to have adequate time to debate things. That is what this bill would address in a meaningful way.

Transparency, democracy and accountability need to be improved in government. This bill is a step in the right direction.

What are some of the things the government could do? One example is parliament must be able to examine the impact these foreign agreements would have on the family. The Canadian Alliance has a policy that it examines all these things to see what impact they will have on the family, the basic building block of society.

Another thing that could happen is that the Senate, which should be elected, could perform a very meaningful role in this area. The

provinces could elect the senators. They would represent the interests of those provinces and could spend a lot of time looking at these agreements to see their impact, whether they are good or bad. They could represent the position of Canadians.

• (1750)

I will conclude by reading our policy in regard to treaty negotiations. Our blue book states that parliament should be asked to approve all agreements or declarations before they are ratified as Canadian positions. This was designed to enable parliament to have some role in ensuring that Canadian interests are being properly represented before treaties are signed, and to give MPs a check on unaccountable officials and NGOs at international negotiations. Indeed the blue book demands that the identity of and proposed position to be taken by all officials, NGOs and individuals speaking for Canada at the international or United Nations conferences be fully disclosed.

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise to speak to Bill C-214. I commend the member for Beauharnois—Salaberry for his work on this private member's legislation. It is definitely a step in the right direction. We need more openness and transparency in the treaty negotiation and ratification process.

Over the last 12 years or so trade has become an increasingly important political and economic issue in Canada. As our trade and treaty process evolves, it is necessary that our domestic engagement policies with subnational governments involve the provincial and I would assert municipal governments. They need to be consulted and involved in discussing the impact of treaties and in discussions and engagement of members of parliament and senators, all parliamentarians. It is critically important.

With this legislation the hon. member would move Canada to something more similar to the Australian model for treaty negotiation. I had the opportunity to have dinner with Alexander Downer, Australia's foreign affairs minister, about two years ago. I used that opportunity to discuss with him the success of the Australian model for treaty negotiation. That has been by and large a successful experiment. We can move with a significant level of confidence in supporting the direction of this legislation because of the Australian example which has been well received and successful.

We need to consult with the provincial and territorial governments more seriously on these issues. On the MAI there was very little consultation or discussion with subnational governments in Canada. If there were discussions, they were typically between federal and provincial bureaucrats as opposed to being between ministers or members of federal and provincial governments. It is essential that the elected members have a role both provincially and federally in terms of the discussions and the process.

The national interest analysis is essential. We need to ensure the impact of treaties is considered not just nationally but also subnationally on the provincial, territorial and indeed municipal governments. Many of the treaties that are signed have a significant impact on the provincial and municipal governments.

I want to be clear that our support of this legislation is in no way an indication of our fear of trade or our opposition to trade or a change in our policy relative to trade. This type of transparent engagement process actually indicates our degree of support for trade. We recognize the importance of trade in the Canadian economy and the increasing level of importance that trade will play in the coming decades.

• (1755)

As such, it is important that our domestic policies evolve appropriately in terms of the democratic process of engagement which needs to grow commensurate with the increased level of sophistication of our treaty negotiation process externally. It is essential that this happen. It is important that this occur partly because of some of the misinformation and mistruths about trade agreements that are utilized by anti-trade individuals and organizations, for example with the MAI or previous to that the free trade agreement and NAFTA.

Solid information and a solid process of engagement and discussion will help to eliminate a lot of the incorrect and sensationalist arguments against these treaties. It is critical that we make policies and processes transparent such that those often incorrect analyses and arguments are exposed for the frauds that they are in a lot of cases. I see this very positively.

I commend the hon. member for his work in this area. Our party will be supporting this legislation. It is a step in the right direction and may be an important step forward for Canada. I would hope that we would have the same success here as the Australian model has had in that country.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maud Debien (Laval East, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-214, introduced by my colleague from Beauharnois—Salaberry, whom I salute, is of great importance to this House, which is why I want to speak to it today.

An act to provide for the participation of the House of Commons when treaties are concluded, this bill would fill the democratic void in Canada, when it comes to negotiating and concluding treaties with our partners from other countries in the world.

I have been taking part in the work of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade for nearly seven years. This is the committee where a few members from all parties study legislation to implement important international treaties to which Canada wishes to become a party.

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However, there are significant differences between implementation legislation passed by parliament and what my colleague from Beauharnois—Salaberry is proposing. In other words, when Canada intends to ratify a treaty, it introduces a bill in the House to implement that treaty in Canada and to give effect to the obligations stemming from that treaty. However, and this is where the problem lies, the public has never heard about that treaty and its contents, not have members of parliament, even.

As we enter the 21st century, it is rather sad to see that international treaties, which will often have an impact on the life of people, cannot be subjected to public scrutiny beforehand. The overall objective of Bill C-214 is to allow for greater transparency so that people and their elected representatives can participate fully and democratically at each stage of the ratification of international treaties Canada intends to negotiate.

Bill C-214 has four specific objectives on which I would like to comment.

The first is to table treaties the government has signed so that the people and their elected representatives can have access to all the information pertaining to that treaty and know its scope.

• (1800)

We all remember the reactions negotiations on the multilateral agreement on investment, or MAI, gave rise to and the general disapproval of the agreement in the civil society and in some countries. We also remember how difficult it was for the former international trade minister to answer questions from opposition members in the House because everything was being done behind closed doors.

With the systematic tabling of all important treaties to be published in the *Canada Gazette* and in the *Canada Treaty Series* or posted on the government Internet site, we would avoid this dysfunction of democracy.

Bill C-214 is really an exercise in openness and democratization. The publication and distribution of treaties are the second part in this bill.

Third, Bill C-214 provides that treaties will be submitted to Parliament before ratification. I pointed out before that the members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade are participating in the study of the treaty implementation bill.

We should know that, at that stage, there is absolutely no debate on the content of treaties, their different parts, their impact on the life of Canadians, their institutions, and the relations between citizens and the government that could be affected.

Implementation bills simply make our legislation consistent with our treaty obligations. We are a very long way from a process

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that would give the treaties greater legitimacy by permitting parliamentarians to vet all of them before their ratification.

This government would have had an extraordinary opportunity to show its open-mindedness, the fact that it is the "best country in the world", had it proposed this bill. We had an example very recently in which parliamentarians could have expressed their opinion on the content of the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court concerning genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. This would have been a great victory for parliamentary democracy.

That said, in a context of globalization, as my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean pointed out so well, in which many decisions affecting us are made at the international level and are beyond our reach, parliamentary democracy obliges MPs to not abdicate any of their responsibilities in this area.

Parliamentary approval of treaties as proposed by Bill C-214 would include a debate of their content and in no way limits the government's manoeuvring room in negotiating and concluding them.

Finally, the fourth objective of the bill on treaties, as the short title provides, is to involve the provinces in the negotiation of treaties that come under their constitutional jurisdiction, thus obliging the federal government to consult them. Bill C-214 also proposes the conclusion of an agreement to formalize this requirement for consultation.

We would therefore have hoped such a bill that attempts to democratize the ratification of treaties and honour the spirit and letter of the Constitution would receive the unanimous support of all parliamentarians. Unfortunately, this was not the case. One after another, the Liberal members speaking on this private members' bill opposed its passage at second reading.

Such an attitude is hard to understand and totally indefensible. How can the Liberal members oppose making the treaty ratification process more transparent and democratic? Why are the Liberal members refusing to honour Canada's Constitution, which nevertheless defines provincial jurisdictions?

• (1805)

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs may have given us part of the answer to explain such behaviour when he commented, on December 1, on the refusal of the U.S. Senate to ratify the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. He said, and I quote:

This show of disunity by our American neighbours is a clear illustration of what happens when sterile party politics find their way into the conduct of a country's foreign affairs.

Could it be that these same sterile party politics, to use the words of the Liberal parliamentary secretary, explain the Liberals' partisan refusal to support Bill C-214?

In any case, it is certainly not the arguments put forward by the Liberal members in this House that justify their stubborn refusal. Since the debates began, they have relied on false pretences only to try to justify their opposition.

Allow me to say a few words on the importance of getting the provinces involved in the negotiation and ratification of treaties that fall under their constitutional jurisdiction.

The provisions of Bill C-214 seek to recognize what is familiarly known in Quebec as the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine. It is, regardless of what Liberal members may say, a simple recognition of the provinces' prerogative at the international level when it comes to areas that fall under their jurisdiction.

Former Quebec minister Paul Gérin-Lajoie popularized that doctrine in the sixties. For the benefit of members opposite, Paul Gérin-Lajoie belongs to the Liberal political family and is not an advocate of Quebec sovereignty. He is, however, an honest man respectful of the fundamental law of the land, the Canadian constitution.

In conclusion, I want to congratulate and thank all the members from the four opposition parties who rose in support of this bill. They all had the insight and the democratic reflex that are so sorely lacking on the other side of the House.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will talk about one part only of the bill presented by the member for Beauharnois—Salaberry. That part is not the most crystal clear one.

It is recognized in Canadian constitutional law, and has been for the past sixty years, that the power to conclude treaties rests exclusively with the federal government. However, hidden among the proposals put forward by the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry is one that asks the members of this House to recognize that provinces have the power to conclude treaties.

That power of the provinces to conclude treaties simply does not exist. And a change of this scale to the Canadian constitutional order requires far more than merely a debate in this House: it requires profound, lasting changes to our constitution.

I am not surprised by that. It is true to the culture and the behavior of the Bloc to try to do indirectly what cannot be done directly, that is to nullify the Canadian constitution.

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Canadian constitutional law clearly establishes that the negotiation and ratification of a treaty is strictly within the purview of the federal executive branch. I should not have to teach that to the member for Beauharnois—Salaberry who is a professor of law.

However, if a treaty requires changes to current laws or the enactment of new ones, parliamentarians need to take action and we have done so several times.

• (1810)

If parliamentarians do not legislate, the federal executive is not in a position to ratify such a treaty, as it cannot reasonably conclude that it could be implemented. Therefore the international commitment made by Canada under such a treaty could not be fulfilled.

On that specific point, I would ask the other members of the opposition—and I am not talking about the Bloc members because I do not expect them to recant their decision in the interest of clarity—to review their position, because if they support this bill, they will be changing the constitutional law that has existed in Canada for more than 60 years.

Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to respond to my colleague and to give her a short lesson in international law and Canadian constitutional law, we know there are several federal states in the world, Swiss cantons or German Länders, which are not sovereign states and which can conclude international treaties, as provided by the constitution.

We interpret our constitution. It is Mr. Gérin-Lajoie, a liberal and a federalist, as my colleague from Laval Centre said earlier, who promoted the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine whereby Quebec could conclude treaties within its areas of jurisdiction. I remind the hon. member that all successive Quebec governments, whether of the Liberal Party or the Parti Québécois, maintained that this Gérin-Lajoie doctrine should prevail and that Quebec could conclude international treaties within its areas of jurisdiction.

In closing this debate, I want to thank members of the House who took part in the debate on Bill C-214. I appreciate and count on the support of opposition members who have fully realized that this bill is aimed at democratizing the process of conclusion of treaties, at circulating treaties concluded by Canada but not properly circulated.

Even today, people will not be able to find the text of a Canadian treaty on the Government of Canada site, which is totally inappropriate, since they will find on sites of other countries, such as the United States and France, treaties they have concluded.

The purpose of this bill is therefore to ensure that parliament participates when treaties are concluded by approving the most important treaties, and that there is an obligation on the govern-

ment to disseminate its treaties by tabling them in the House, or by publishing them either on an electronic site, in the *Canada Gazette*, or in the *Canada Treaty Series*.

In my opinion, this is essential because this parliament is lagging somewhat behind other parliaments in the world, such as those of Australia, New Zealand or the United Kingdom. These parliaments have, in recent years, amended their procedure and allowed members to debate treaties, which, as the member for Lac-Saint-Jean pointed out, are taking on increasing importance.

I noted objections from the government side resulting from a desire not to acknowledge that the royal prerogative with respect to the conclusion of treaties should be shared between the federal and provincial governments in application and respect of the federal principle. They also thought that this bill would have the effect of unduly limiting the prerogatives and discretion of the government with respect to the conclusion of treaties. That is not the case.

References to a republican system such as that of the United States ignore the development of practices in Commonwealth countries, where parliament is finally being given a voice when it comes to concluding treaties.

• (1815)

I will conclude by expressing the hope that this bill will receive significant support when it is voted on, on Monday. I also hope that the government realizes that this debate cannot be postponed any longer.

This is a debate that must take place. Let us hope that government members and ministers take the initiative, as other governments have done, and modify the existing practice, which is outmoded and unworthy of a country which claims to be democratic but which does not which to give a voice to the people's elected representatives when it comes to important treaties.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): It being 6.16 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

Pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed demanded and deferred until Monday, June 12, 2000 at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

Adjournment Debate

IMPORTATION OF PLUTONIUM

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on May 29 in the House, I raised the issue of the importation of MOX plutonium into Canada. Unfortunately, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources sidestepped my question.

In fact, I mentioned that 161 municipalities and MRCs in Quebec had written to the Minister of the Environment asking him to drop his plan to import plutonium. The parliamentary secretary said just the opposite.

On May 24, the Montreal urban community commission on the environment rejected the plan. In its recommendation to the city executive council, it recommended:

That the Council ask the Government of Canada to drop the plan for eliminating American and Russian military grade plutonium in Canadian CANDU reactors, as well as the research project to that effect by Atomic Energy of Canada Limited and, consequently, to accept no more samples of MOX fuel.

No recommendation could be clearer. Moreover, 161 municipalities and MRCs in Quebec are making the same request.

The issue that I am raising today is not whether there is a danger with such importation. My request is totally justified because, whenever MOX is burned in Candu reactors, more than 50% of the initial plutonium mass persists in the form of waste and that waste has a chemical mean life of 24,000 years. We must not forget that, at this time, more than 23 million kilograms of uranium are stored in Canada and that there is no permanent solution to dispose of them.

The public must know that in February 1998, a panel chaired by Blair Seaborn presented a report, one of the recommendations of which was as follows:

Any plan for the permanent storage of nuclear fuel waste in Canada should aim to:

1) ensure that the public has an appropriate level of knowledge of and control over nuclear fuel waste management in Canada and that such management is in keeping with changing public priorities particularly in light of the dread factor about nuclear issue and:

2) achieve informed and collective acceptance at every stage of development.

It added, and I am still quoting:

Public participation must be incorporated in a comprehensive and credible manner throughout future steps. This implies that the public must accept the plan before it is implemented.

● (1820)

I am still waiting to hear the reasons for the Liberals' actions. But I am warning them, voters will not hesitate to punish them in the next election. We must give some form of power back to the people. Again, I cannot help deploring the dictatorial attitude of the government.

People want to know if they will be consulted with regard to the importation of MOX fuel before being forced to live with tens of tons of highly radioactive material for thousands of years.

[English]

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the mixed oxide, or MOX, fuel test project, which is, I point out, just a fuel test, is part of an international non-proliferation initiative to find a safe and secure manner to render surplus American and Russian weapons grade plutonium inaccessible for future use in nuclear weapons. The plutonium that is declared surplus by the U.S. and Russia already exists and will continue to present a real proliferation danger until it can be reduced to a form that cannot be readily used for weapons purposes.

The use of MOX fuel in a nuclear reactor is one of the methods by which the plutonium can be effectively rendered inaccessible for weapons.

Canada has agreed in principle to consider the use of MOX fuel as part of its contribution to international disarmament initiatives. The Government of Canada believes that Canadians share a common desire to create a safe and secure world for future generations and are prepared to take appropriate action provided that public health and safety and the environment are not compromised in the process.

With respect to the future import of MOX fuel test samples from Russia to Canada, I want to assure the House now that the shipment will comply with all Canadian legal and regulatory requirements. The shipment must comply with the Nuclear Safety and Control Act, the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act, the transportation packaging of radioactive materials regulations, and International requirements under the International Marine Organization, the International Civil Aviation Organisation, as well as standards set by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The MOX test sample shipments are safe. The trace amount of radiation is so small that it poses no significant risk to health, safety or the environment. The fuel is in a stable, solid, ceramic form inside a sealed zirconium alloy element and transported in a container, as I stated earlier, that meets Canadian and international standards.

It is not soluble and cannot spill, ignite or explode. It is not a powder that can be inhaled. The transport of the fuel samples is subject to all requirements of Canada's regulatory system which fully protect public health and safety and the environment.

I must stress that undertaking this test does not oblige Canada to agree to the large scale use of MOX fuel in Candu power plants in

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the future. Should any such program be proposed at some point in the future, stringent conditions will apply, including full public participation prior to entering into the program.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Pursuant to a motion made earlier today, the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been withdrawn and the House will now proceed to the report stage of Bill S-10.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill S-10, an act to amend the National Defence Act, the DNA Identification Act and the Criminal Code, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Pursuant to order made earlier today, the question for concurrence at report stage is deemed put and the motion is deemed carried on division.

When shall the bill be read a third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Jim Peterson (for the Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.) moved that the bill be read a third time and passed.

• (1825)

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the government House leader for allowing me to go first. I told him I would be very brief and I will because my party supports the bill. We had a good debate at second reading and in committee, and appreciate that it has now come forward. We also like the fact that the commissioner of the RCMP will be reporting on the status of the DNA data bank on an annual basis and that parliament will review the operations of the data bank every five years.

We support the bill because it is a good step in utilizing a person's genetic fingerprint. It is an indispensable tool for the police and the military authorities to solve crimes.

Very often DNA is solely viewed as a tool to convict, but it also exonerates the innocent. I think that is so important. We only have to be reminded of Paul Morin and David Milgaard to appreciate the brilliance and the justice incorporated in DNA samples.

In just taking a short period of time, we want to say that we support the bill and look forward to its quick passage and, more important, to the implementation which will be to the benefit of all Canadians.

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak in support of Bill S-10 which amends the National Defence Act, the DNA Identification Act and the Criminal Code. This bill builds on the national DNA data bank, legislation passed by this House in 1998 which created the DNA Identification Act.

As hon. members of the House will recall, the DNA Identification Act establishes a national DNA data bank that will contain DNA profiles from both crime scenes and people who are convicted of serious and violent offences. Each time a new DNA profile is entered into the data bank, a search will be made to find a match in the system to help police identify suspects.

DNA profiles stored in the national wide data bank will provide the police with valuable information that will also speed up criminal investigations. It will also offer hope to victims' families that long outstanding crimes may be solved.

The benefits of having a national DNA data bank are well recognized by the police community and the Canadian public. It will be a landmark public safety tool.

The overall purpose of Bill S-10 is simple and twofold: to establish a more complete data bank by including the DNA profiles from offenders convicted in the military justice system; and, to make sure that the legislation can be effectively implemented. Bill S-10 makes simple and straightforward refinements to the data bank legislation to ensure its smooth implementation.

The provinces and territories support the bill because it clearly responds to the practical issues that they have identified. It is now up to us to give Bill S-10 our full support.

I am pleased by the momentum that is building up to implement this landmark investigative tool. Plans are well under way. The RCMP has established a special unit to run the data bank. Regulations in support of the DNA Identification Act have been drafted and published. Law enforcement officials across the country are actively engaged in preparations to implement the data bank by June 30. A federal and provincial working group is finalizing guidelines to assist prosecutors in applying the law uniformly across the country, and police are being trained on sample collection procedures.

We have made great strides in ensuring that Canadian police have this modern technology available to them. All sectors of the criminal justice system have come together on this initiative to ensure that the national DNA data bank can soon become a reality.

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In the interests of all Canadians, indeed for public safety, I encourage all members of the House—and I gather all members are supporting this—to support Bill S-10 so that we can proceed as planned to get this much needed public safety tool off the ground.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill S-10, which amends mainly the National Defence Act.

• (1830)

This bill will authorize military judges to issue DNA warrants to take bodily substances for the purpose of deriving the DNA profile of the military suspected or convicted of designated offences.

Bill S-10 is an addition to the existing legislation providing similar authorities to be exercised by a provincial court judge under the Criminal Code to allow the taking of bodily substances for DNA analysis.

Under this bill, a military judge will be able to order the taking of bodily substances in cases of offences under the Criminal Code and specific military offences like striking a superior officer or striking a subordinate.

DNA profiles of the military will be included in the DNA bank just as those of civilians. This bank will also include the profiles of human cells found at the scene of a crime, and they will be compared to the profile of suspected or convicted offenders. Thus, it will be possible to find the criminal as quickly as possible and with great accuracy. The Canadian DNA bank should be operational by the end of June, as mentioned a moment ago by the parliamentary secretary.

Canada is not the first country enacting legislation to take bodily substances for DNA analysis and create a bank of DNA profiles. The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium already have legislation authorizing the taking and storing of DNA data.

Some American States have also enacted such legislation. The French are presently studying legislation to authorize the taking and storing of such data.

Let me describe briefly the overriding legislation in these countries and compare it with the legislation that will soon come into force in Canada.

The United Kingdom pioneered in this regard when it passed legislation to authorize the taking of bodily substances and the storing of the DNA profiles derived from them. The United Kingdom DNA data bank has been operational since April 1995 and it is operated by the Forensic Science Service.

Contrary to the Canadian legislation, where a police officer must obtain a warrant from a judge for the taking of bodily substances, the British legislation empowers police officers to make the decision as to whether to take a sample from suspects. The police officer must obtain the consent of the person before taking an “intimate” sample of substances. “Intimate” refers to a sample of blood, sperm or urine, a dental impression or a sample from a bodily orifice other than the mouth.

The police officer does not have to obtain the consent of the person before taking a “non intimate” sample. Such a sample could be a fingernail clipping, a sample from the mouth or from any other part of the body, or a foot impression.

These samples are taken from anyone suspected of having committed a criminal act. Under the British legislation, a criminal act includes all crimes, with violence or not, which are punishable by a term of imprisonment.

The Canadian legislation is very different. In Canada, a judge will be able to order offenders suspected of a designated offence to provide samples of bodily substances. Whenever someone is convicted of an offence, the Canadian parliament has decided that giving samples of bodily substances will be mandatory but only in the case of the most severe crimes, such as sexual assault, murder and other such crimes.

However, in the case of summary convictions for lesser offences, a Canadian judge will have the authority to order the taking of samples of bodily substances if he is convinced that the infringement on the offender’s privacy is not excessive compared to public interest.

In the United Kingdom, bodily substances are used to prove or disprove the involvement of a person in a specific offence. It is possible to keep the data in a data bank when the person is convicted of the offence. The data are destroyed whenever the suspect is acquitted or dies.

The United Kingdom goes further than Canada and other countries where there is a legislation on the taking of bodily substances. A British policeman can collect a non intimate specimen on a person accused of an offence even if that specimen is not related to the crime committed.

In that case, the specimen is not collected to prove or disprove the involvement of the person in the offence but simply because the person is accused and that it may be possible to link that individual to other offences.

• (1835)

Before the British law regulating the taking of DNA samples was passed, the United Kingdom systematically conducted DNA analyses among the population in order to find the authors of crimes. Indeed, in the Pitchford case, in order to solve the rape and murder

of two teenage girls, the police had taken over 3,600 DNA samples from men in the area where the crimes had been committed. After the case was solved, the police used the 3,600 samples to establish cross-references with other crimes.

It is obvious that the British justice system gives more power to the police and puts less emphasis on civil liberties. Canadian law is less permissive and states clearly under which circumstances the police can take a sample. I believe our DNA legislation strikes the right balance between the need to find and punish the guilty party and individual freedoms.

Following the Dutroux tragedy, Belgium passed legislation dealing with identification through DNA analysis within its criminal justice system. This legislation is similar to ours.

First of all, the Belgian penal code was adapted to allow the analysis of human cells found at a crime scene and to allow the taking of DNA samples from individuals suspected of being involved in a crime.

And then, two databanks were set up. The first one consists of a crime scene index containing DNA profiles derived from bodily substances found on the crime scenes. The other one is the convicted offenders index containing DNA profiles obtained from convicted offenders.

The Belgian national institute of forensic sciences and criminology manages the genetic index. This state institution also has the mandate to carry out expert analyses on samples collected at the scene, to do research and development in the DNA field and to oversee the training and regulation of technical and scientific police services. It also deals with the laboratory for the technical and scientific police services and the reference laboratory for forensic sciences.

I have also found some information about the legislation in force in the Netherlands. It stipulates that suspects in a serious crime have to provide samples of bodily substances for forensic purposes. That country is the only one to allow the accused to request an independent second assessment by a laboratory other than the national criminal justice laboratory.

Although the United States have carried out DNA analyses in more than 24,000 cases since 1986, they still do not have a DNA databank. In fact, most of the American States have legislation providing for the collection and analysis of samples of bodily substances. Pursuant to these acts, samples are taken from persons convicted of serious crimes like sexual assaults.

DNA samples are sent to the state forensic laboratory where they are entered in a registry and stored in the state DNA databank. Various DNA data are stored in different databanks across the country.

The FBI recently initiated a movement to create a national DNA data bank which would group together all the data recorded in each

state. Studies are being implemented to check the feasibility of the project.

On April 4, 2000, France introduced a piece of legislation to create a national data bank of gene prints and imprints. This national automated data bank would centralize the gene prints found on the scene of a crime as well as the gene imprints of inmates. A judge at trial will be able to order a comparison between the gene prints in the national data bank and the DNA profile of an individual under investigation for an offence punishable by imprisonment. In principle, that national automated data bank of gene imprints should be operational by the end of May of this year.

● (1840)

Science today makes it possible to determine, from a tiny amount of bodily substances, an individual's DNA profile. This has allowed many police agencies around the world to resolve vicious crimes for which no culprit had yet been found.

In spite of the sure benefits of genetics for criminal justice, I feel continued caution is in order with regard to potential manipulation of genetic information. That is why passing legislation entails, in my opinion, many benefits both for fighting efficiently against crime and for protecting justiciables against potential abuses from the state.

First of all, the passing of an act provides a framework for the power of seizure exercised by police officers. Then, its passage permits conservation of genetic information in a single location, thus making the search for the perpetrator more effective.

Finally, passage of a law makes it possible to sanction individuals who would use the law for purposes other than those it was intended for. Despite all these advantages, few countries have complete legislation governing the sampling, conservation and use of bodily substances obtained for forensic analyses.

Canada, like the United Kingdom, Belgium and the Netherlands, will have proper legislation permitting the collection and conservation of genetic information. As we have seen, there are significant differences between Canada's legislation and the others'. Bill S-10, at issue here, improves a number of measures passed by the House of Commons in this area and will give the law its own particular cachet.

First, let us mention that Bill S-10 gives military judges the same powers as provincial court justices in the collection of bodily substances. It appears that Canada will be the only country to subject the military to the same regime as civilians. The Bloc Québécois sees no reason to exclude the military from the application of this legislation.

Bill S-10 provides that DNA profiles and substances taken must be used only to apply the law, to the exclusion of all other unauthorized uses. Offences and sentences are provided in the law for those who fail to comply with it.

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According to my information, Canada is the only country, besides Belgium, to provide for protection against the abuse of genetic information. These provisions are very important and the Bloc Québécois fully supports them. They meet the concerns expressed by Canada's privacy commissioner.

Indeed, the privacy commissioner had reservations about the creation of a DNA data bank and the way that information might be used. While recognizing the usefulness of that technique, the commissioner was opposed to letting the state develop a DNA public registry. The information contained in the DNA data bank should not, according to the commissioner, be used to determine other characteristics that can be genetically related, such as one's personality, or be used for medical research. Bill S-10 provides protection against such practices.

The RCMP will administer the DNA data bank, which should be in operation by the end of June of this year. The Solicitor General of Canada announced that the RCMP will receive \$18 million to operate this data bank. If properly administered by the RCMP, this tool will allow the police to quickly and accurately solve many crimes. By using DNA profiles during their investigations, police officers will save time and money, which can be reallocated.

The newspapers recently revealed that the RCMP was not properly managed by its senior officers. Moreover, in his report released last April, the auditor general reported that the RCMP had a major backlog with regard to the DNA analyses that are currently authorized. According to the auditor general's report, the RCMP laboratories take an average of 82 days to do a preliminary DNA analysis.

That work should only take two days. The average time for a complete analysis is 101 days. These timeframes far exceed the recommendation made by Justice Campbell, who conducted the investigation in the Bernardo case and who recommended a 30 day turnaround time for DNA analysis. The RCMP takes a total of 183 days to do a DNA analysis.

• (1845)

The RCMP will have to establish its priorities, because the success of the national DNA data bank depends on it. Given this disturbing information concerning the management of the RCMP, the Bloc Québécois will carefully scrutinize its activities.

The annual report to be submitted to parliament by the commissioner of the RCMP responsible for administering the DNA data bank will allow to determine whether the functioning and the administration of the DNA data bank respond to people's expectations.

This obligation on the part of the commissioner to submit an annual report is an addition in Bill S-10, since the current legislation provides for a Senate or a House committee, or a joint

committee, to examine the implementation of the legislation in the five years following its coming into effect.

I did not believe this change was essential. However, in the light of huge management problems within the RCMP, I think an annual report is not too much to ask, to allow parliamentarians to examine the work of the RCMP in this field. I believe a five year period is too long and might have jeopardized the functioning of the DNA data bank.

Available data concerning the performance of the British DNA data bank can be used to assess the performance of the RCMP. In fact, in 1995, during the implementation of the DNA databank in the United Kingdom, the 43 police services of that country provided over 94,000 samples taken from people and over 2,500 samples gathered at crime scenes. Almost 1,000 samples were used to provide sufficient DNA evidence.

In 196 cases, police officers were able to cross-reference the samples with the DNA profiles stored in the national DNA databank. The United Kingdom authorities found these preliminary results very encouraging, since the DNA databank had just been set up. With these 1,000 samples gathered at the crime scenes, the identification rate was 19.2%, a lot better than with the fingerprints.

As of April 10, 2000, the British databank had been in existence for five years. Since its creation, it has gathered some 750,000 profiles of suspects and over 73,000 samples of substances found at the crime scenes. In five years, the United Kingdom has linked 68,000 suspects to crimes thanks to the DNA databank.

The Bloc Québécois supports Bill S-10 and the creation of a DNA databank, but given the RCMP's current problems, we will want to ensure that the money for this project is spent appropriately.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague of the Bloc Québécois on her speech.

[*English*]

I want to thank my hon. friend and colleague from Nova Scotia, the member for Sydney—Victoria, for allowing me to pre-empt his remarks with my own. I also commend the parliamentary secretary for a very titillating speech. I know he takes a great deal of pride in bills and his knowledge of the technical aspect of bills such as this.

As has been said, these amendments pertain to the National Defence Act and the DNA Identification Act, as well as the criminal code. Obviously, there is very much a spirit of non-partisan support for the bill and its practical implications.

I was once told by a good friend and colleague in Nova Scotia, Kenneth Fiske, who is a lawyer, that when appearing before the

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court of appeal a person should be brief, be concise and be gone. That is what I intend to do with this speech.

The purpose of the bill is to include the genetic profiles of offenders, which will allow law enforcement officials to collect genetic fingerprints, which are very much useful in the investigation of serious crimes.

The bill is set up to mirror existing legislation which came before the House in recent times. It is there to enhance and equalize the system with regard to the military and ensure that those who are involved in serious offences involving violence will be held to equal account. As well, it provides that the evidence, which is necessary to prosecute and hold individuals to account, be available to the military.

• (1850)

This legislation, in essence, helps to achieve that goal and helps to bring about equality and fairness in the military justice system.

In recent years the courts have seen many high profile convictions, such as that of Paul Bernardo, and the eventual acquittal of Guy Paul Morin due to the use of DNA evidence. This demonstrates the usefulness of this latest tool of law enforcement in the protection of Canadian society.

We know that it is used for both inculpatory and exculpatory evidence, which is an important nuance to understand. It enhances the accuracy and the truth of our justice system.

The DNA data bank, while being useful and careful not to trample on individual privacy rights, is a very good piece of legislation. It has been brought about by the hard work of individuals in this House, as well as those in the other place. It is very interesting and telling that it was brought forward as a Senate bill, and I commend and applaud the efforts of those in the other place.

I have recently spoken with regard to the tragically flawed conviction of Stephen Truscott. If DNA had been available in 1959 there is certainly reason to believe that it is quite possible his conviction could have been avoided. He would have been exonerated and spared a very horrible fate.

Also, the similar types of injustices suffered by Marshall, Milgaard and Morin may likely have been spared with the timely use of DNA evidence. Therefore, we should do everything possible to expedite its implementation.

This could be a very powerful legislative tool in the conduct of criminal investigations. My friend and colleague from Sydney—Victoria, who is a defence lawyer, would be quick to agree that it could often avoid a case even appearing before the courts. If there is evidence that exonerates, the prosecution may decide in its wisdom not to proceed. Or, if there is evidence which categorically

places the individual at the scene of the crime, it may result in an earlier guilty plea.

Warrants for the taking of DNA samples provide a safeguard on the evidence that exists and meet some of the privacy concerns that were raised during the course of the debate.

It should be noted that the data bank itself, according to the government, will be operational by June 2000. We are into that month and we have had no word yet as to whether the government will fulfil that commitment. We have seen it in the past with health reform. We have seen it with the youth criminal justice act and environment legislation. Many times Canadians are led to believe that they will get a piece of legislation or a program, and sadly that does not come to fruition until months and sometimes years pass. Because of the importance of this type of bill and this very useful tool for criminal investigations, we are hoping that this will be the exception to the Liberal record in that regard.

We can only hope that the federal government will come through with adequate funding as well. We have known all along that this would very much enhance the present CPIC system and would allow police to be armed with the DNA strand and evidence which could be used to both convict and exonerate, and they are very much in need of a system that will accommodate that.

We know from earlier reports that the CPIC system, which would house this information, is at a point in its history where it is about to collapse. Money has been allotted for that. There was an announcement of \$115 million for the data bank. At the same time, RCMP experts have estimated that they would need double that amount, \$280 million for the data bank, for it to be really state of the art for the 21st century.

I must say that the reactions of the Liberals, when it comes to problems and cries for help from people like the law enforcement community, are nowhere near their rhetoric in terms of delivery. Law enforcement has been given short shrift in the past. We hope that will not be repeated. We are encouraged that this bill will certainly move in that direction.

This bill came about as a result of Senate hearings. It began back in 1998 with a report that was drafted to amend the National Defence Act and it was meant to reform the military justice system. The defence minister, I believe, was enlightened by this report, which contained a great deal of useful information in this regard.

For cases of sexual offence involving members of the military, the RCMP would not have had the jurisdiction they needed to do the job of taking and storing DNA samples. This bill, in essence, reacts to that perverse anomaly in the law and is very much, as I said earlier, about backfilling that inadequacy in the current legislation. The report of the committee was very useful and

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pointed out some of these inaccuracies and injustices under the current system.

• (1855)

The report also recommended that the federal government strengthen legislation concerning the administration of the bank itself and the security of that information, along with the ability and necessity of strict monitoring to ensure that there was a process whereby that information was not released into other government agencies.

We also know from the past number of weeks that this is very much a concern when it comes to cross-referencing Canadians' information. Again, this government has had a very dismal record to defend in recent weeks.

The commissioner of the RCMP would have final authority to make a report on the DNA data bank and he is required under law to make an annual report to parliament. We see this as a good safeguard.

This type of legislation is very much a technical and time-sensitive type of justice strategy that we are very encouraged will enhance the ability of our law enforcement agents to do their very important and sometimes under-recognized work in Canada.

Under this bill the DNA profiles of offenders subject to the code of service discipline who are convicted of serious and violent offences will be included in the national data bank, which again will allow for greater cross-referencing to solve, in many instances, unsolved crimes in the country. This is very much on par with the entire purpose of the DNA data bank and provides a standard of evidence that should be applied equally for all Canadians.

This new bill provides provisions that are included in the National Defence Act. It very much mirrors the existing legislation in our criminal code. It is there to contain a list of designated offences that would apply when it comes to the use of DNA. Again, it is the mirror image of what we see in the criminal code.

In cases of primary offences, it is mandatory for samples to be taken at the time of conviction, except in exceptional circumstances. This was an issue that was hotly debated at the justice committee in the Commons. It was one on which there was a great deal of disappointment in the law enforcement community, which was pushing for the legislation to very much reflect the same type of evidence gathering that exists for fingerprints, and that is that the officers would have at their discretion the ability to take DNA at the time of arrest when reasonable and probable grounds, the other standard that is always applied, existed.

It is an important point to note that they would be permitted to gather that evidence at the earliest possible point to prevent individuals being released on bail, knowing that they have out-

standing offences or have been involved in other criminal activity that, upon the taking of the DNA at the time of conviction, would very much link them to those outstanding crimes.

I know that is a bit of an antiquated way of explaining it, but it would be very crucial for the Canadian Police Association, for example, to have this guarantee, which unfortunately did not come about.

For secondary offences, it is not the case that there would be mandatory convictions for a sample to be taken, so there is some solace to be taken.

Under Bill S-10 the list of scheduled offences limits the situations in which DNA samples can be taken and now applies to members of the military who have been convicted of those same said offences.

Within five years after the act comes into effect there will be an opportunity to review it. We feel that is consistent with transparency. I mention transparency because this government does not really possess a strong record on transparency and openness, irrespective of what was said in the red book. Sadly, that is a book in which Canadians cannot put a lot of faith.

There is a clear statement in the DNA profiles and samples that come from those convicted of crimes that establishes DNA profiles that can be used and held and cross-referenced for future investigations.

• (1900)

The implementation of this bill will enable police officers to be more effective in gathering evidence and using it to obtain convictions where justified and also address some of the backlog of cases where DNA evidence could be used to exonerate those who are awaiting trial.

This legislation is a positive move. I see it as a very powerful tool with important implications and repercussions for our justice system and for society generally. The provisions of the bill will ensure greater respect for the privacy of Canadians by setting clearer guidelines for the use of DNA by the police, the courts and others in our justice system.

The Progressive Conservative Party unequivocally supports this bill as it will help bring our society closer to achieving a sense of public safety. Anything that moves our justice system in that direction is something that we in the House certainly embrace.

Mr. Peter Mancini (Sydney—Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, with respect to the comments of my colleague from Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, I too know Butch Fiske. He gave me the same advice just before an appeal. He was brief and concise; I was longer and I won. I think it is good advice.

The New Democratic Party will be supporting this legislation. It is good legislation and we welcome it. As has been said, it mirrors

the legislation that was introduced in the House dealing with the DNA identification data bank in the civil courts.

It is important to note that many witnesses came before the justice committee and gave of their time and their ideas to help us craft the right legislation. When that is done properly we see what happens, a government bill that is supported by the Canadian Alliance, the Conservatives, the NDP and the Bloc.

My colleague from Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough spoke about how he and certain police associations hoped that the legislation would go further in terms of allowing the taking of DNA at the time of arrest. I appreciate that. When we craft laws, and this law is important for public safety, we always have to balance what we know to be fundamental rights. The difference between taking DNA samples and taking a fingerprint is the difference between taking bodily fluids and taking a photograph. That is the way the courts have viewed it and I think that is the way ethicists have looked at it.

I was one of the individuals who raised these issues at the justice committee. We sought opinions from some retired supreme court justices. They concurred that it would be detrimental to the legislation to allow the taking of DNA samples at the time of arrest. Nobody in the House wanted to craft a bill that would not withstand a legal challenge. From my way of thinking it was better to get a piece of sound legislation passed as quickly as possible that would provide for public safety and give the police the tools they need.

A great deal has been said in the House about this legislation. It provides the military with the same tools that the civilian police force have. Because the RCMP would not have jurisdiction in the taking of the samples, it extends powers to the military courts and it extends the power to issue the warrants to the military justices.

There is consensus on the bill. The NDP will be supporting this important piece of legislation. It uses today's technology in a way to prevent crime and also to determine the guilt or innocence of an individual. It is interesting that the bill comes on the day when the Minister of Justice talked about enhancing support mechanisms for investigation of wrongfully convicted individuals. DNA will form an important part of that in the same way that it provides a useful tool for those who have committed a crime in determining their guilt.

We always have to bear in mind the presumption of innocence. DNA is but a tool in the same way that fingerprints are and other evidence is in determining the construction of a case against an accused. We always have to bear in mind at the beginning that the accused is presumed innocent and this is but one investigative tool, albeit an important one.

• (1905)

I get a little nervous when people start to think that science is foolproof, that technology has all the answers, but this is an

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important piece of legislation for evidence gathering and we will support the legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): Pursuant to order made earlier today the question on the motion at third reading stage is deemed put and the motion is deemed carried on division.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

INCOME TAX CONVENTIONS IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 1999

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill S-3, an act to implement an agreement, conventions and protocols between Canada and Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Algeria, Bulgaria, Portugal, Uzbekistan, Jordan, Japan and Luxembourg for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): Pursuant to order made earlier today, the question on the motion for concurrence at report stage is deemed put and the motion is deemed carried on division.

When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Jim Peterson (for the Minister of Finance) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak today at third reading of Bill S-3.

This legislation implements nine tax treaties. All of them are important to Canada's trade and investment with the countries involved and to the elimination of double taxation for businesses and individuals with operations and investments in those countries. Among these treaties are seven new ones that have been concluded with Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Algeria, Bulgaria, Portugal, Uzbekistan and Jordan. Bill S-3 also amends Canada's tax treaty with Japan and replaces our existing convention with Luxembourg.

[*Translation*]

These treaties were designed with two primary objectives in mind—the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income. The potential for double taxation arises when a taxpayer resides in one country and earns income in another. Without a tax treaty, both countries can tax this income.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Tax treaties are therefore essential in helping to ensure that income is not taxed twice. This can be achieved in several ways. The most important method requires the country of residence to either exempt the income from tax or give credit for the tax paid to the source country under a tax treaty. Another is to allocate taxation rights between a taxpayer's country of residence and the source country of the income. One of the ways of achieving this is for tax treaties to provide for reciprocal rate reductions.

The treaties contained in Bill S-3 meet this objective through reduced withholding taxes for individuals and businesses. Withholding taxes, as hon. members know, are the taxes that countries usually impose on income paid to non-residents. Let me provide some examples.

The treaty with Kyrgyzstan limits the maximum withholding tax on dividends and interest to 15% and to 10% on royalties. Some exemptions exist for interest and royalties on copyrights, computer software, patents and know-how.

[Translation]

The convention with Lebanon provides for a maximum 5% withholding tax on dividends paid to a company controlling at least 10% of the voting power in the company paying the dividends, and 15% in all other cases.

- (1910)

Copyright, computer software, patent and know-how royalties will be taxed at 5%; other royalties as well as interest at 10%.

[English]

I could cite the other treaties with Algeria, Bulgaria, Portugal, Uzbekistan, Jordan, Luxembourg and Japan, but the bill lays out the measures very clearly. They are in a similar fashion to the one I cited earlier so I will not belabour the House with that information.

I would be remiss in my remarks if I did not mention the second main objective of tax treaties, the prevention of fiscal evasion. The treaties contained in this bill encourage the exchange of information between revenue authorities to prevent tax evasion or tax avoidance. Sharing information helps revenue authorities in both countries identify and act on cases of tax evasion or avoidance.

[Translation]

There is one remaining issue I want to highlight before closing, and that is the taxpayer migration rules as proposed by the Minister of Finance.

Amendments to the Income Tax Act will be introduced under separate legislation with respect to Canada's right to tax emigrants on gains that accrue while they are in Canada.

[English]

With this in mind, Canada has been negotiating its tax treaties to ensure that double taxation will not happen when emigrants' pre-departure gains are taxed. However, this provision is included in only four of the treaties covered in the bill, the ones with Luxembourg, Portugal, Lebanon and Jordan. I will explain why.

The treaties with Uzbekistan, Bulgaria, Algeria and Kyrgyzstan were all negotiated before the new rules were announced. Because of this, there is a provision in the proposed taxpayer migration rules for Canada to give a unilateral foreign tax credit to emigrants until the year 2007. This time frame guarantees that there will be no double taxation of pre-departure gains before these treaties have been negotiated to take the new rules into account. Japan has asked to review taxpayer migration in future negotiations.

In summary, I want to assure hon. members that the tax treaties contained in this bill only hold positive benefits for Canadian businesses and individuals with operations and investments in these countries.

[Translation]

The fact that our exports now account for over 40% of Canada's annual GDP is testament to the importance of tax treaties to both international trade and to Canada's domestic economic performance.

Once these treaties come into force, the number of tax treaties Canada has in place with other countries will increase to 75.

[English]

I therefore urge all hon. members to pass this legislation without delay.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill S-3, an act to implement an agreement, conventions and protocols between Canada and Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Algeria, Bulgaria, Portugal, Uzbekistan, Jordan, Japan and Luxembourg for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income.

The Bloc Québécois agrees with this bill, especially since the bill is inspired by relatively standard models developed by the OECD.

- (1915)

The member opposite said that such protocols have been signed with 75 countries. I think that is wonderful but some of these countries have old protocols of agreement that are deplorable because they do not prevent fiscal evasion, which is the second objective of the bill. This is very important. We must not lose sight of this.

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Certain corporations have head offices outside Canada and pay practically no taxes on income. When these Canadian companies bring their money back into Canada, the law tells them that they have already paid taxes in the country where they do business. The money is therefore allowed into Canada without any taxes on income. There are many companies operating abroad who are paying little or no income tax there and, when they bring their money into Canada, they do not pay a cent in taxes.

I would like to give an example that members will understand. There are three countries with whom we have duly signed conventions—old models, relics—and they are Liberia, Bermuda and Barbados. These are tax havens.

In Liberia, there are no income taxes. A company doing business in Liberia with a head office there pays one amount, \$350 US a year. Whether its profits are \$100, \$1,000 or in the billions, it pays income taxes of only \$350 US.

Let us take another example: Bermuda. Under an agreement with Canada, companies will pay no income taxes until 2016.

In Barbados, companies are subject to decreasing local taxation. In other words, the more money one makes, the less income tax one pays. The maximum tax rate is 2.5 % and the minimum rate is 1%.

Why do I mention these examples? Because the Minister of Finance owns Canada Steamship Lines. I have in front of me the organization chart of Canada Steamship Lines, which I would be willing to table in the House. I see that all the subsidiary companies are located in Bermuda, in Lebanon or in Barbados. There is practically no company any more that has its head office in Canada.

What does it mean? That Canada Steamship Lines, with its head office in Bermuda and its subsidiary in Lebanon, pays almost no income tax. Profits are imported into Canada. Here we tell them “Since you already paid income tax in the countries where you are doing business, you do not have to pay any here”.

When we see that Canada has such a great need of money to invest in health care and give back to the provinces in social transfers, I think the tens of millions of dollars that our Minister of Finance is saving through his company, Canada Steamship Lines, would really be welcome in the consolidated revenue fund. You and I, Madam Speaker, with only a simple T4, are paying a lot of income tax.

Once again, I wish to point out that the Bloc Québécois supports Bill S-3, because it complies with the model proposed by the OECD. The Bloc Québécois does, however, beg the government to do some serious housecleaning of all the old tax conventions it has signed with certain countries, especially those that are tax havens.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): Pursuant to the order adopted earlier today, the motion for third reading of Bill S-3 is deemed to have been put and carried on division.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7.20 p.m.)

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