



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 136 • NUMBER 043 • 2nd SESSION • 36th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, February 7, 2000

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 7, 2000

The House met at 11 a.m.

(Motion agreed to)

Prayers

• (1100)

VACANCY

ST. JOHN'S WEST

The Speaker: It is my duty to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the representation, namely, Mr. Charlie Power, member for the electoral district of St. John's West, by resignation effective January 31, 2000.

Pursuant to subsection 25(1)(b) of the Parliament of Canada Act, I have addressed on January 31, 2000, my warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for the election of a member to fill this vacancy.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to designate Tuesday, February 8, 2000, as an allotted day.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-202, an act to amend the Criminal Code (flight), as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

Mr. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge, Lib.) moved that the bill be concurred in.

• (1105)

Mr. Dan McTeague moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Raymond Bonin (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of Bill C-202, an act to amend the criminal code concerning flight. I also rise to thank members from all sides of the House who have worked together to transform this bill into a non-partisan effort. I trust that this co-operative spirit will continue so that we can make Bill C-202 law in the briefest possible time.

A special thanks must go to our colleague from Leeds—Grenville, a strong contributor and co-sponsor of Bill C-202. Of course we owe the largest debt of gratitude to our colleague, the member for Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge, for developing, drafting and tabling this bill during the first session of this parliament. Without his determined efforts we would not be here today.

Bill C-202 sets out straightforward principles that are shared by Canadians. Individuals who use motor vehicles to flee and evade police, who cause police chases, who put the lives of police and innocent citizens at risk must learn that such behaviour will be severely punished. By way of Bill C-202 these individuals will learn that Canadians and parliament will not tolerate such behaviour.

Bill C-202 creates a new and separate offence for using a motor vehicle to flee and evade police. The penalties are tough, providing a maximum imprisonment of five years in cases of pursuit to evade police. There is a maximum imprisonment of 14 years where the pursuit results in bodily harm, and when a pursuit results in death the penalty provides for life imprisonment.

Individuals who flee and evade police in cars, trucks and vans are a significant risk to public safety. The penalties set forth in Bill C-202 reflect the seriousness of the problem.

I am pleased that the Canadian Police Association, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and La Federation des policiers et

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policrière du Québec have publicly come forward in support of the bill, a bill that will help protect police officers and make Canadian streets safer.

Those who flee police inflict tremendous human costs on our communities. According to the CAA, in Ontario alone between 1991 and 1997 there were over 10,000 high speed chases that resulted in 2,415 injured people and 33 deaths. These people are our friends, neighbours and the police officers upon whom we depend for our protection. That is why we need Bill C-202.

On July 28, 1999, Sergeant Rick McDonald of the Sudbury regional police was struck and killed by a van fleeing police. He was laying down a spike belt. Our friend Rick was only 38. Words are so inadequate to express the senseless nature of this tragedy. Sergeant McDonald's wife Corrine is also a member of the Sudbury regional police service. Sergeant McDonald's family is represented here today by his sister Marlene Viau. Sergeant McDonald's colleagues and the community he served so proudly all want to see Bill C-202 become law.

I would go even further to say that they need to see this bill become law and they need to know that the tragic death of a man they loved and respected, a man who gave so much of himself, will lead to a law that will improve safety on our streets, a law that will help save the lives of other police officers throughout Canada and a law that will severely punish those individuals who put our communities at risk.

I urge all members of the House to support immediate passage of the bill because we all know that it is the right thing to do for our communities.

• (1110)

Mr. Bill Gilmour (Nanaimo—Alberni, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to stand today to support Bill C-202, an act to amend the criminal code regarding flight from a police vehicle, which was put forward by the member for Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge.

Hardly a week goes by without reading in the papers about the carnage on the highways as a result of an individual fleeing the police. In many cases an innocent person pays with his or her life as a result of this reckless behaviour.

Such was the case in Toronto when Father Ilce Mioviski was at the wrong place at the wrong time. Father Mioviski was struck and killed by a stolen car being pursued by Scarborough police. A 21 year old man now faces nine charges, including criminal negligence causing death, impaired driving causing death and theft over \$5,000. Unfortunately we do not have a specific section in our

criminal code which deals with the offence of fleeing a police officer.

The facts of these cases are indeed frightening. Between 1991 and 1997 police entered into more than 10,000 high speed chases in the province of Ontario alone. That is over 1,000 high speed chases a year in Ontario. Six innocent bystanders were killed as a result of these chases, another 33 who were directly involved were killed and 198 were injured. This has to stop.

As I said previously, fleeing police as it now stands is not a separate offence. Bill C-202 proposes a new criminal code prohibition against leading police on a high speed chase and it would add maximum penalties. This is a good first step.

I commend the member for taking this issue forward. I am pleased to say that this bill is endorsed by all parties within the House.

The maximum penalty for evading a police officer in a motor vehicle will be raised from two to five years. The maximum penalty for injuring an individual while trying to flee police will be raised from 10 to 14 years. Anyone who causes the death of another person is liable to imprisonment for life. This is testimony to the emphasis put on this issue and the gravity of these offences.

The solicitor general for Ontario is very supportive of this bill, in particular for its criminal code implications. Ontario's solicitor general has tabled his own code of conduct for police officers involved in high speed chases. In my own province of B.C. the attorney general introduced new rules in September, specifying that police can only close the distance and chase without lights and sirens if an officer has reasonable grounds to believe the vehicle has been involved in an indictable offence. Officers in that situation have to regard public safety before starting a chase.

While these actions attempt to address the growing menace of our highways, they do not stop the behaviour of the criminals who take on the police. The criminals must be stopped.

Bill C-202 sends a message that society has simply had enough of this carnage. Leading a police car in a chase is akin to taking a lethal weapon in the form of a two tonne vehicle and driving it with abandon.

Here are some of the more disturbing facts about high speed chases. From 1993 to 1997 high speed chases on the island of Montreal killed three people and injured 59. In B.C. the RCMP and 12 municipal police forces were involved in over 4,000 high speed chases from 1990 to 1997. Twenty-one people were killed and another 748 were injured. This problem is growing.

Some of these pursuits can cover great distances, as one in Ottawa did recently, where a young intoxicated person with his 16

year old girlfriend took the Ontario police on a 50 kilometre chase. That same week a 21 year old Brampton, Ontario woman who was pulling out of a parking lot was killed by a drunk driver travelling at 140 kilometres an hour trying to evade police. This is the situation we have at the present time. Just last week a teenager in Aldergrove, B.C. died while driving a stolen van in a police chase.

• (1115)

Some people would paint the police as causing the deaths. The police are not the problem. The people driving the cars are the problem. Telling police not to chase, hands these criminals carte blanche. For all intents and purposes, it says "If you want to carry out a criminal offence, simply get in a car and drive fast. The police won't chase you". We do not want that to happen. This is hardly the way to attack the problem and in fact it avoids it.

The Department of Justice is currently studying the problem of police pursuits. The justice minister seems to realize that in many cases the police are able to lay criminal code charges, such as for dangerous driving, but in other cases the offender just receives a slap on the wrist. This is wrong. Society has had it with these people and it wants to have the problem put to an end.

Bill C-202 does just that. The problem is escalating and we simply must act.

Bill C-202 proposes necessary amendments to the criminal code which will deter individuals from taking police on high speed chases and endangering or taking away the lives of innocent bystanders. I fully support the bill and hope that it has speedy passage through the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Madam Speaker, as every previous speaker has already said, there has indeed been all-party support for this bill. The Bloc Québécois made up its mind some time ago. We have supported the hon. member from the start. A number of members even signed the forms to speed up the process.

As far as the object of the bill is concerned, it is obvious that the various parties support it because it meets a significant need. The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights heard a number of witnesses. They told us that there was something missing from the Criminal Code, from the legislation, and that a change like this one would fulfil a need.

What happens today if someone steals a car, tries to get away from the police and is finally arrested? At most, he will be charged with theft. If there really has been a police chase, if it can be proven that there has been dangerous driving, he will also be charged with

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that offence. But for there to be a conviction for dangerous driving, there has to be very strong evidence of it.

With a specific clause in the legislation, we are going to have a precise response to an offence. Its addition to the Criminal Code will meet a crying need.

I will not cite statistics, as all of the parties have already done so. These statistics tell us that there have indeed been a number of court cases in Quebec and in all of Canada. Unfortunately, these proceedings are not all listed.

This is why we do not have specific numbers regarding this situation. I want to make it clear that we support Bill C-202. In so doing, we are not supporting the party opposite, but the police officers who have asked repeatedly for this legislation.

I know that we will also be asked to speed up the process. The House will submit a request to all parties, asking that this bill be referred to the Senate as quickly as possible.

Since the introduction of Bill C-20 by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, the Bloc Québécois has decided it will not co-operate with an undemocratic government. That was our approach in December and it is still our approach today. However, there are exceptions to any rule, and the bill before us today is one of them.

This is not a government bill, but a private member's bill. It was drafted at the request of the witnesses heard by the committee.

• (1120)

We on this side of the House are democrats. The Bloc Québécois has always reacted in a very democratic fashion and it listens to what Quebecers want. And Quebecers have said, through, among others, police officers and the Quebec police federations, that they want parliament to pass Bill C-202.

We will make an exception and agree to this accelerated process. I do hope that the government opposite will take its cue from us and will set its politicking aside when it comes to issues regarding which Quebecers are unanimously opposed to the adoption of certain bills.

I will mention only two that are extremely important to me. The first is Bill C-3 on the young offenders, which Quebec opposes unanimously. I would hope there are democrats on the other side of the House who will do their work and tell the Minister of Justice that the bill is not wanted in Quebec.

The second is, naturally, Bill C-20. The great democrat sitting in the seat of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs should come and visit Quebec to hear what Quebecers have to say about Bill C-20.

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I would hope he will rise in this House, as I am doing as a democrat today, and say "Quebecers do not want this bill, and I have decided to withdraw it". I would hope that the government opposite will say yes to Quebec's demands, as the Bloc Québécois did to Bill C-202, which it supports, and it will work with the House to expedite its passage so that the police in Quebec and the rest of Canada may have it at their disposal in order to act effectively and, most importantly, offer Quebecers and Canadians greater security.

In conclusion, I thank the police in the gallery listening to the debate. They have done a fantastic job, and I mention among others Yves Prud'homme of the Fédération des policiers du Québec and thank him. He enlightened me further, although I already supported the bill. This is why, among other reasons, the Bloc Québécois is supporting this bill.

[English]

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak today in favour of Bill C-202, an act to amend the Criminal Code and strengthen the laws involving criminal flight from police pursuit.

I will begin my remarks by recognizing the efforts of the policing community in bringing this matter to fruition. This is a very practical and admirable amendment. Those congratulations must also extend to the hon. member for Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge and his supporting mover from Leeds—Grenville. They have both displayed exemplary perseverance and a non-partisanship that is uncommon and remarkable in this place. The member for Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge obviously recognizes the need for greater good in areas of justice and public protection. I offer him our unconditional support. Chapeau, monsieur.

The Conservative Party has always supported crime prevention and police forces across the country. We have continually demanded that government correct the problem of underfunded and overworked police forces that are trying to deal with the growing violence that exists in the country, especially amongst youth, biker gangs, organized crime and cross-border terrorism. The example we saw in Washington state in December 1999 exemplifies some of the problems that exist in law enforcement in the country. Human smuggling and other issues are the daily tasks that face our men and women in blue.

The RCMP Public Complaints Commission, speaking specifically to this bill, issued a report last December calling on police to take measures to reduce death and injuries caused by dangerous police chases. This has highlighted the problem that exists in the country and highlights recent government neglect of policing and public safety. Funding cuts to the RCMP and indirect cuts through transfer payments have also affected municipal police forces. Other problems have been created because of government policy in the area of prisoner release, like dangerous prisoners being placed in

minimum security prisons. I note for the record that Gary Fitzgerald is still on the loose from Ferndale prison. We also have a weak youth criminal justice system.

• (1125)

The government has consistently shown that combating criminal activity is not a priority. Yet we see a backbench member, the hon. member for Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge, bringing forward what is obviously a very informed and exemplary piece of legislation.

I understand from a reliable source that this is the first time a backbench member has been able to achieve this level of change within the criminal code. He has obviously come up with a good piece of legislation. It is surprising and disappointing that his party was not able to do so through the Minister of Justice. Perhaps the hon. member on the back bench should be on the front bench.

While the Liberals have misplaced billions of dollars at HRDC, the RCMP cannot even investigate major fraud files in British Columbia because of a lack of resources. Simply repeating bland generalities, as we have heard from the solicitor general, does very little to help frontline police officers. I suggest that it increases the growing cynicism and sense of frustration in those brave men and women. Hopefully the RCMP will not be forced to engage in its own fundraising efforts similar to what we saw in the controversial true blue campaign in Toronto because of the lack of government support.

I hope Bill C-202, which has been delayed since December, will receive no further delays. There have been attempts to amend and improve the legislation, which has been embraced with open arms by the hon. member. It must be underlined that this bill is far too important to be engaging in partisan politics or to be holding it up. It is important for frontline police officers and innocent civilians who could be injured or killed as a result of high speed chases.

Bill C-202 will serve as a deterrent. Many of the substantial changes, which have been outlined by previous speakers, are: up to five years in prison for evading a police officer using a motor vehicle or injuring someone in the process; up to fourteen years for a person killed in a pursuit by irresponsible driving; or, a life sentence for those who engage in such an activity. We should have no qualms about codifying in our criminal code that escaping from the police, who are in pursuit of a person, poses a danger to everyone on our highways and roads.

Whether it be in a community of a small town or a large city, it goes without saying that this type of activity is extremely dangerous. Whether a person is injured with a knife, a gun or any type of weapon, or a car that is used in an irresponsible fashion, the criminal code has to be amended and codified so our judges and our justice system can respond appropriately and proportionately. The judges of this country must be given leeway to respond to and reflect on the gravity of these types of offences.

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These amendments, which we are supporting, toughen up the original draft and allow more judicial discretion. We know judicial discretion is a wonderful thing if it is properly exercised. The amendments surrounding flight, and the type of carnage, injury and death that can result, are aimed at doing just that; toughening up response and responding appropriately with general and specific deterrents aimed at both treating the offender with a firm hand and sending a message to the general public that our system is adequately responding and responding in a way that is appropriate.

Minor aspects of this bill involve those who cause police chases. They are now being charged with crimes that include crimes under the Highway Traffic Act, offences which vary from province to province. Dangerous driving and criminal negligence causing bodily harm or death are already there but this singles out and puts the focus on a specific problem. It also brings about a greater form of continuity and a common response from the provinces across the country. We all know that consistency and an even-handed approach is what the criminal code should try to portray.

Issues of flight from police came to the forefront last year, particularly in Toronto. March 21 marked the death of Father Ilce Miovski, age 50, and March 27 marked the death of Valeri Kovaliv, age 41. Both were pedestrians, innocent victims, hit by runaway vehicles fleeing the police. It was only March and he was 1999's fifth victim of a police chase in or around greater metropolitan Toronto.

• (1130)

Enacting tougher legislation would reflect the public's abhorrence to such reckless and dangerous acts and would deter flight from police. It would make an example of criminals who place innocent lives at risk through such thoughtlessness.

Lives at risk often include the lives of police officers who often drive outdated unsafe police cruisers due to cutbacks. Innocent bystanders on the street are most at risk when killed in the midst of a car chase.

Criminals may be fleeing from an unpaid parking ticket or a speeding charge which has led to such a chase. Many flee because there are legal consequences for relatively minor criminal offences.

We all know there are other instances where high speed chases are a result of criminals who know that when they are taken into police custody they will face serious ramifications for outstanding warrants or other criminal acts that they may have committed prior to becoming engaged in the chase.

Many in the country feel that police chases using such tactics as roadblocks, spike belts, helicopter surveillance et cetera would be a more effective approach. In reality, increasingly we find that the lack of funding impacts greatly on the ability of the police to engage in other types of responses. These devices do not always help.

A very real example involved Calgary police Constable Richard Sonnenberg who on October 8, 1993 used a police spike belt to stop a car from fleeing police. The car was driving, as I understand it, at 170 kilometres an hour. The car veered away from the police spike belt and hit the officer killing him instantly.

The police are very often faced with making split second instantaneous decisions. We must remember that anyone is at risk, anyone can be killed when these types of chases begin.

A further tragedy was that in the case of Mr. Sonnenberg the criminal was given a six year sentence for criminal negligence causing death. This underlines the importance of the provisions of Bill C-202.

We know that life does not mean life in this country, but I would suggest that the recognition of this type of offence resulting in the loss of life and it being codified in the criminal code sends a very important message to all. The need to give our justice system the ability to respond appropriately to those who escape justice does send that message.

Increasingly police are faced with this difficult situation. We know that the public complaints commission has released some very pointed and useful responses that the government should be quick to embrace.

I want to conclude by saying that we can do more, but this bill certainly addresses part of the problem and it is a big part that we in this House can all embrace and pass quickly. It is a very smart and reasonable step in the right direction, a direction that recognizes the attempts to address the serious problems with flight from police. I urge all hon. members to support this bill and others aimed at improving Canada's criminal code.

Ms. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to reiterate the New Democratic Party's support for this bill.

Much has been said today indicating that it is a non-partisan bill. I believe it has the support pretty much of all members of the House which we will see when the vote takes place.

The highlights of the bill indicate that it creates specific offences for anyone who while using a motor vehicle fails to stop for the police. It sets the penalty for committing the offence as imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years.

• (1135)

There is no question that something had to be done to address the problem, to give police the tools to work with to stop the high speed chases. We also had to put in place laws that will make it a criminal offence so that the police are able to do their job properly. So often, as the member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough indicated, this government has failed to do that.

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Certainly the laws of Canada are questioned a number of times as to whether or not they are severe. Parliamentarians are often torn as to how to protect civil liberties and the rights of people against the rights of victims. There is no question that there has been agreement on this bill.

In many cases the problem is the government's support of its police forces. We have seen a number of classic examples in the last months of not enough funding for the RCMP to carry through on cases. I am talking about cases dealing not just with petty theft but with million dollar extortions. If we do not give the RCMP enough funds to proceed with those cases, how on earth do we expect it to act on each and every piece of legislation that comes through?

I want to reiterate our support and thank the hon. members who are going to support this bill. As well I want to thank the member for Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge for putting forth this bill. I also want to thank those backbenchers, one of whom has come up with this bill, and ask them to put pressure on the government. We in the opposition will continue to pressure the government to put enough support into police forces so they can enforce these laws.

[Translation]

Mr. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased and very honoured as a member to be speaking to the first bill to be debated in this House in the new millennium.

[English]

I would be remiss in saying that it is certainly a proud moment for all of us as parliamentarians but it is struck on a sad note. The extraordinary circumstances which bring us together and unite us as parties are underlined by the fact that extraordinary sacrifices and the sad loss of family, friends and loved ones are really at the root of creating this bill. With the help of the justice minister and her department we have been able to craft a piece of legislation which will send out an important message which I believe transcends politics and ensures a greater measure of public security.

Rick McDonald, whose wife and sister are here today, Richard Sonnenberg, Sarah Bowman, Dominique Courchesne, Ilce Miovski of my riding are all individuals who have paid the ultimate price in order to ensure that this bill passes. There is no pride nor pleasure in knowing that while we pass a bill unanimously, which I believe I am hearing from all members of parliament, it nevertheless does not take away from the tragedy that has taken place.

I suspect what we are trying to do here for the love of God and for the love of humanity and mankind and all those around us is to do our very best as legislators to ensure that this parliament is relevant not just on the front benches or in the discourse and the debates at two o'clock in the afternoon, but also here on the backbenches from which we rarely hear. Politics in this country can

be relevant if we work hard to understand the pain and anxiety which people go through day in and day out.

I want to thank my two colleagues who from the word go were very helpful to me in crafting this legislation. I am referring to the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville and the hon. member for Nickel Belt. It is not always the case that politics and policies are top down; sometimes they are bottom up. Indeed when they are bottom up they receive the consent of the House.

I am honoured to know that several individuals also worked very hard to make sure this legislation could pass. I am referring to people like Sergeant Charlie Green, Doug Corrigan, a good friend of mine from the Toronto Police Association, and others in the Durham police and right across the country who have spoken so eloquently to this need. Words cannot replace the tragedy and indeed the investment of the blood of thousands of people and hundreds of injuries in order to make this bill what it is today.

As we send this bill to the Senate there will be equal concerns and equal considerations. Because the House of Commons speaks with one voice, and it is extraordinary circumstances under which it does so, I think that the Senate too will see in its wisdom the importance of ensuring this parliament passes relevant laws for the people whom we represent.

• (1140)

I am honoured that we are going to proceed with the bill. It sends a very important message that this is a parliament that will achieve extraordinary ends if we only work together.

With that in mind I hope this will be the final speech on Bill C-202 and that with the consent of the House we may heretofore pass it into its rightful place in terms of sending it to the Senate and making it relevant public policy from the backbenches of this parliament.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

[Translation]

SITTING SUSPENDED

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): As we have disposed of the bill, the House will suspend proceedings until 12 noon.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11.41 a.m.)

Privilege

• (1155)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

The Speaker: It being 12 noon, the House will resume debate. Before proceeding to debate, I am going to hear a question of privilege. The hon. member for Athabasca.

* * *

[English]

PRIVILEGE

MEMBER FOR WENTWORTH—BURLINGTON

Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a question of privilege regarding a member of the House who used false representation to gain unjust advantage. The member for Wentworth—Burlington used my signature, without my permission and knowledge, to advance a private member's bill. As a consequence he presented a falsified document to the House.

The circumstances that led to my question of privilege today began in the last session when I seconded Bill C-264, an act to amend the Access to Information Act, which was introduced on October 23, 1997, by the member for Wentworth—Burlington. In that session the member obtained another 112 seconders for this bill.

On June 11, 1998, the member sought unanimous consent to change the text of his bill. He felt that there were some flaws and technical changes that needed to be made, and the House agreed to change the text of the bill. From that point on the House had before it a new version of Bill C-264. By virtue of, I guess I could say, the magic of unanimous consent, I became a seconder to the new bill, an altered Bill C-264, even though I did not second that particular version.

• (1200)

I make no objection to the House changing the bill because it has that authority. My objection is with the original signatories being attached to the new version of the bill and with the member for Wentworth—Burlington for carrying over his invalid support for Bill C-264 into the second session and applying it to the new procedures for Private Members' Business.

In February 1999 the rules regarding Private Members' Business were changed. Under the provisions of Standing Order 87(6) a private member's item is now eligible to be placed in the order of precedence after the sponsor files with the clerk a list containing the signatures of 100 members who support the member's item.

The breach of privilege occurred when the member resubmitted the altered Bill C-264 from the first session to the second session and listed me as a seconder for the purpose of Standing Order 87(6). The bill was given a new number. I did not second Bill C-206. As I mentioned earlier, I did not officially and wilfully second the new version of Bill C-264 from the last session.

What we have here is a very serious matter. The member was obviously aware that his bill had changed yet he kept the original seconders. As a result he falsely represented support for his private member's bill.

I would also charge that the member is guilty of non-disclosure. He never contacted me to advise me of the changes to his bill and to ask if I still supported it. I appreciate that at the subcommittee on Private Members' Business he mentioned the history of Bill C-206, but he failed to mention to the committee that he did not notify the original signatories of the changes he had made to the bill. I would expect that any changes, minor or major, should have been brought to the attention of the members who supported the original bill.

Furthermore, the member failed to disclose to the committee the extent of the changes he had made to his bill. He told the committee that he had only made minor technical changes. This is false and misleading.

I had an analysis done of both bills and I am willing to share a very brief synopsis of this analysis with the House. There would appear to be little question that a number of the revisions to the bill are indeed substantive rather than simply minor wording changes. For example, clause 4 of the revised Bill C-264, now Bill C-206, contains an exemption for information that could reasonably be expected to be injurious to the constitutional integrity of Canada. However in the initial version of Bill C-264 clause 4 did not contain these words.

Perhaps the most notable revision is found in clause 9 of Bill C-206. The proposed section 14.1 contained in clause 9 was not included in the first version of the predecessor bill to Bill C-206, Bill C-264. When it received first reading in the first session of the 36th parliament on October 23, 1997, section 14.1 did not appear in Bill C-264 until it was revised pursuant to an order made on June 11, 1998. The proposed section 14.1 which now appears in Bill C-206 reads:

The head of a government institution may refuse to disclose any record requested under this Act that contains information on plans, strategies or tactics relating to the possible secession of a part of Canada, including information held or collected for the purpose of developing those plans, strategies or tactics.

The purpose of section 14.1 would allow the government to refuse access to information on plans, strategies or tactics relating to the possible secession of a part of Canada. It differs notably from the current section of the act and the proposed subsection 4(2.1) in that it does not contain the wording "reasonably expected to be injurious to".

Privilege

In the absence of this wording it is arguable that the rather high threshold test of reasonable expectation of probable harm would not apply to the information or plans, strategies or tactics relating to the possible secession of a part of Canada. Arguably, then, it would be easier for the government to refuse access to public opinion polls on the subject of national unity and constitutional reform on the basis of the proposed section 14.1, at least to the extent that the polls contain information on plans, strategies or tactics relating to the possible secession of a part of Canada. The bottom line is that I did not and would not second Bill C-206 yet I am recorded as being a seconder.

• (1205)

In conclusion, it is stated in the 22nd edition of Erskine May on pages 110 and 111, and Joseph Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* on page 233, that any person who presents documents to the House or committee that have been forged, falsified, altered or fabricated will be found to be in contempt.

The member for Wentworth—Burlington fabricated and falsified support for Bill C-206. He presented this invalid support to the House, which gave him unfair advantage over other private members.

I urge the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to consider his testimony and determine whether he is in contempt for giving false testimony and for misleading its subcommittee on Private Members' Business. If you find that there is a prima facie question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, I would move the appropriate motion.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his intervention. Before I hear other interventions I would like to hear from the hon. member for Wentworth—Burlington.

I noticed that the hon. Leader of the Opposition was on his feet, as was the member for Berthier—Montcalm. I will listen to their interventions after I have heard the hon. member for Wentworth—Burlington.

I will take everything the hon. member has said and wait until the hon. member for Wentworth—Burlington comes to the House, at which time if there are other interventions on any side I will entertain them.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I know on this question of privilege that you are waiting for intervention from the member for Wentworth—Burlington. I understand why you want to hear another side before you hear other representations on that same question of privilege.

The difficulty may be that I do not know when that will be because I do not know when the member for Wentworth—Burlington will choose to make that presentation. I just ask that you ensure that the rest of us who have been on our feet will be notified so that

we can respond after listening to it. I do not want to be off in a committee and find out that it has all been dealt with in my absence.

The Speaker: That is a very reasonable request for when the member for Wentworth—Burlington is here.

[Translation]

I am sure that the members who have risen, including the member for Berthier—Montcalm, will have an opportunity to speak if they wish at that time. When we know when he will be here, we will come back to this question of privilege.

The member for Berthier—Montcalm has the floor, not to speak, but to ask a question I believe.

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to challenge your ruling. I understand that we may not say that the member is not present, but it is because he is not present that we are not proceeding with debate.

We need an assurance that he will be here before Wednesday, because that is when this bill will be debated again. A speaker's ruling is necessary before debate begins. We need an assurance that he will be here tomorrow.

The Speaker: I would love to give it to you, if I could. I am going to do all I can. I will inform the hon. member and he will be asked to come. But as you are aware, I cannot tell the member that he absolutely must be here within a few minutes. The hope is, however, that all hon. members will be present before this matter is dealt with.

I understand what the hon. member has said. Is there anything to add?

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur: Mr. Speaker, I understand you cannot force him to be here, but everyone knows the House resumed this morning.

According to an old saying, those who are absent are always in the wrong. I understand that he is not here this morning, but tomorrow we may have to begin debate, whether he is here or not, so that you may reach a fully informed decision.

• (1210)

The Speaker: As I said, I will do my best to ensure the hon. member is here so that I can hear him.

[English]

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. Earlier today

the Department of Human Resources Development gave a news conference which was astonishing in its degree for the contempt that it showed for this place.

We have a situation where the government is unable to properly account for over \$1 billion in public money. I would strongly urge the Chair to take under advisement that there is a responsibility on the minister to have been here in the House, in her place, prepared to speak to this matter and to make a public statement.

The minister and the Prime Minister have decided to distance themselves from this fiasco by simply taking it outside the House of Commons. In so doing I suggest they destroy centuries of practice which are at the core of our freedoms in this place. The government must be accountable to this parliament, representatives of the people.

The government continues to bypass the House and marginalize the abilities of all members to ask questions and to interact directly with the minister. Ministers have an overriding duty to advise the House of actions which go to the core of the management of public money in this House, which is the sole source of authority for the legal expenditures of public money. By hiding behind a press conference by unelected officials, the same officials who created the situation—

The Speaker: I would rule that it has been our tradition for a number of years that ministers and all members are absolutely free to make interventions in a press gathering or a meeting of any kind.

We have always said that it is better to bring this information to the House, but I suggest to the hon. member that over the course of the next few days he will have ample opportunity in question period and by other means to question the minister involved.

Therefore I would rule that the member does not have a question of privilege.

Mr. Bob Kilger: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. If it might be helpful to you and other members of the House on the issue raised previously involving the member for Wentworth—Burlington, I understand he is on his way to the House and should arrive very shortly.

The Speaker: I thank the member for the information.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Berthier—Montcalm has asked for him to be here. When he is in the House, we are going to continue this question of privilege, perhaps just after Oral Question Period today.

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[Translation]

AN ACT TO GIVE EFFECT TO THE REQUIREMENT FOR CLARITY AS SET OUT IN THE OPINION OF THE SUPREME COURT OF CANADA IN THE QUEBEC SECESSION REFERENCE

The House resumed from December 14, 1999, consideration of the motion that Bill C-20, an act to give effect to the requirement for clarity as set out in the opinion of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Quebec Secession Reference, be read the second time and referred to a committee; and of the amendment.

Ms. Eleni Bakopanos (Ahuntsic, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Fredericton.

This debate is important for the future of all of Canada. It is critical for me, my constituents and the future of our children, and this is why I want to be part of it.

We must ensure that the democratic interests of people in every province are respected, should there be a referendum process that could lead to secession.

For 25 years, I have been fighting the separatists who want to destroy my adopted country. This beautiful country allowed the daughter of immigrants, a Quebecer and a Canadian of Greek origin, to now be a member of this House and to represent her country all over the world.

[English]

The bill calls on the government “to give effect to the requirement for clarity as set out in the opinion of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Quebec secession reference”. If there is one thing that the supreme court insisted on, it was clarity.

Clarity is the cornerstone of any democratic process. Citizens must be in a position to understand the scope and the consequences of what they are voting for, and governments must be clear about the nature of the mandate they have been given. For that to happen what is at stake in a referendum must be clear to all. As the supreme court has pointed out, the political actors have a role to ensure that this requirement for clarity is respected.

• (1215)

It is a bit strange even to have a debate on the need for a clear question in a future referendum. I would have thought it was intuitively obvious, yet the separatists continue to harp on this and reproach us through ads that use children.

When I became a member of the House I never imagined for a moment that one day I would be reproached for caring too much

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about the fundamental component of democracy. After all, clarity is the first thing incumbent on all of us as parliamentarians.

[*Translation*]

The PQ government criticizes our alleged interference in the referendum process. We on this side of the House would by far prefer no referendum at all, since such a process can only be divisive.

However, the PQ government, in particular Premier Bouchard and his Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Joseph Facal, keep repeating that such a referendum will take place during their government's current mandate.

Mr. Facal made it very clear when he said that, in his mind, there was no uncertainty whatsoever, adding that, every day, he works relentlessly to prepare for a winning referendum on sovereignty during his government's current mandate.

In light of the events that took place in Laval this past weekend, however, there seems to be some confusion among separatists. Some say that a referendum will be held during the current mandate, while others say it will be during the next mandate. Be that as it may, these people are arguing amongst themselves. They do not know when a referendum will be held, but they are trying to create, as they have always said, winning conditions, precisely so that they could then have a referendum.

Based on what Mr. Bouchard and the separatists, including their former leader, are saying, we are concerned that a referendum probably will be held.

We think that the question to be asked should be clear, and that Canada could not be divided without a clear majority of the people of a province having opted for separation; without their saying clearly that they want the province to no longer be a part of Canada. This stands to reason.

Let me read the following question, and tell me whether it is clear, because I do not think it is.

The Government of Quebec has made public its proposal to negotiate a new agreement with the rest of Canada, based on the equality of nations; this agreement would enable Quebec to acquire the exclusive power to make its laws, levy its taxes and establish relations abroad—in other words, sovereignty—and, at the same time, to maintain with Canada an economic association including a common currency. No change in political status resulting from these negotiations will be affected without the approval by the people through another referendum; on these terms, do you give the Government of Quebec the mandate to negotiate the proposed agreement between Quebec and Canada?

That is not clear. That was the 1980 question. Now let us look at the 1995 question:

Do you agree that Quebec should become sovereign, after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new economic and political partnership, within the scope of the bill respecting the future of Quebec and of the agreement signed on June 12, 1995?

That is the question with the partnership proposal that Mr. Bouchard later described as skeletal.

[*English*]

The separatist leaders have always tried to have Quebecers believe that the questions asked, both during the 1980 and the 1995 referendums, were clear. Let me clarify that in 1980, and again in 1995, Prime Minister Trudeau and our current Prime Minister clearly indicated that the questions posed to Quebecers were not clear and that they did not feel bound to negotiate because the questions were not clear.

The question in 1995, like the one in 1980, is convincing proof that we need a clear question. A poll conducted shortly before the referendum of October 30, 1995 revealed that 80% of Quebecers who were planning to vote yes believed that if the yes side won Quebec would continue to use the Canadian dollar and that economic ties with Canada would remain unchanged. Fifty per cent believed that they would continue to use the Canadian passport. Twenty-five per cent believed that Quebec would continue to elect members to the federal parliament. Another poll indicated that almost one out of five yes supporters believed that a sovereign Quebec could remain a province of Canada. If that is not cause for confusion I do not know what is.

[*Translation*]

This is the truth of the matter with respect to the so-called clarity of the question in 1995. I would remind those still unconvinced of the ambiguity surrounding that referendum of a statement made by their friend, Jacques Parizeau, in an open letter he sent to the *Devoir* last year. Mr. Parizeau said: "We have often been told that the 1995 question was not clear". He is the one saying so. "It is true, as I have often said, that the question I would like to have asked was the following: Do you want Quebec to become a sovereign or independent country effective—?"

● (1220)

One can be forgiven for wondering why Mr. Parizeau was not interested in this degree of precision when he took up his duties as Premier of Quebec and leader of the yes camp. But I will not get into that today.

[*English*]

Our government is duty bound not to undertake any negotiations that could lead to the separation of a province unless the voters of that province state clearly and democratically that they want to secede from Canada.

When we speak of voters I must speak on behalf of certain Quebecers who are often overlooked, ignored or even ridiculed by certain members of the opposition and by certain separatists in Quebec, unfortunately. I am one of those Quebecers who is not pure laine—not that I know what that means—and who, in the

language of some separatists, should be excluded from their so-called democratic process. I will not quote a number of former leaders of the movement who stated that openly and publicly.

I consider myself a Canadian living in Quebec, whose origins are Greek. I am proud of my origins, but I am also proud of being a Quebecer. Most important, I am particularly honoured and proud that my parents chose Canada as their adopted country.

I, as others who have immigrated from around the world, am Canadian by choice. We have chosen to live in Quebec. Many of us have left countries that have known civil unrest, dictatorship, coup d'état, hypocrisy, abuse and even the denial of basic civil, legal and human rights, the imprisonment and the execution of democratically elected parliamentarians, economic hardship beyond comprehension, and let us not forget the abuse and exploitation of the most vulnerable of our society, our children. That is an abuse to which I will not refer in terms of the ads that are now being promulgated all over Quebec.

It is on behalf of the citizens who sought and found a safe haven in a democratic society, as well as all of my constituents, that I ask my provincial government to respect my rights and to ask a clear question without ambiguity, without nuances and without word playing.

Mr. Bouchard should give all Quebecers the right to choose separation or unity. It is only through clarity that all Quebecers can make an informed decision. I am confident that their choice will be the same as mine, that their democratic rights will be respected by the PQ government and, more important, that future generations of Canadians living in Quebec, such as my daughters, will thank the members of this government and of this House for assuring that Canada continues to remain an open, democratic and just society where everyone can enjoy the same rights and where future immigrants from all over the world will be embraced and offered a safe haven. We are and will continue to be the best country in the world in which to live.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Brien (Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, we can understand the hon. member fighting for her country to be Canada. However, we cannot understand as well her resorting to some rather complicated reasoning for someone who wanted to speak of clarity. We too wish to speak of clarity.

On two occasions, in the previous referendums in Quebec on sovereignty, in 1980 and 1995, reference was made to an association or partnership with Canada. The hon. member who today boasts of belonging to a government of clarity is one of those same people who told us "No, no partnership for us". We subsequently learned that Ontario was making secret preparations to negotiate with Quebec; we also learned in the Supreme Court decision that there would be an obligation to negotiate a partnership. Why were

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these aspects so important? Because we were dealing with people who were not telling the public the truth, that is that there would obviously be negotiations between Quebec and Canada.

Those who are today staunch defenders of clarity were trying to spook people by telling them there would be none. What we wanted was to show that we were sincere and honest, and it was even made part of the question. We were creating an obligation to negotiate even before achieving sovereignty, with a time limit of one year, with a monitoring committee which would reach a decision on this. There was even room in its membership for representatives of the Liberal party of Quebec.

• (1225)

We do not consider ourselves any smarter than the people who are going to vote. People can make decisions. Those about to express their opinion and finding the issue unclear still have the option of saying "No, the question before me is not clear enough". Of those who voted, 49.5% found the question sufficiently clear to say yes and say that they were prepared to support the proposal of sovereignty-association put to them.

Over 90% of voters cast a ballot. Did the people not understand the issues? The fact that a Liberal Party poll has just shown there may be some confusion is not going to convince us that the people did not know what they were voting on. When the people left home to go and vote they knew very well what the issue was, and the proof is that 93% of voters went to vote.

Why do members opposite think they are smarter than the other side of the House and say to us "The people voted yes because they did not understand"? That is not the case. The people understood perfectly well. They understand increasingly that they have an intransigent Liberal federal government before them that has been incapable of offering anything to Quebecers since the referendum and so has decided to take a hard line and prevent them from deciding as they wish the next time.

It will not work, because Quebecers are responsible and intelligent people. They can see through these tricks and they will express their pride fully the next time by saying that they have had it with people who cannot understand and respect them.

Ms. Eleni Bakopanos: Madam Speaker, the only people who do not respect the intelligence and the rights of Quebecers are those who belong to the party sitting on the other side of the House and those who belong to the governing party in Quebec.

They talk about intelligence. Yes, people went out to vote. Thank God, people believe in the importance of their right to vote, and I will always defend that right.

The only people who are afraid are those in the Quebec government who do not dare ask a question such as the one proposed by Mr. Parizeau "Do you want to separate from Canada?" Negotiations are not the issue here.

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We always said and the supreme court said that there will be negotiations if the question is clear and if there is a clear majority. Those are the two things upon which the supreme court insists, even before negotiations are undertaken. However, the members opposite are talking about two questions that were not clear.

This is not a poll by the Liberal Party. It is a general poll that was done before the 1995 referendum, and it showed that people believed that, after a yes vote, they would still be part of Canada and they would still use Canada's currency and have a Canadian passport, things the party opposite and the governing party in Quebec does not want.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, through you, I would like to ask my colleague a question.

The people in Quebec who voted no, the federalists on her side who voted no, did they understand the question?

Ms. Eleni Bakopanos: Madam Speaker, we are back to the same issue. The member asks me if they understood clearly. Yes, because I think federalists—

An hon. member: Are federalists more intelligent?

Ms. Eleni Bakopanos: No, I never said that. Madam Speaker, the hon. member must not put words in my mouth.

An hon. member: You are not being very clear.

Ms. Eleni Bakopanos: I find it unacceptable for the member to put words in my mouth when they are not true. Nobody said that on this side of the House, but maybe on the other side—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Member, but we will resume debate. The hon. member for Fredericton.

[*English*]

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the bill that has been tabled in the House is a crucial issue for Canada, which is why I wish to speak to it today.

Some members opposite, like members of the current Quebec government, are reproaching us for wanting to clarify the referendum process. They say that the Government of Canada wants to take the place of the legislative assembly of a province.

• (1230)

In the time given to me, I will explain why I believe the Government of Canada has a role to play, as stated in the bill, in giving effect to the requirement for clarity as set out in the opinion of the supreme court on August 20, 1998.

It is important to bear in mind what the separatists never wish to speak about. By playing its appropriate role in the referendum debate, the Government of Canada is in no way encroaching on the prerogatives of the legislative assembly of a province. Any province can ask any question it wants. No one is challenging its right to do so.

The bill reiterates that:

...the government of any province has the authority to consult its voters by referendum on any issue and the right to formulate the wording of its referendum question.

Furthermore, the supreme court's opinion stipulates that the obligation to negotiate secession is closely linked to another obligation, that of obtaining a clear majority in support of secession and in response to a clear question.

Paragraph 100 of the opinion reads:

A right and a corresponding duty to negotiate secession cannot be built on an alleged expression of democratic will if the expression of democratic will is, itself, fraught with ambiguities.

That applies "both in terms of the question asked and the support it achieves".

In paragraph 153, the court also specifies:

...it will be for the political actors to determine what constitutes "a clear majority on a clear question" in the circumstances under which a future referendum vote may take place.

These two sections of the opinion are highly significant and are more than sufficient to justify the role the federal government intends to play in clarifying the referendum issue. In fact, it obliges the Government of Canada.

Asking for a clear question and a clear majority does not violate the prerogatives of the national assembly.

The Government of Canada is one of the political actors the court referred to in its opinion. How can the separatists speak or ask us to shirk our constitutional responsibilities when the future of our country is at stake?

Our opponents accuse us of flouting Quebec democracy. We have heard a number of politically inspired accusations against us over time but this particular one raises the bar. Since when is it undemocratic to call for clarity? Our shared democratic heritage demands that citizens really have a say through their votes. All we are asking for is a clear question and a clear majority. Otherwise, how can we determine whether the citizens of a province truly want their province to leave Canada and become an independent state?

What is really undemocratic is asking citizens to vote on a deliberately ambiguous question.

The question must allow the people to clearly state whether or not they want their province to leave Canada and become an independent state.

A question on a mandate to negotiate that does not ask the people to state whether they want their province to cease to be a part of Canada or a question for secession mixed with another option would not allow the people to express their will that their province cease to be part of Canada.

For instance, the 1995 referendum question referred to a new economic and political partnership with Canada, an ill-defined, unrealistic partnership that Mr. Bouchard would later describe as “bare bones”. That question posed as a question on secession is patently undemocratic. It was not exactly a masterpiece of clarity.

I am sure our opponents will not accept my judgment on this. Maybe they will believe the polls conducted at the time of the referendum. I note specifically the poll that revealed that one in four yes voters believed they were voting for an option that proposed that Quebec would remain a Canadian province. One sovereignist voter in four.

To give rise to such confusion, the 1995 question certainly did not permit voters to clearly express their will for their province to cease to be a part of Canada.

When we look at facts like that, we get a better appreciation of why the federal government—to use the language of the supreme court decision—is an “actor” in ensuring that a referendum on separation, if we were ever to come to such a sorry state of affairs, would have to be held in an atmosphere of clarity.

• (1235)

There are other reasons for setting out the circumstances under which the Government of Canada would negotiate around a referendum result.

Premier Bouchard has never renounced holding another referendum during his mandate, so we need to be prepared. We need to clarify these issues, not when the referendum campaign is in full swing but well beforehand.

This referendum obsession is still a clear and present danger. Premier Bouchard said so on November 9. Quebec’s intergovernmental affairs minister, Mr. Facal, has suggested that the Quebec government may override the supreme court opinion. Mr. Bouchard has also said that the Government of Canada’s willingness to have the supreme court’s requirement for clarity respected is a sign of bad faith on our part and opens the door to a unilateral declaration of independence.

In all likelihood, it was the former Quebec premier, Jacques Parizeau, who got it right when he pointed out on November 30 how important the allusion was to a unilateral declaration of independence. The translation reads “He’s really opened the door. You have to understand how important Mr. Bouchard’s statement

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really is on that. It’s really something, that statement”. He added that he himself had never been that clear. Not only is there a real threat of another referendum, there is also the real possibility of a unilateral declaration of independence.

If there was ever an issue that we on this side would gladly stop speaking about it is the prospect of another referendum for the secession of a province. The Quebec separatist leaders will not let it die. It is the first article on their political platform. They are obsessed by it. That is why they rejected the Prime Minister’s proposal to stop talking referendum.

We would like to address other priorities but we are duty bound to ensure that the supreme court’s requirement for clarity does not fall by the wayside. Our respect for Quebecers requires us to assume our responsibility in that regard.

We did not start the fire and we are not the ones perpetuating this sad state of affairs. We are not the ones trying to break up the country. The separatists leaders are doing that. As long as we have to argue with them to ensure the unity and the progress of the country, we will continue to promote the democratic tradition that is one of the great achievements of Quebec and of all Canadians.

With regard to the bill itself, to those who say “not now”, I say “if not now, when?”

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Paul Marchand (Québec East, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have listened with a great deal of interest to my hon. colleague’s remarks. He talked mainly about the requirement for clarity and democratic principles.

My feeling is that the main purpose of this bill is not so much to establish the need for a clear question, or the respect for democracy, but rather to strike a blow against Quebec and its citizens’ interests. It spearheads a plan B that involves making no concession whatsoever to Quebec. The government does not want to have a clear question and a democratic process—we always had that—but to make sure the next referendum is unacceptable for English Canada. That is the purpose of this bill.

The government wants to make both the question and the majority in favour of that question unacceptable. In other words, it is a direct attack against Quebec. The government is setting rules that will make any referendum unacceptable in English speaking Canada so that it will not pass in Quebec.

It is a bit like going into somebody’s living room and telling him how to should place the furniture. It is invasion. It is a show of strength. The requirement for clarity has nothing to do with this.

In the past, the referendum questions have been clear, and people in Quebec understood quite well what it was all about. This bill is an insult to Quebecers. It treats them like ignorants.

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Why this show of strength? Why force on Quebecers referendum rules without respecting their basic rights and their democratic rights?

• (1240)

[English]

Hon. Andy Scott: Madam Speaker, I will address two or three points made by my colleague. First, he said that the last question in the 1995 referendum was in fact clear. I suspect that is one of the reasons why we need to take a role in this. I do not think there would be a consensus that it was a clear question at all. In fact, it was anything but clear.

I also remind my colleague that the legislation actually supports the notion that the province has the right to conduct such a referendum and frame its own question. That is contained within the bill. All provinces have the democratic right to conduct their own affairs and express their own will.

As the supreme court has stated, the exercise and the expression of that will can only be achieved if the question is clear and the majority is clear. If 51.1% is a clear majority, then what is an unclear majority?

The government's bill is an important recognition of the right of any province to speak its mind in terms of its will. Our condition of negotiation subsequent to that is to make sure that it is based on a clear question and a clear majority, which what democracy is all about.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is always disappointing to hear members opposite say that the Quebec separatist leaders will never let it die.

The supreme court decision he has just cited said that the sovereigntist project was a legitimate one and that we were within our rights to promote it. They have never been willing to admit that our project is legitimate. So legitimate is it that there are 45 sovereigntist members in this House. Logic dictates that the House recognize this legitimacy, which is the legitimacy recognized by the Quebec people, who are entitled to decide, in a percentage of 50% plus one, what their future and political status will be.

[English]

Hon. Andy Scott: Madam Speaker, the bill specifically recognizes the legitimacy of this movement by stating that any province can ask any question it wishes, but it would seek clarity on both the question and the majority. This is a significant act for a democratic country like Canada to propose. As I am sure the hon. member knows, many countries would not allow that.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is with considerable regret that I rise today to speak on a bill that contemplates the potential breakup of Canada.

Having recently participated in the NDP Social Democratic Forum on the Future of Canada, a constructive and thoughtful process of consultation and reflection on the future of our federation, I would much prefer, as I am sure many members of the House would prefer, to be making the case for the many positive proposals that the forum put forward not simply to strengthen national unity but more significantly to improve our democracy and the way that Canada works for all its citizens.

My regret also stems from my firm belief that Canada could have done better than this, that the situation we are now in was avoidable. While I believe that the government is now doing in part what needs to be done, I begin by saying that I hold the Liberals, who are now the government, responsible in no small way for where we are now.

The current Prime Minister has had a long career, all of it characterized by a lack of sensitivity to the appropriate constitutional aspirations of the Quebec people within Canada. This was most clearly and most tragically apparent in the nature of his opposition to the Meech Lake accord, the failure of which led to the formation of the Bloc Québécois and the resurgence of separatism in Quebec.

It also led, in the context of the subsequent and unsuccessful Charlottetown accord, to the rise of the then nascent Reform Party and therefore a political situation in which a meaningful plan A is now a faint hope or at least a plan A which addresses the desire of many Quebecers for some kind of constitutional recognition of the special, distinct or unique nature of Quebecers as a people or a society within Canada.

• (1245)

Devolution of power is one thing and this has happened extensively in recent years in training, housing, immigration and other areas. However, this administrative approach to addressing Quebec-Canada relations not only has no effect on separatists, not surprisingly, it does not address the most important needs of Quebec federalists either, all the while weakening the presence and the role of the federal government in the rest of Canada. Likewise, the resolutions passed by the House after the 1995 referendum having to do with distinct society and the Quebec veto came too late and too much like deathbed repentance after the near death experience of the 1995 referendum, and they still do not constitute constitutional change.

And so Quebecers may be asked to choose between staying in a Canada that is now unwilling or unable to do certain important things, or becoming a separate country. If they are asked this question they will be asked to make the choice by a provincial

government that is committed to Quebec becoming a separate country in any event. I say this because I take it as self-evident that if Quebec federalists were in power in Quebec City, if Jean Charest was in power in Quebec City, Quebecers would not be having such a question put to them.

Not all Quebecers are committed to the view that if Canada does not meet each and every desire they have for constitutional change their response should be to form a separate country. There are many Quebecers who may be unhappy with the way things have worked out in recent years but who are still committed to working out those problems within the context of a united Canada.

It is to those Quebecers that in many respects I feel this bill is directed, so they do not become, along with other Quebecers, the object of a political process which sets in motion a process toward secession without there being such things as a clear majority and a clear question.

We have to deal with the situation we have before us, with the real live historical possibility of another referendum. We do not know exactly when it will come. It appears that Mr. Bouchard does not know exactly when it will come. He appears more uncertain as the days and weeks go by.

How we got here is not the issue any more. The issue now before us is twofold. The first issue is whether Quebecers, in any subsequent referendum that a separatist Quebec government sees as an instrument of its separation strategy, will be presented with a clear question so they know exactly what they are choosing. The second issue before us is whether Quebecers, if they choose to leave Canada in response to a clear question, should do so by some standard of "clear majority". These two issues correspond to the two conditions laid down by the Supreme Court of Canada as the conditions that would have to be met if the rest of Canada is to be obliged to negotiate secession after any referendum.

As to referendums on non-secessionist questions, these would continue to be possible and would continue to have whatever effect they might have, depending on the level of support that such non-secessionist proposals might have in Quebec and in the rest of Canada. There is no need to incorporate the possibility of such referendums into this bill, as has been suggested by some. The possibility of such referendums is not endangered by the clarity bill.

Referendums on various forms of partnerships and associations would still be possible, but they would not trigger negotiations that had anything to do with, or could lead to, secession. That is the difference between the kind of referendum and referendum question that this bill addresses and other referendums and referendum questions that may be possible.

Those other kinds of referendum questions, which do not have to do with secession, could trigger whatever kinds of negotiations that

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might be politically possible in any given historical context. Such non-secessionist referendum proposals would presumably come as an aid to the normal process of constitutional amendment, whereby a province like Quebec, or for that matter any other province, could demonstrate the unity of its population or the strength of its political change by having a referendum.

• (1250)

The clarity bill does not damage nor does it replace the ordinary process of constitutional change and amendment. The clarity bill addresses what would need to happen for there to be extraordinary constitutional negotiations and extraordinary constitutional amendments leading to the secession of Quebec or some other province.

Canadians listening to this debate may notice that I have assumed the right of Quebecers to freely and democratically determine their own future. Since the founding of the New Democratic Party in 1961, New Democrats have affirmed Quebec's right to self-determination. The NDP is proud to have been the first federal party to recognize that right.

Recently at our August 1999 convention we adopted a paper which advocated recognizing Quebecers as a people, not in the ethnic and therefore inappropriate nationalistic sense of being a people, but rather as a way of recognizing that Quebecers form one of the two linguistic and cultural realities that most Canadians live and move and have their social being within. This non-ethnic understanding of a people which the NDP proposes to recognize corresponds with what some observers have called civic nationalism.

In itself, though, Quebec's right to self-determination, or the self-determination of the Quebec people, is just an abstraction. It is just a principle if it is not fleshed out in the context of other democratic values, such as the rule of law, individual and aboriginal rights, constitutionalism and federalism. As with any other individual or collective right, Quebec's right to self-determination must be given concrete expression in a clear, fair and democratic process that is consistent with all of the competing but equally legitimate democratic principles.

It is precisely this challenge that was taken up in the 1998 supreme court reference on Quebec's right to secede from Canada. In that opinion the supreme court offered some key advice, particularly with respect to the rights and obligations of the federal parliament in any secession bid.

In its opinion the supreme court made two key points. First, it affirmed the democratic legitimacy of Quebec's right to self-determination even though the Canadian constitution contains no explicit process for the secession of a province. The court even recognized that a democratic referendum would be a legitimate mechanism through which Quebecers could express their desire to secede. On this question the court said:

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A clear majority vote in Quebec on a clear question in favour of secession would confer democratic legitimacy on the secession initiative which all of the other participants in Confederation would have to recognize.

This was a legitimate victory for my sovereigntist colleagues in the House who for too long have been taunted by some who have threatened to not negotiate in any event.

However, the court in its opinion also made a second equally important point: that Quebec's right to self-determination must be exercised within the Canadian constitutional framework. The court said:

Quebec could not, despite a clear referendum result, purport to invoke a right of self-determination to dictate the terms of a proposed secession to the other parties to the federation. The democratic vote, by however strong a majority, would have no legal effect on its own and could not push aside the principles of federalism and the rule of law, the rights of individuals and minorities, or the operation of democracy in the other provinces or in Canada as a whole.

This was a legitimate victory for those who believed that no referendum by itself would enable Quebec to act unilaterally and without regard for the views of the rest of Canada.

We see in the supreme court opinion that Quebec's right to self-determination must be respected by its partners in confederation, but that that right must be exercised with respect for the other democratic values that have guided us for more than 130 years. In striking a balance between these two key principles the supreme court specified a clear role for the federal parliament in any secession bid.

As a key actor in the constitutional amendment procedure, parliament has an obligation to negotiate in good faith should it be confronted with a clear will to secede, and it has an obligation to represent the rights and interests of all Canadians in any such negotiating process.

The bill before us today sets out an orderly process by which parliament would discharge these responsibilities.

• (1255)

We in the NDP are supporting this bill in principle at second reading because we recognize the role that parliament must play in setting the terms under which the rest of Canada represented in parliament would negotiate secession.

As one of the negotiating parties to any possible secession, parliament has a right to say what it will regard as sufficient to trigger its own willingness to negotiate secession. This right should not be put into question any more than the right of the national assembly in Quebec to conduct a referendum and to ask any questions it wants should be put into question. These two rights coexist. They are not in conflict with each other.

The only thing that should be debated here is whether parliament, in exercising that right, has set the bar too high on the issues of clarity and majority or whether the clarity bill acts in some other way that can be judged as unfair or prejudicial to the freedom of the Quebec people or the rights of minorities in Quebec such as the aboriginal community. This is what the committee process should be about.

At the end of the day we believe it will be in everyone's interests, both in Quebec and in the rest of Canada, to have a clear and transparent framework for defining a secession bid and for dealing with a secession bid should we unfortunately be presented with one.

It is particularly important to establish in advance the conditions under which secession negotiations would be triggered. The supreme court identified two key conditions for a referendum to trigger secession negotiations: a clear question and a clear majority.

New Democrats agree that a clear question is a necessary condition before any secession negotiations begin because with an ambiguous question it would be impossible to determine whether a referendum result truly reflected a desire to secede. Surely this is a democratic principle and cannot be construed as an attack on democratic principles that an unambiguous question should be required in order to create the conditions for something as serious as separation.

It should be emphasized again that the bill's requirement for a clear question to trigger secession talks would not in any way prevent Quebec from holding a referendum on any kind of question it desires. It simply means that only referendums that are clearly about secession could impose an obligation on the federal parliament to enter secession negotiations. That seems only fair and reasonable to me.

However, we do have some concerns about the current drafting of the bill's provisions with respect to a clear majority. That is why we have offered our support in principle for the bill at second reading, but will no doubt be proposing amendments to address our concerns when the bill goes to committee for more detailed study and consultation.

In addition to the bill's definition of a clear majority, we also have concerns about the role and rights of aboriginal peoples and the excessive role given to the unelected Senate.

On the notion of clear majority, the bill does not specify a particular threshold. Instead, it follows the supreme court suggestion that after a referendum result parliament must make a qualitative judgment, taking into account the size of the majority, the turnout and any other factors relevant to determining the true meaning of the result.

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While we can appreciate the court's desire to avoid oversimplifying the issue, the process proposed in the bill could permit an irresponsible parliament to ignore a clear majority in favour of secession by arbitrarily establishing an unreasonably high threshold after the votes are counted, the so-called moving goal posts after the game. We are concerned about that. We look forward to hearing from Canadians about how we might improve the bill to avoid or minimize this potential problem.

New Democrats are also concerned that the rights of aboriginal peoples are not adequately protected in the bill. Existing constitutional protection for aboriginal rights would clearly be threatened by the secession of a province.

The bill specifies that the question of aboriginal rights would need to be addressed—whatever that means—but specifies no basic level of protection for these rights that would need to be achieved before parliament agrees to the secession of a province.

The bill also identifies various actors whose views parliament must take into consideration in its deliberations on a secession bid, but aboriginal peoples are not among those specifically identified.

Recent practice and natural justice suggest that aboriginal peoples should be involved. New Democrats will be actively searching for ways to ensure both that aboriginal peoples are meaningfully involved and that stronger protection is provided for their rights.

• (1300)

The bill's failure to involve aboriginal peoples is particularly problematic, some might even say offensive, when one considers the prominent role it gives to the Senate, or to the other place as we are required to say in this place. The bill calls on parliament to take into consideration the views of the Senate in determining whether or not there is a clear question and a clear majority.

New Democrats have long argued that an unelected, unaccountable Senate has no place in a modern democracy and so it seems to us that there is simply no justification for giving such an undemocratic institution an important role in a process concerning a serious issue like secession. After all, the primary objective of the bill must be to establish a framework that is in both fact and perception fair and democratic. Giving a prominent role to the Senate clearly does not help in this regard. One can only wonder what the Liberals were thinking when they came up with this.

While I raise these concerns about the current drafting of the bill, I want to emphasize that New Democrats will go into the committee stage with open minds. We invite Canadians to share their suggestions for improving the bill in the three areas I have identified and indeed in any other areas they may want to raise and bring to the attention of the committee. We also call on the Liberals

to join us in a sincere effort to improve the bill so that Canadians can have the most fair and democratic framework possible for dealing with the gravely serious issue of secession.

Like many Canadians, I have been concerned that the Liberal Party may be using the bill to serve narrow partisan interests. It would not be the first time in Canadian history that votes have been sought by virtue of a so-called tough on Quebec strategy. The Liberal Party since 1968 has profited greatly from such a strategy on occasion. The Reform Party is heir to the same tradition, a tradition that the united alternative, or CCRAP, or CRCAP, or whatever, seems to want to distance itself from.

I say with great pride that the NDP has never been attracted to any such strategy. We do what we do now because we believe it to be necessary. We take no joy in it. We loathe the destructive family feud that goes on in this House between the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois. From time to time we are called to take a stand on some matter of principle. From time to time in doing so we have voted with the Bloc on such matters as they pertain to Quebec and have been attacked in some of our home constituencies for catering to separatists and siding with separatists. We have done it when we thought the Bloc was right. On this issue we find the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs to be in the right despite the often arrogant and unhelpful way he goes about his business.

Finally, I want to reiterate the comments of my leader. She closed her speech on this bill by urging the government and parliament not to allow work on this bill to distract them from the critically important task of building a better Canada, one that meets the hopes, dreams, needs and aspirations of our citizens so that the legislation we are debating today will never be required.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate, following the speech by the NDP member.

I would like to quote from an article written by Manon Cornéliier, which appeared in the English press. The headline reads "Progressive Canadians Opposed".

The article states as follows: "Support for the federal clarity bill is not unanimous outside Quebec, particularly among those who usually back the New Democratic Party. Over 80 intellectuals representing unions and activist groups have already indicated their support for an open letter denouncing the project launched by a Laurentian University professor, Gary Kinsman, and I quote: 'We are calling for the withdrawal of the clarity bill and an end to threats and intimidation with respect to the right of Quebecers to decide their own future'. We are also affirming the right to

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self-determination of the aboriginal peoples in Quebec and in the rest of Canada”.

A bit further on, the article mentions a source of concern. According to these same intellectuals who usually back the New Democratic Party “This authoritarian bill is a source of concern for anyone defending democratic rights because it denies Quebecers the right to decide their own future”.

• (1305)

They denounce the fact that the Parliament of Canada will reserve the right to decide on the clarity of the referendum question and result and they say: “This means that parliament is taking away the historically recognized right of Quebecers to make their own decisions”. I would like to hear what the member has to say about this.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I am familiar with the statement from which the hon. member is quoting and I have to say that I think the people who signed that are wrong. I do not understand how they could claim that what is happening here is an authoritarian attempt to prevent Quebecers from determining their own future. All it is saying is that Quebecers are a part of Canada now, and if they determine their future in a way that results in separating from the rest of Canada, that the rest of Canada through its parliament has some right to say through its parliament what the conditions would be in the context of which negotiations for secession would commence. I do not equate that with any attempt to prevent Quebecers from determining their own future and if the people who signed this statement do, then I profoundly disagree with them.

I do not think that Quebec’s self-determination is something that has to be defended by defending each and every position taken by a sovereignist government in Quebec City, or for that matter defending each and every sensitivity of Quebec nationalists, whether they be sovereignists or federalists.

We in the rest of Canada are entitled to our own view on this matter. I think that parliament has a right assigned to it by the supreme court as one of the actors that must determine what constitutes a clear question and a clear majority. Parliament has that right. This bill is a way of exercising that right.

If Quebecers vote for a clear question for secession and they get their clear majority, the negotiations will take place, Quebec will no longer be a part of Canada and my friends in the Bloc Quebecois will be happy. They will have their own separate country. Are they really saying to us that that is not possible under this legislation? Because if that is the claim they are making, I think that is patently false.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic, BQ): Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona delivered a rather well-thought-out message regarding certain issues, especially the danger—and he said his party would be on the lookout—that the government might make a change after the vote, by raising the passing mark.

For example, if we got 52% it might decide, after the vote, that we needed 53%. The hon. member also talked about the need to respect aboriginal people and about the role given to the Senate, a non-elected house that is accountable to no one.

There are three very important aspects in Bill C-20 that bother the New Democratic Party, yet the hon. member says he will support this legislation.

I would like the NDP member to tell me whether, in his opinion, a result of 50% plus one is acceptable in a democracy and, if not, what would be the acceptable threshold.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Madam Speaker, the member refers to the controversy over 50% plus one.

Certainly one of the things I understood the Bloc and many others to be worried about at a certain point when we did not know what the clarity bill would look like was that the government might be coming in with a bill that would actually and definitively set the threshold higher than 50% plus one. The bill does not do that. The bill says that a qualitative judgment has to be made.

I was saying in my remarks that I think the merits of the court’s finding that there needs to be a qualitative judgment made after a referendum need to be held in balance with the legitimate concern that my colleague and I have that this somehow could be used, to use the metaphor I used earlier, to move the goalposts during or after the game.

• (1310)

It is not just a question of 50% plus one, it is also a question of other things that an irresponsible parliament or an irresponsible government might try to do after a referendum result that it did not like. I would remind the member, and this corresponds to the supreme court judgment, that if a parliament or a government tried to act in a way that was clearly moving the goalposts, that was clearly an abuse of that requirement for a qualitative judgment, that a Quebec to which such an injustice was being done would have the right then I believe, and I think the supreme court said this, to appeal to the international community that the Canadian government in that context was not acting in good faith and not respecting the findings of the supreme court.

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It is not as if there would be no recourse in such a circumstance. The question is whether we want to set a numerical threshold going into the vote. I understand the member wants to do that. I think there are some good arguments for doing that. I want to hear those arguments, but I also want to hear the arguments against it. I am happy so far that the government has not done what we were worried it would do, which is to come in and say that it has to be 60%, or 55%, or whatever because that certainly would have been a mistake.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Madam Speaker, we take note of the reservations expressed by the New Democratic Party regarding the bill.

I have two questions for our colleague. First, is it the NDP's opinion that the current clause dealing with the issue of majority might lead to arbitrary measures on the part of the government and the House of Commons and, second, does the NDP wish that the committee proceedings be as open as possible?

Does the New Democratic Party want the committee to travel across Canada and Quebec to hear individuals and groups on Bill C-20?

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Madam Speaker, what I had to say previous to the question asked by the hon. member addresses the first part of his question. With respect to the committee process, of course we would like to see it as open as possible and we would certainly support the view that the committee should travel. It should go to Quebec. It should go to other parts of Canada. This is an important national debate. In my judgment it is an unfortunate one but one that it appears we need to have. We would certainly support the view that the committee should travel and should seek as wide a consultation as possible.

I would hope that within Quebec we will see the same variety of opinion that a colleague of the member who just spoke was eager to point out existed in the rest of Canada with respect to this bill.

Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this is a great and historic debate and I am very honoured to be part of it today. I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Canada is very important to me. It is important to my constituents. It is important, I would hope, to all members in the House and to people around the world. Although we have differences, Canada is place where people can live in harmony with and tolerance of one another. It is the envy of many countries worldwide because as

a nation we can agree to disagree when and if necessary and yet coexist. We can work together and share values and resources.

Secession would be traumatic for all involved and it would certainly be difficult to negotiate. Bill C-20 which I support is intended to protect the rights of all Canadians if we ever have to tackle such an issue, and I hope we will not.

• (1315)

It provides a means to ensure that a decision which would have profound and irreversible consequences such as secession would be made only as a result of asking a clear and unequivocal question.

Canada is recognized as a model of openness and tolerance where disputes can be resolved through debate without recourse to force. This means that we can engage in discussion at many levels in our country and our lives and well-being are not threatened because of the points of view we express.

In this country it is possible for populations of different cultures and languages to respect each other and yet live together in harmony. This is not the case in many areas of the world where identity based decisions result in violence. One can only think of what has recently happened in the Balkans in the last number of years.

We must continue to express tolerance and openness toward each other, not only to serve ourselves but to serve as an example to other populations around the world that face ethnic, linguistic or identity based tensions.

Our ability to work out our differences has been recognized by our neighbour to the south. On October 8, 1999, President Bill Clinton, after having said that the United States values its relationship with a strong and united Canada, remarked as follows:

The partnership you have built between people of diverse backgrounds and governments at all levels is what...democracy must be about, as people all over the world move around more, mix with each other more, and live in close proximity more.

Here then is recognition of the success we have achieved as a great multicultural federation able to face its current challenges and those that the world as a whole will have to face more and more often in the future. We have done it and we are successful at it. Here is recognition of the fact that our country can be a role model for other states that are emerging or evolving, for states that are starting out on the path of democracy.

Ours is a large and diversified country where each province and territory can solve problems by finding and implementing its own solutions. We have learned from one another over the years. At times we share solutions and best practices and we can also choose to be distinct.

If we have differences, for example, they need not be irreconcilable, leading to the strife as is the case in many parts of the world.

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They can be examined and we can find common ground that suits all. As our federation evolves we must strengthen partnerships among all levels of government and ensure that all Canadians benefit from the strong economy we are enjoying now and that their rights are protected no matter where they live in this great country.

We have a federal government and provinces that are strong in their areas of jurisdiction. We respect certain principles and have mechanisms and programs in place to ensure that all Canadians enjoy the same rights and have access to a comparable quality of life whether they live in British Columbia, Nova Scotia, or any and all points in between.

Where regional differences create disadvantages we try to make up for them, most notably through our equalization program. Canadians know this and appreciate the choices and mobility afforded them by those programs. In 1996 our Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs said:

That's what Canada is, and that's why it is respected and envied by so many on the international scene. It is the country that gives the best guarantee that human beings will be treated like human beings, with full dignity.

Truer words were never spoken. There are other ways to solve our problems and work out our differences. At the federal and provincial levels our first ministers and their officials meet and negotiate regularly. We see finance, health, industry and agriculture, to name a few, trying to address collectively the problems people in our society face.

Our courts also resolve disputes, examine issues and then render decisions and opinions based on fact and law. Elections that we often take for granted in a democracy are held and allow citizens to express their views on larger issues which affect them no matter where they live in Canada. This is the ultimate way we work out our differences, but it has allowed our country to thrive and to prosper. We are stronger as a result.

• (1320)

With Bill C-20 the federal government wants to ensure that we can handle the most difficult issue a country could ever have to face: the possibility of its own breakup. However, the country would have to go through this while making sure that the rights of all Canadians are protected. That is important to note.

Bill C-20 ensures that if Canadians are asked if they want their province to separate from Canada it is through a question they can understand clearly. We live in a democracy. Bill C-20 is our democratic response to the talk of secession.

In 1980 and again in 1995 the Quebec government asked its citizens questions that could have led to the separation of Quebec. If Quebecers are asked again, the federal government wants to

ensure and needs to ensure that they know what they are being asked and what the consequences of their answers would be.

What would the impact be to Canadians, to Quebecers and even to the world if Quebec were to separate from Canada? A great nation would no longer exist, and that would be a tragedy. Our example to the world showing that minorities can coexist and flourish would be lost forever. Secession would break up Canada but it would also result in the division of Quebec society itself, a rift that history has taught us could last no more than a generation. Disagreements would continue for many years, long after formal negotiations would have been concluded.

In his speech opening the 18th Sommet de la Francophonie in Moncton on September 3, 1999, the French president, Mr. Jacques Chirac, expressed his admiration for our country. He said:

[*Translation*]

It is so symbolic to be here in Canada, a country which searches for and comes up with ways to live together in a peaceful and tolerant fashion. Today, Canada, this land of first nations, francophones and anglophones, provides an example of a cultural and linguistic diversity that is not only accepted but also valued.

[*English*]

The Canada we now live in would no longer be. The once exemplary federation decentralized and tolerant would now be a broken nation. It would be a major setback for the coexistence of minorities worldwide.

In the opinion on unilateral secession rendered by the Supreme Court of Canada on August 20, 1998, it was stated that only clear support for secession would give rise to an obligation to undertake constitutional negotiations should Quebecers decide to separate from Canada.

Support for separation would need to be expressed by a clear majority in favour of secession, answering a clear question on the very secession point. The question that would be put to voters would have to be straightforward and clear. It could not cloak a separation from Canada and its grave consequences in wordiness thereby allaying any confusion. That is totally unacceptable. Bill C-20 will ensure that facing the possibility of separation Canadians would know what they are being asked and would know how the government will uphold democracy.

In conclusion, the bill is an enormously important one. It is of historic consequence and one that all of us should support.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Paul Marchand (Québec East, BQ): Madam Speaker, I was very much intrigued by what my colleague had to say, because it contains contradictions.

The hon. member describes Canada as a success story. How could Canada be a success story if one quarter of the population,

namely Quebec, has been trying in vain for more than 30 years to obtain some recognition of its distinctiveness?

It can now be said that half of this distinct people wants to separate from English Canada, precisely because it has always been denied recognition this obvious and fundamental fact.

• (1325)

How can Canada be said to be a success story when the federal government just introduced a bill whose main purpose is to threaten Quebecers, frighten them and force upon them what we already know will be unacceptable criteria for a referendum?

For instance, the bill requires the question to be clear while we all know very well that the questions asked in previous referendums were very clear. The 1995 question was “Do you agree that Quebec should become sovereign?” This is a rather clear question. If questions asked in the past were clear then obviously future questions will always be seen as unacceptable by English Canada.

I ask the hon. member the following: how can he truly and seriously declare that Canada is a success story when we have reached the point where the federal government has introduced a bill that threatens Quebec and in a way deprives the Quebec people of some of its rights and has every appearance of an antidemocratic measure?

[*English*]

Mr. Lynn Myers: Madam Speaker, it never ceases to amaze me that the party opposite says things like frighten and intimidate and tries to pretend that somehow Quebec has been a victim in all this when the reality is that Canada is a federation that works.

Time and time again not only have we proven it here at home but people around the world say that we are a country second to none because of our tolerance, our compassion, our assistance to others, and the ability to allow linguistic, cultural and religious groups to maintain what they believe and think is important. We have done that in a very meaningful way which allows the people of Quebec and all parts of Canada to live in a way and in a sense of harmony that is unparalleled in the world.

To the member opposite I say it is quite frivolous to hear that, but I want to directly answer his comment about the Government of Quebec question and how clear it was. Let me for the record say that in the 1980 referendum this was the question:

The Government of Québec has made public its proposal to negotiate a new agreement with the rest of Canada, based on the equality of nations; this agreement would enable Québec to acquire the exclusive power to make its laws, administer its taxes, and establish relations abroad—in other words, sovereignty—and at the same time, to maintain with Canada an economic association including a common currency; any change in political status resulting from these negotiations will be submitted to the people through a referendum; on these terms, do you agree to give the Government of

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Québec the mandate to negotiate the proposed agreement between Québec and Canada?

Oui or non. Do you think for one minute, Madam Speaker, that is a clear question? I do not think so. When the member opposite tries to hoodwink us by saying it is, I say it ain't. It is not, and he should reread the question to find out and then he would know.

Mr. Hec Clouthier (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a delight for me to be here today to speak about an issue of grave importance to all members of Canadian society.

Something is happening in Ottawa. Something is happening in my great riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke. Something is happening in every province throughout this great country of ours. In a way that something makes me a bit sad because if it is not properly addressed, if it is not looked into, if it is not handled in the right way, it could lead to the breakup of the greatest country in the world, our country Canada.

• (1330)

My duty as a federal member of parliament is to articulate the concerns of my constituents, to be their advocate. But as a federal member of parliament I have an even greater obligation. That obligation is to our country Canada and to the protection and preservation of national unity.

Each and every one of us in this room must be invigorated by our triumphs of the past, by the magic of the present and by our hopes and dreams of the future. Canada has triumphed over much adversity to be in the situation we are in. It is the year 2000 and we are recognized as the greatest country in the world in which to live, work and raise a family. There is a magic in the air. We are in a new millennium. There is a new command, to dare to dream about a fantastic future for our country that is strong, united and free. With Bill C-20 unity will reign supreme. This bill will be a blueprint.

An hon. member: Oh, oh.

Mr. Hec Clouthier: Madam Speaker, you can see that I have piqued the interest of members of the opposition. They know that I speak the truth.

That is one thing that will be front and centre in the clarity act. Veracity will reign supreme. If any province or territory in this country, not only the province of Quebec, wants to embark on the vacuous voyage to independence, truthfulness, honesty and clarity will be front and centre. Not only the government but the Canadian people and all parties opposite have clearly said that without that there will be negotiations. The truth of the matter is that the bill we are proposing is going to bring clarity to the future of this great country of ours. Let us look—

An hon. member: What about the billion dollars?

Mr. Hec Clouthier: Madam Speaker, do not worry about it. I am used to the heckling.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member but I am having a hard time listening to what is being said. With all due respect please listen to the hon. member.

Mr. Hec Clouthier: Madam Speaker, the simple truth of the matter is that some of the people who have been advocating separation in the province of Quebec have not shown clarity in what could happen if the people of Quebec ever embarked on that voyage.

Let us take a look at a few of the situations, such as currency. My colleagues from the Bloc Québécois have said that if something ever did happen, and God help us that this does not happen, they would still use the Canadian dollar. There is nothing preventing them from doing that. The Bahamas use the American dollar. But think about this. They say they want to be maîtres chez nous, masters in their own house. How can they be masters of their own house if they relinquish power to the most important thing, which is their monetary system? Think about it.

The member of parliament who is our Prime Minister comes from the province of Quebec. The finance minister is a member of parliament from the province of Quebec. They are putatively the two most powerful people in the government and they come from the province of Quebec. They can defend the interests of Quebec and the interests of other provinces with regard to the monetary situation.

Look what happened when former premier René Lévesque gained power and said that they were leaving, quitting and separating from Canada. There was a mass exodus of businesses from the province of Quebec. Why? Because business people want stability. Where there is talk of separation and independence people will not invest money. My colleague from Frontenac—Mégantic has a lot of money but perhaps he does not want to invest in Canada.

• (1335)

With regard to the province of Quebec, some people are saying that Quebec would automatically be a member of the United Nations, NATO, GATT and NAFTA. That is not necessarily true. One has to negotiate oneself into these organizations.

The United States has made it abundantly clear that Quebec would not automatically be in NAFTA. Think about that. Without the protection of the North American Free Trade Agreement the milk marketing board in the province of Quebec would be obliterated. There is enough surplus milk in the state of New York to flood Quebec. Tell the milk producers in the province of Quebec that it would be all over. They would not be able to sell any more milk because they would be undercut.

On citizenship, one thing which really puzzles me is that they say they will still retain their Canadian citizenship. That is like

saying, "I am leaving home but I am taking the MasterCard and the family compact with me". Why in heaven's name would they want to do something as offensive as separate yet retain the citizenship of the country which they were separating from? Because the Canadian passport is recognized as the best passport in the entire world. That will not automatically happen. That is something the country will have a say in.

On duplication, one of their famous mantras is "We can do things cheaper because we would be our own country". Let us take a look at the Charlottetown accord of 1992. The province of Quebec held its own referendum as opposed to the rest of the country which held the national referendum. Afterward the cost of the referendum was figured out. In the province of Quebec it cost about \$6.63 per person for its own referendum on the Charlottetown accord. For the rest of the country it was about \$4.83. So much for doing things cheaper on its own. It is just not in the cards, and that was clearly evident.

Now on to transfer payments. I had a real job out in the real world before I got elected as a member of parliament. I was in business. I believed it was good business if I gave someone \$10 that they would give me back \$11, \$12, or even \$10.01. With the transfer payments, the people of Quebec should be made aware that they send the money to Ottawa. Somehow they have the convoluted idea that we just throw the money away and they get nothing in return. The opposite is true. They get over \$3 billion a year more in transfer payments from Ottawa than they send to Ottawa.

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Hec Clouthier: I know the hon. member over there is a little upset because the truth hurts.

I am a product of an Irish mother and a French Canadian father.

[*Translation*]

My son, Tyler, studies in a French school in Pembroke, Ontario. He speaks French better than I do. I speak French like a logger. In my heart, I am proud of my French culture and heritage but I am even prouder to be a Canadian.

[*English*]

In this debate we must remember that being polite and gracious is not a sign of weakness. We should be exploring the problems that unite us instead of deploring the problems that divide us.

We as Canadians who are strong in unity can and will face any challenge. We as Canadians strong in unity will march forward vanquishing any naysayer who stands in the glorious path of liberty, prosperity and most of all unity. I say this to my colleagues in the House, venez avec moi mes amis. Come with me because my resolve is that a greater, more beautiful and brighter future awaits

us in this millennium. Come join with me and Canadians and each and every one of us will do whatever we can. We cannot fail at this critical time. Let us sprint forward together, united, and we will continue to flourish as a country in this millennium.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Madam Speaker, we appreciate our colleague's great eloquence but the truth escapes him.

• (1340)

When he claims that he knows the truth, he sounds like the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and his colleagues. That minister is not proud of his pupil because he does not even know that nowadays states that share jurisdiction adopt a common currency and citizenship.

That is what sovereignists have always wanted and proposed to the rest of Canada, and they will keep on doing so. Members opposite are rather like the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs about whom a commentator said today:

[*English*]

“For his troubles, Dion sits at the bottom of the hit parade of Quebec politicians. Only a tiny minority of Quebecers approve of his performance. He is an object of open ridicule in many media quarters”.

[*Translation*]

The member is saying what the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs has been repeating for years. This does not work in Quebec. This is not accepted by Quebecers because they want the freedom to choose their future. This bill will take away that freedom. It is an undemocratic bill and we will fight against it until the very last in the House.

Mr. Hec Clouthier: Madam Speaker, if the Government of Quebec asked an honest and clear question, we would have no problem with the result. I say to my friends and to the Government of Quebec that they must be careful: the question will have to be honest and clear.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will not comment on the eloquence of the hon. member because he chose the wrong venue. He would be a cheerleader for a football team than a member of parliament. This is no picnic, the bill is an attack against the democratic rights of Quebecers. The members opposite should refrain from making stupid statements.

He said that Quebec would not be a party to international trade agreements; this is pure nonsense, it is simply not true. He said that we receive \$3 billion more than what we pay each year; this is simply not true. They owe us at least \$2 billion per year for the last

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two years. Quebecers pay too much taxes to the federal government, compared to what they get back.

He said that all is well in Canada, that everybody gets along fine and that we all live in harmony. I beg to disagree. The premiers are unanimous in saying that the federal government must give back what it took away from the Canada social transfer, but both the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister are not listening. Where is the harmony in this great Confederation?

Mr. Hec Clouthier: Madam Speaker, this is terrible. My friend across the way said that I am a football player.

Mr. Yvan Loubier: No, no. A cheerleader.

Mr. Hec Clouthier: I am a hockey player, not a cheerleader.

It is true that with the transfers to provinces—listen to this and say it to the people in Quebec—they get more than \$3 billion each year.

An hon. member: It is not true.

Mr. Hec Clouthier: I like my friends across the way a lot because they are passionate and demonstrative. It is perfect, as far as I am concerned, and it is good for Quebec, but it is even better for Canada. Let Quebec stay in Canada, and all will be well. Do not be afraid of me, I am only a backbencher.

The Prime Minister resides in the Province of Quebec and we do not have any problems with our friends. I like my friends a lot, and the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot has the same haircut as me.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Jones (Markham, PC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to address Bill C-20, the clarity act. I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Chicoutimi.

This bill, the bill that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs has the audacity to call the clarity act, falls just short of being rightfully tabbed the most unclear, the most ambiguous and certainly the most imperilling legislation ever proposed in the history of our great nation.

Today in the interest of time and procedure, it is the disingenuous, disruptive spirit of this bill rather than its blatantly flawed details that I will address during the time I have been given. As I read carefully through the bill I find difficulty in uncovering its merits.

• (1345)

The reason is that this bill simply has no merit. In fact I submit that it represents not only the wrong course of action for Canada but moreover its presentation to the House for consideration is nothing further than adding another instance of Liberal government dishonest, poll driven practices. I cannot in good conscience allow myself to look past the clarity act or past the motivations behind the government's proposed legislation.

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The hon. Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs is quite a brilliant individual. The member holds a bachelor of arts, a master's degree and a Ph.D. In addition he has served as a professor of political science, as a journal editor and as a research fellow. No one is questioning his expertise on Canadian constitutionalism. Indeed his expertise is the very reason why he was recruited to run for the Liberal Party. However, with such distinguishing credentials and given that he is so clearly gifted, it is truly puzzling that the hon. member would make the mistake of proposing this ill timed, ill conceived and, most glaring, this ill advised bill.

Perhaps I can serve as a beacon for the House and shed some light on my colleague's motivations.

When he was recruited to run for the Liberal Party, my colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville was a professed federalist; and he remains as such today as the banner boy for the federalist forces of Canada. During his byelection campaign we were introduced to the member as an experienced, reasoned academic who possessed practical and realistic ideas for saving Canada.

We were told by political analysts that the minister's strength as a candidate was his supposedly unyielding support for reforming and ultimately renewing confederation. He was called upon by the Liberal Party to quell Quebecers' wishes to separate from Canada.

The hon. member came to Ottawa as an adamant proponent of plan A, that is a proponent of negotiating and conciliating with Quebec toward a new constitutional arrangement.

Clearly the minister's recent bill is not indicative of the plan A approach but rather of the directly opposite plan B approach.

How are we to reconcile what certainly seems to be a glaring discrepancy? On one hand we know that the minister came to Ottawa as a fervent advocate of plan A and on the other hand we have this new bill, the clarity bill, which obviously comes to us from the plan B school of thought proposed by the same minister who previously had not simply leaned toward plan A but as we all know had built his reputation on furthering plan A.

What do members suppose would urge an apparently intellectual resolute individual like the hon. minister to make a 180 degree turnaround on such an important national issue? Given the recent history of the Liberals the answer is quite simple: the polls.

Polling conducted following the 1995 Quebec referendum indicated that constitutional fatigue and a sense of exasperation had descended upon Canadians. Having recently undergone two attempts at constitutional renewal, first in 1987 with the Meech Lake accord and then in 1992 with the Charlottetown accord, Canadians were admittedly tired of hearing about constitutional negotiation.

Following the referendum Canadians were so embittered by the near loss of our nation that many jumped aboard the plan B ship. This shift among Canadians was manifest in the polls of the day. Therefore, because of the prevailing sentiment in the nation at the time, many colleagues across the floor surrendered their once

strong support for plan A and flocked to the masses as they adopted plan B, all in the name of electoral success.

My colleague turned a blind eye to the reality that plan A was and remains the most favourable course of action for the survival of our nation. The Liberal trademark weather vane government is assuredly not the type of leadership Canada needs as we prepare for our most important challenge since confederation.

For the first time in our history the stages of possible succession for a province and for the resulting breakup of Canada are defined. It is truly regretful that it has become common practice for our reddened leaders to govern the polls, placing utmost importance upon polls of the day rather than upon what is ultimately best for Canada. By bending and stretching when told, hoping to sweeten the public come election time, the government is not only depriving Canadians of the leadership they so rightfully deserve from Ottawa, but even beyond this the government is compromising the future of this great nation.

Today Canada does not need a government that governs solely according to the public will without first engaging its own steadfast conscientious deliberations on the issue. Yes, it is true that we must actually solicit support from the public in order to gauge its inclinations.

• (1350)

However, basing questions of national interest on the fluctuating preferences of the public, particularly when the public may not be fully apprised of the complexities of the matter and particularly when the public may very easily be swayed by its own emotions, is not only thoughtless but I submit is the wrong course of action for the country.

The bill legitimizes the breakup of a great country that generations past and present have worked so hard to build. Canadians have been misled into thinking that the bill presents the most favourable course of action for Canada in dealing with the impasse Ottawa has reached with Quebec. The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs would have Canadians believe that laying down strict rules for the secession of Quebec is the only alternative left for Canada. However, this is most definitely not the case. There is an alternative to Bill C-20.

The alternative, the most favourable alternative for Canada, is to focus on reconciliation between our nation's two founding peoples. The alternative to the minister's bill is to do what was intended by our forefathers and by Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first prime minister: to fight for the preservation of Canada—and we have to remember this country is only 133 years young—to fight for the prosperity of all Canadians; to pursue aggressively the inclusion of all Canadians in the political discourse; and to stand firm and unite against challenges both external and internal.

The alternative, contrary to what my colleagues across the floor would have us believe, is not to facilitate the separation of the nation's two founding peoples but rather to work toward a constitutional resolution.

With the right leadership and with a concerted effort to draw political actors, officials and Canadians together, our continued union between Canada's founding peoples can doubtless become the most flourishing, successful and triumphant union ever forged.

The bill proposes to cede the right of secession of our provinces. With the bill the condition for the separation of Quebec and for other provinces will be set as law. Once met, those who would destroy what countless Canadians have given their lives to build and to preserve will have the guarantee of entering into negotiation. For what? For the destruction of our great land and for undermining the work, the effort and the unrivalled commitment of our forefathers.

In closing I offer the following to my colleagues in the opposition and those in the governing party who still have the courage of their convictions to think for themselves. I would encourage all of them to join us as we expose the Liberals for the improvident, distanced, poll driven defeatists they are. I would encourage them to do what they know is best for Canada: to oppose Bill C-20, the clarity act.

Canadians deserve better leadership than they have received from the Liberal Party and from the untrustworthy, vacillating Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. We have a responsibility to Canadians. They must know exactly what the bill means for the future of our country. I am afraid that should the bill pass Canadians will gain nothing further than a false sense of security. The clarity act is the wrong course of action for the country.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I listened quite carefully to what our hon. colleague was saying in this debate and I have a couple of questions for him.

He said something to the effect that it was terrible to give the option to Quebec to possibly separate. I agree with that because I want the country to stay together. However, what would his alternative be? Would it be to say that no province or no people within a province could vote democratically and make decisions on what they want to do? That is my first question.

The second one has to do with the issue of clarity. It seems to me that the votes in the past on this issue have been very unclear. They could take our country into a kind of abyss, which is exactly what the member wants to avoid. It seems to me that it would be in the greatest interest of keeping Canada together if those people voting in a province on such an issue have a clear question so that they clearly understand the consequences of their decision.

As a result I believe—and I think the hon. member would too and I ask him to express this—that if the people got a clear question and clearly saw the consequences then they would vote to stay in Canada because it is a wonderful country and it is part of what we

are all together. We want to stay together. I would like the hon. member's comments on those two questions.

● (1355)

Mr. Jim Jones: Madam Speaker, these questions are very interesting. The questions that come to mind are why is the bill even here and what has been done since 1995 to resolve this issue.

I am transparently aware that the only thing the interprovincial affairs and justice ministers have done is to have a reference of three questions to the supreme court and a letter writing exercise between the federal interprovincial affairs minister and the interprovincial affairs minister of the Quebec government.

With what we have going for us, I would have worked a lot harder trying to resolve this issue with the interested parties, not only the people of Quebec but with the other provinces. Instead, it may be purely coincidental that this was brought out just before Christmas. It was the same old story as in the 1997 election. A book was published in the U.S. where the president of the United States waged a war because his popularity had waned. Maybe they brought this forth to conceal the impending fraud and scandal that are starting to emerge from the HRDC and the transitional jobs fund.

A lot more could have been done by working on plan A in trying to resolve this 150 to 200 year old situation instead of just bringing forth an act that talks about a clear question. It did not specify a clear question. It did not specify what is a clear majority, and there are a lot of other things it did not make clear.

A lot of Canadians have not been happy about this issue over a long period of time, but it will only give them a false sense of security.

[Translation]

The Speaker: It being almost 2 o'clock, we will now move on to Statements by Members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

LILIANNE PERRAULT-MERCIER

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Prime Minister of Canada and all

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federalist members of this House, I would like to pay tribute to Liliane Perraud-Mercier, a native of Amos, who has always been heavily involved in the betterment of her community.

An excellent music teacher, she has provided countless young people with the basic foundations for further studies in the various cegeps of Quebec that offer music programs. She was awarded the Jeunesse musicales du Canada medal at its annual convention and has also had the great distinction of being appointed to the Order of Canada.

At the present time she is actively involved in the Liberal Association in the riding of Abitibi West. She has a deep conviction that it is vital to make room for our young people so that we will have the right kind of replacements coming up.

We can use the experience of this great Canadian and her ideas for maintaining Canadian federalism to good advantage.

* * *

[English]

CHINESE NEW YEAR

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome back all members of the House by wishing them a happy new year. I am honoured, on behalf of Canadians of Chinese descent, to extend Chinese new year greetings to everyone.

February 5 marked the beginning of the year of the dragon, the most revered sign of the Chinese zodiac. It symbolizes happiness, power, fortune and love.

Canadians of Chinese descent can be proud of their heritage and history in Canada. It started with the Chinese railway workers whose labour helped unify this great country. The story of their struggle to become equal Canadians must be told and passed on to future generations.

Who would ever believe that today Chinese would become the third most spoken language in Canada? Canadians of Chinese descent are forever thankful to this country. In the new millennium the roar of the dragon will be heard across the land. Happy new year.

EATING DISORDERS

Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week is eating disorder awareness week. It provides us with an opportunity to educate the public on the relationship between dieting, body dissatisfaction and eating disorders.

This week is an opportunity for all Canadians to evaluate the way our attitudes toward shape and weight impact the quality of our lives. Food and weight concerns should be taken seriously, and most women and a growing number of men in our society struggle

with these issues. Some 90% of women experience body image dissatisfaction, 80% have dieted before the age of 18 years, and 15% have many of the symptoms of an eating disorder.

• (1400)

Informing the public about food and weight issues is only the first step in the fight against the development of eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. Healthy lifestyles, healthy eating and appropriate, enjoyable exercise are but a few simple preventive measures that can be taken by people of all ages, genders, shapes and sizes.

I encourage all Canadians to learn about food and weight issues and applaud the efforts of all those involved in this very important issue.

* * *

GENIE AWARDS

Ms. Sarmite Bulte (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 20 years ago a small group of filmmakers had an idea to help foster the development and promotion of the feature film industry in Canada by founding the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television and establishing the Genie Awards. On January 30, 2000 the Genies celebrated their 20th anniversary.

In 20 years we have all witnessed the outstanding growth to the Canadian film industry. However, Canadian films command only 2% to 3% of the Canadian national box office. This figure clearly demonstrates the need for increased support to take Canada from a producer of world respected art films to a globally competitive producer and exporter of popular and entertaining films that are undeniably Canadian in content.

I would like to commend the academy, Telefilm Canada, CBC Television and Canadian Heritage for their support of our national film awards, and I congratulate this year's award nominees and recipients for their dedication to the art and craft of Canadian film.

* * *

[Translation]

THE LATE ANNE HÉBERT

Ms. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on January 22, Quebec writer Anne Hébert, recipient of the 1982 prix Fémina for *Les Fous de Bassan*, died in Montreal after a long illness.

Born in Fossambault-sur-le-lac, near Quebec City, she was not long in developing a passion for poetry and the theatre, her first poems being published in periodicals in 1939.

Anne Hébert's considerable literary output was divided between novels and poetry. She was a leading literary figure in Quebec for more than half a century.

The recipient of an impressive number of awards both here and in other countries, the author of *Kamouraska* and *Chambres de bois* leaves a large literary heritage behind her.

My condolences to the members of Anne Hébert's family. She will always remain with us in the pages of her works.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are telling us that health care is in trouble.

At the premiers' conference last week all agreed that the health care system is not sustainable and that it is not able to maintain the status quo. The premiers know there is a problem. Reform knows there is a problem. Change must occur in the health care system and it must occur now.

In an Angus Reid poll conducted last month, 78% of Canadians agreed that the health care system in their province is currently in a crisis.

Is it any wonder that the health care system is in such peril? We have a government that is showing no leadership, offering no solutions and taking no action. The Liberals have squandered more than \$1 billion as patients sit in crowded waiting rooms and are shuffled between hospitals.

Can hon. members imagine how many MRIs we could have bought if we had not wasted that \$1 billion on a boondoggle?

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Jean Augustine (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the House that February is Black History Month.

In communities across Canada people of African descent are celebrating their heritage and are paying tribute to the contributions of black people to the social, economic and cultural fabric of this great country.

In 1995 when the House passed a motion declaring February as Black History Month, it gave recognition to the African experience in Canadian society.

From the newcomers of today to the slaves who came to Canada via the Underground Railroad, African people have pioneered in many sectors of our society, including medicine, law, politics, education, science and the arts.

As we move into the 21st century let this be the era in which governments and institutions heighten their efforts to educate young people about the rich and diverse history of Canada's peoples.

[Translation]

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BILL C-20

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of Canadians and Quebecers concerned about respect for the rules of democracy, the Bloc Québécois would ask the Liberal government to be reasonable and to hold broad public hearings on the controversial Bill C-20.

This government, which prides itself on seeking clarity, must recognize that democrats want to be heard on this bill.

Even today, many stakeholders and interested parties in Quebec and Canadian society are calling on the government to be transparent and to respect democracy. They are calling for the most comprehensive hearings possible to ensure their democratic right and basic freedom of expression are not threatened.

• (1405)

It would be far more preferable for the government to withdraw its hateful bill. Should it decide to proceed, it must not silence the people of Quebec and Canada in the process.

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[English]

HEART AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. John Harvard (Charleswood St. James—Assiniboia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House and all Canadians that February is Heart Awareness Month.

We are proud of the internationally known Canadian Heart Health Initiative, a partnership in which Health Canada is collaborating with provincial departments of health and with the Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation to encourage Canadians to adopt healthy lifestyles and to create working and living conditions conducive to healthy choices.

Major challenges remain to ensure that progress continues in the reduction of the major risk factors: smoking, high blood pressure, elevated blood cholesterol and diabetes.

By investing in heart health we can reduce significantly this disease. By mobilizing society as a whole to invest in heart health we can enhance the quality of life of countless Canadians.

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CANADIAN ALLIANCE

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I was privileged to have had the opportunity to participate in the formation of the new Canadian alliance. I want to tell members of the House how exciting it is to be part of history making as this new political party takes shape.

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Our opposition and pundits said it could not be done, that true small *c* Conservatives could not be united. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our leader has proven all the naysayers wrong. His vision, conviction and determination to stay the course and think big has once again proven his tremendous leadership ability.

People from across the country proudly worked together to create the new Canadian alliance. Their common cause is to bring accountability and respect back to this institution. The reaction across the country has been overwhelming, as people call to ask how they can be part of this exciting movement.

At the end of the day the big winner is Canada. All Canadians will have an opportunity to vote for real, positive change.

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[*Translation*]**CANADIAN ECONOMY**

Mr. Robert Bertrand (Pontiac—Gatineau—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the employment figures released by Statistics Canada on Friday indicate that economic growth is continuing.

This situation inevitably reflects on the rate of unemployment, which was at only 6.8% in Canada and 8.2% in Quebec in January.

These encouraging results show that our government has made the right economic and financial decisions. The return of healthy government finances is now benefiting all of Canada.

The sectors of the economy where job creation was most encouraging include the manufacturing sector, which recorded a net gain of 13,000 jobs last month.

I therefore encourage our government to continue its efforts in this direction so that the improvement of the quality of Canadians' life remains a priority.

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LIBERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when one takes a hard look at how certain ministers of this government have squandered billions of dollars, one wonders about the government's integrity.

[*English*]

The government has not taken responsibility for these actions. Citizens have the right to expect that the public purse is properly managed. The government has broken that trust. It is hiding from the evidence that there was political interference for the benefit of Liberal members. The October 1998 audit of HRDC raised con-

cerns about projects which may have been approved for political reasons rather than based on the strength of business plans.

[*Translation*]

Canadians have lost confidence in the Minister of Human Resources Development and in her predecessor. The NDP is asking the Prime Minister to take action and ask for the resignations of the current Minister of Human Resources Development and her predecessor.

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MINISTER FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, recently, the Minister for International Trade took great pleasure in commenting on the problems experienced by Emploi-Québec. He arrogantly made fun of the situation, taking advantage of the fact that he was no longer Minister of Human Resources Development.

But now he has gone into hiding. He is no longer giving press conferences abroad, something he was so fond of, and has invoked some old parliamentary tradition not to appear before the Standing Committee on Human Resources.

We do not see why the Minister for International Trade, who allowed himself to criticize Emploi-Québec, does not feel compelled, as a matter of honour, to answer the committee's questions on one of the worst administrative scandals ever to happen in this country, and this while he was the minister responsible.

● (1410)

The minister, who loves to travel all over the world stressing the need for good governance to ensure economic development, should realize that he will lose all credibility if he is not capable of defending his own management practices. He should know that a great many questions are going to be directed at him and there will be no avoiding them.

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[*English*]**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Mr. Mark Muisse (West Nova, PC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's participation in the Gulf War ended in 1991. However, for many of our veterans, their battle for survival has just begun. Hundreds of our veterans returned to Canada suffering from mysterious illnesses that our Canadian military conveniently attributed to stress.

The late Terry Riordan was one such soldier. Soon upon his return Terry began showing signs of illness that would eventually ravage his body. Terry died on April 29, 1999. The cause of death read "Gulf War Syndrome".

Test results done on Terry's body have identified high levels of weapons grade depleted uranium. Where else but during the Gulf War could he have been exposed to this deadly element? What is the correlation between this poisonous element and Gulf War illness?

Is our military conducting tests on our Canadian veterans to find out if they also have this poison within their bodies? If not, let us ask ourselves why not. How many more of our Canadian soldiers must die before the government acts to find out the answers?

* * *

DR. HENRY DE JONG

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to recognize the outstanding efforts of one of my constituents. Dr. Henry de Jong has recently returned to Fredericton, having worked in Nicaragua for CESO. Henry was asked to advise on agricultural co-operation in potato production and marketing. He visited potato growing locations, many of them very difficult to reach, to get a picture of current production. During Henry's assignment the entire potato production chain was analyzed and recommendations were made for improvement.

Henry is typical of CESO's highly skilled volunteers. Last year CESO volunteers provided almost 23,000 days of assistance to developing nations, emerging market economies and Canadian aboriginal communities. CESO is supported by CIDA, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and by hundreds of Canadian corporations and individuals.

I am pleased to congratulate and thank Dr. Henry de Jong for his contribution in this worthwhile effort.

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WORLD ANTI-DOPING AGENCY

Mr. Rick Limoges (Windsor—St. Clair, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to endorse the recent initiative by the hon. Secretary of State for Amateur Sport to bring to Canada the recently established World Anti-Doping Agency.

We recall the decision taken at the February 1999 conference hosted by the International Olympic Committee to establish the World Anti-Doping Agency in a major effort to eliminate drugs in sport. At its inaugural meeting the IOC announced its intent to conduct an open bidding process to find a permanent home for the new World Anti-Doping Agency.

It would be a distinction for Canada to house the new World Anti-Doping Agency. I offer my best wishes to the member of parliament, the Secretary of State for Amateur Sport, for his efforts in this regard.

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HEALTH CARE

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada's system of public health care is facing serious pressures which threaten its very survival. Federal cuts to transfer payments have put medicare on a precipice. They have made public health plans vulnerable. They have opened the door to privatization. They have fueled the fire of two tier advocates, with Ralph Klein in the lead. This is the fight of our lives.

Today the Canadian Health Coalition with Tommy Douglas' daughter, Shirley, who is with us today, launched its campaign to stop Klein's privatization plans, to restore health care transfers in the upcoming budget and to strengthen medicare now. They represent all Canadians. They want the government to act now. They expect the government to take immediate action to stop two tier health care.

We know the threats are real. We also know we have a great opportunity to develop the same kind of gutsy solutions that Tommy Douglas and the Saskatchewan CCF launched in the 1960s.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in December the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food sent the standing committee on a whirlwind tour of western Canada and pretended to consult with farmers. The Liberal dominated committee only held nine meetings to discuss the ongoing farm income crisis.

• (1415)

In spite of efforts by the Reform official opposition, the Liberals, PCs and NDP all refused to extend the meetings into Ontario and B.C. and refused to travel more than one week. This is disgraceful.

The official opposition continues to hold real consultations with farmers. Again, we have held over 55 town hall meetings with farmers across B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario and have seven more meetings scheduled.

In the past, farmers believed that the Liberals did not understand the farm income crisis. Not anymore. Now they know for a fact that the Liberals just do not care.

Farm families have grown tired of announcements that do not have any meaning. How can they believe the minister's promises of new assistance when he has only delivered 25% of the AIDA money he pledged last December?

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD***[English]***HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT**

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, Canadian taxpayers pay the highest personal income taxes in the western world. No wonder they are angry therefore when they find out that more than a billion of those hard earned taxpayer dollars have been grossly mismanaged by the Minister of Human Resources Development.

If the human resources minister had any respect for Canadian taxpayers and respect for the principle of ministerial accountability, she would rise in her place today and resign from cabinet. Will the minister resign from cabinet?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would not accept the resignation if it were to be offered because, as usual, the opposition is exaggerating.

An audit was commanded by the department related to \$200 million and 459 projects, of which 37 had some problems representing around \$30 million. Of these projects, \$11.5 million have been cleared in the last few days and the rest will be reported upon very soon.

We are very proud that our department is looking at the management problems. Today, the deputy minister—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister intervenes not to protect Canadian taxpayers but to protect the discredited minister.

In 1991 the Prime Minister said “When we form government, every minister in the cabinet will have to take full responsibility for what is going on in their department. If there is any bungling in the department, the minister will have to take responsibility”.

When did the Prime Minister abandon the principle of holding cabinet ministers accountable for squandering taxpayers’ money?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister has taken full responsibility. She is working on the report that was presented. I described that report. She has been in touch with the auditor general who approved all the needed rectifications this morning. If there is money that has been lost, we will collect it back.

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, a fish rots from the top down.

We pointed out last year that moneys from the transitional jobs fund were being misused in the Prime Minister’s riding. The Prime Minister excused it. He accepted no responsibility. He set the wrong example. Now that little scandal from Shawinigan has become the billion dollar boondoggle in human resources.

Why does the Prime Minister not start accepting responsibility for this gross misuse of taxpayers’ money and fire the Minister of Human Resources Development?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member does not care about the people who receive this money.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien: Listen to them. I know they want to cut the taxes of the rich and do not want to give money to the poor, but I will not change my policy on that.

The administrator of the Alberta branch of the Canadian Paraplegic Association said “The bad press is hurting us as an organization. The money we received was very well spent. We employed 200 people, with various levels of disabilities, all across the province”. I find it very hard to believe—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill.

• (1420)

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we have just seen a classic example of the old bait and switch technique: Instead of answering to the issue, you try to pretend the issue is something different. The issue is a billion dollar boondoggle involving public money.

This minister has not proven to be very adept at answering questions and some of the answers she has given are very troubling. For example, on December 16, 1999 she said “No moneys flowed until appropriate approvals were in place”, but her own departmental audit had already informed her that was not the case. In fact, this minister was not candid with the House.

Will she stand in her place and resign?

The Speaker: I know it is the first day back, but we are going a little bit over in both the questions and the answers. I know we are going to close it up. The Right Hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member’s riding is receiving money. Perhaps I should apologize because a Bible society in her riding received a couple of thousand dollars in grants. They must be good Christians there, so they are preaching the Bible.

Oral Questions

For the edification of the hon. member, I have a quotation by the co-ordinator of the Beddington Heights Community Association referring to comments made by the hon. member. The quote reads:

To say that they are a waste of money when the member has not been in these doors—she has no concept of what goes on, so it's sort of probably an empty statement.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, if public moneys were misspent, if they were uncontrolled and if Canadians did not get value for dollar, it does not matter where that happened. It is wrong.

Somebody should have been minding the store and that somebody will not even stand in her place and give an account of her stewardship of our money. She hides behind the Prime Minister.

I ask why a minister, who cannot even defend her own department, will not resign?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not here to tell you that everything is run perfectly in my department. That is why I am working with the department to implement a significantly strengthened regime that will ensure we manage the grants and contributions in my department effectively.

I want the House to understand that a billion dollars has not disappeared. We know where every cheque has gone. It is held by educational institutions. It is held by community organizations, by individuals and small business people in the hon. member's riding, in her seatmate's riding and in the ridings of all the members of parliament in the House.

* * *

[Translation]

BILL C-20

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a number of groups in Quebec are demanding that Quebecers' views on Bill C-20, which sets out the ground rules for any future referendum in Quebec, be heard.

We have learned that the government House leader wants to act quickly and that he is pulling out all the stops to speed up the bill's passage through the House.

Given the importance of this bill to democracy in Quebec, will the Prime Minister promise to set up a travelling committee so that Quebecers' views on Bill C-20 can be heard?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the committee is making the required decisions. Obviously, there will be hearings here in Parliament.

• (1425)

If Jacques Parizeau wants to appear before the committee—Mr. Bouchard would probably be very happy to hear what he thinks, as would we, particularly since we are not very far from Quebec—he is welcome.

We went to British Columbia because it was very far away, but it is just a trip across the river to Ottawa.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if it is just a trip across the river, I imagine the committee could manage it too.

What was good for British Columbia, because British Columbians were consulted, even though the government in Victoria was in agreement with the bill, should also be for Quebec. Why, when there was consultation for the Nisga'a treaty, is the government refusing to do the same in the case of Bill C-20? Is what is good for British Columbia not good for Quebec?

Could he explain how he arrived at this strange decision, without resorting to geographic technicalities and nonsense?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the bill applies to all provinces in Canada.

If there are hearings in Quebec, the committee will have to travel to all ten provinces. This is a bill that applies to any province that might, one day, wish to leave Canada. If the member wants there to be hearings, there will have to be hearings in all the provinces. In this House, initially, only my party supported the measure. Since then, the NDP members, the Reform Party members and half the Progressive Conservative Party members have changed their position.

Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a letter to the leader of the government, Quebec civil society organizations asked for the right to appear before the committee that will be struck to review Bill C-20.

Can the Prime Minister guarantee that these groups will be heard by the committee and that, as requested by these groups, a democratic consultation process will take place?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it will be up to the legislative committee to decide on how it will proceed.

Is it possible to be so disconnected from what is going on in Quebec?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Except for the tough guys from the Bloc Québécois and the PQ government, are there many Quebecers who give priority to the issue of a referendum on secession?

Oral Questions

It is obvious that they do not even manage to get a large following with their own Bill 99. Except for the “mothball clubs” of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, they are not getting a lot of people.

Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if there is someone here who is disconnected from Quebec it is the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

Between 55% and 60% of Quebecers do not want to hear about his bill. Even the pollsters from his own party told him so last week.

By establishing the legislative committee that unions, students and women are asking for, is the minister's true objective not to ultimately prevent these groups and individuals from testifying? Is the minister not in fact saying “Quiet! We will not hear from you”?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in recent weeks, I had the opportunity to talk to many Quebecers. The general impression is that, except for a few individuals, most people in Quebec feel that what we are doing is perfectly reasonable: that it is reasonable to ask for a clear question on separation before negotiating separation and that it is reasonable not to let the smallest of majority break up the country.

Given that this is found to be reasonable, it becomes totally unreasonable to want to ban the Canadian flag from city halls and school boards.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is the first day of parliament in the new millennium. Canadians face the political fight of their lives. When it comes to health care, we have a choice: to move forward or to go back to the two tier Americanized, privatized health care that Canadians reject. When it comes to fighting Harris and Klein, we have a problem: a federal government that says one thing and does the opposite.

Canadians want to know why the government wants to be the deadbeat dad of health care.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have stated very clearly that the five conditions of the national health act should be respected.

• (1430)

I am pleased to report that last week it was discussed by the premiers and they all agreed that the five conditions of the national health act should be maintained.

Last year we made a very special effort to help the problem of health. I will quote for the hon. member somebody who said, “I am very pleased with what the government has done and I think the

federal government should be congratulated”. That was Mr. Roy Romanow on February 16, 1999.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister knows that the premier said there has to be complete restoration of the health care system.

Canadians have heard these words from the government. They have heard the feigned concern but they have also seen and felt the pain of what the government has done. It has ripped billions out of health care. It has reduced the federal contribution to health care spending from 50%, the 50:50 partnership on which health care depended, down to 13%. It has opened the door to privatized two tier health care.

Why does the government want to be the deadbeat dad of health care?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is such a thing as tax points that are given to the provinces. It is extremely important because provinces that are rich receive fewer tax points than provinces that are poor. That is in order to make sure that all provinces have the same opportunity. The hon. member forgot to mention that. Perhaps I could quote someone after the Minister of Finance's last budget. Joy MacPhail, B.C. finance minister at the time of the 1999 budget, said, “This is welcome news, certainly for us. We can now join together with Ottawa and address the problems of the health care system”.

* * *

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jean Dubé (Madawaska—Restigouche, PC): Mr. Speaker, on January 19 the minister released an altered document to the Canadian public, an internal audit whose title page was dated January 2000. We know now the audit was completed much earlier, on October 5. As a matter of principle, no minister of the crown should withhold information. Will the minister do the honourable thing and resign?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not here to argue dates with the hon. member but let us make it clear. I have nothing to hide. I am the one who received the audit that said there were improvements that had to be made in my department. I am the one who insisted on the strong management report response from my department. I made the audit, its data and the management response public. We are going to implement a very cohesive six point plan to ensure that this problem never happens again.

Mr. Jean Dubé (Madawaska—Restigouche, PC): Mr. Speaker, the minister cannot be part of the solution because she is part of the problem.

Why did the minister stand in the House of Commons and tell Canadians just before Christmas that everything was all right with the department? When did the minister know and when did she forget?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I received the audit and took it seriously. I demanded that my department prepare a full response so that we could deal with this issue.

We made the full report public. Now I would say that as a minister it is my responsibility to ensure that the action plan will be implemented and that this problem will be fixed once and for all.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is one thing for the minister to say that everything is going just great in her department. She has borrowed a pair of flip-flops from the industry minister.

First she said everything was really well managed and that she was just proud as punch of it. On November 4 she said, "Nothing inappropriate was done in terms of the administration of the approval process". But now she admits that maybe some things were overlooked, little things like application forms and things like that.

Why will the minister not just accept the responsibility she has for this billion dollar bungle and resign from cabinet immediately?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me repeat again that there has been no \$1 billion lost. We know where the money is. It is in the ridings of all the members of parliament in this House. There is nothing in the internal audit that I received that would change anything I said in this House to date.

• (1435)

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is unbelievable. As late as November of last year the minister told the House the appropriate approval process was being followed and nothing inappropriate was done. But while the minister was making those statements, we know that she had an audit on her desk that showed that eight out of ten files reviewed showed no evidence of financial monitoring, 87% of the files showed no evidence of supervision and 15% did not even have the name of the person they were giving the money to.

Why should the House believe the minister's current explanation when her original story to this House was false?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just ask the hon. member to review *Hansard* where I was forthcoming and identified that there were administrative problems in the particular program that they asked questions about.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as usual, the Prime Minister has attempted to downplay the problems at Human

Resources Development Canada by reducing the boondoggle to 37 cases.

Does the Prime Minister still persist today in claiming that the scandalous mismanagement at HRDC is limited to these 37 cases?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. members may have exaggerated the press reports a bit with their stories of billions of dollars. The reality is that the auditors audited \$200 million worth of projects, or 459 projects.

Of those 459 projects, 37 had problems considered serious enough to warrant further investigation, and in those 37, which represented about \$30 million, a figure that has now been dropped to about \$20 million, if there are people who received money wrongfully, received too much or cannot justify their expenditures, then the government will take steps to recover the money.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last November 17, the Minister of Human Resources Development became aware of the incriminating report on her department.

How can the minister justify boasting here in this House, on December 1 and on December 16, 1999, of her manpower programs, when she had been aware of the disastrous internal audit report since November 17, 1999, that is two weeks earlier?

[*English*]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Again, Mr. Speaker, I talked about how effective the transitional jobs fund has been for the 30,000 Canadians who did not have work before that program was implemented. I today would continue to say that that program has worked very well. I repeat however for the particular programs that were addressed and of which questions were asked in this House, I was forthcoming and identified that there had been administrative problems.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the human resources minister should take the advice from the Prime Minister. Back in his righteous days he said, "When you are a minister and your bureaucrats do well, you take the credit. I always took the credit. On the other side of the ledger, when I made a mistake, I took the blame. I never ran away from it. It is the only way".

Why will the human resources minister not stop running, do the right thing and resign from cabinet immediately?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, walking away from challenges is never the right solution.

I received the information on this internal audit. I identified that there were problems in my department in the area of administration of grants and contributions. I demanded a strong response

Oral Questions

from our management team. We made the whole report public so Canadians would know that we have challenges but so that they also can measure us by our actions.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. I am sure we all want to hear the questions and the answers.

• (1440)

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that Canadians have lost confidence in the minister and a department that has bungled billions of dollars of taxpayers' money. That we know about. Now the minister is trying to wiggle out of her share of the responsibility. Her department bungled a billion. She was told about it months ago. The minister has to go. If she has so much confidence in her department, why will the human resources minister not resign and let them find her something new to do?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everything has been very open. The auditor gave the report. It is known by the public. Not only that, before we formed the government, the auditor general had one report a year. Now we have permitted him to have four reports a year so that he can find out where the problems are and we can rectify them.

There are always mistakes. Take the party that has been formed. I will not say its name because there might be kids in the audience, but at the convention an error was made. There were 1,100 delegates and they had 1,500 votes.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois made public the fact that 54% of the Human Resources Development Canada projects were approved in the period around the election, in June 1997, a few weeks before and up to two weeks after.

Is the billion dollar administrative bungle by the Department of Human Resources Development we are reading about, a bungle the government is blaming on public servants, not rather the result of partisan political decisions made by the government unbeknownst to the officials?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us just remember the 18 projects in the riding of Mercier, the nine projects in the riding of Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, the four projects in the riding of Roberval, and even a project in the riding of Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

When we look at the time when moneys flowed for these very important projects, it began in July, well after the election had been completed.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we know that a lot of projects were announced in our ridings; they tried to win them but did not succeed.

I would like to put a question to the Prime Minister. How does he explain the fact that 75% of all the projects going to his riding were handed out just before the election or just after it other than by the fact that they resulted in a political turnaround, getting him elected when he would otherwise have lost?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would look at the data, he would see that no moneys flowed, or the significant amount of moneys flowed from July onward.

I also want to remind the hon. member and the House that when we are approving projects like the transitional jobs fund, we have to get the approval of the provincial governments and that includes the Government of Quebec.

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said that everything was open but it would appear that the only thing open was the vault.

The minister is trying to blame civil servants for following cabinet orders. We know that administrators were concerned about grants to the Prime Minister's riding. We know that the minister's office overruled them. We know that the minister was briefed as early as last August about the mismanaged \$1 billion. Yet for months she told the House that everything was fine.

• (1445)

She is the minister. She is responsible and she should resign. Will the human resources minister do the right thing and resign?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am the minister. There was information in the internal audit, an internal check and balance, which said that we had to make improvements in the management of our grants and contributions. I took it seriously.

I indicated to the department to make this a priority and prepare an action plan with tight timeframes so that we could ensure that Canadians could see the results of our implementations. I insisted that we make this plan public, that we make it available to the Canadian people so they could see that there were problems but that we were prepared to deal with them. Canadians want problems fixed, and that is what I am doing.

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources is responsible for the billion dollar bungle. The auditors gave her the news

Oral Questions

months ago, but she hoped that nobody would find out. She only made it public after a public privacy request was asked for by our party. Now that she has been caught she should do the right and honourable thing and resign her cabinet position.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what amazes me is that money has gone into every riding of all members of parliament. I want the Canadian public to know that all this money is going to the opportunity fund which helps Canadians with disabilities find jobs, literacy programs, youth internship, Youth Services Canada, career summer placement programs, and self-employment assistance programs.

These are programs that are helping those who have difficulties in society. During that time the Reform Party wanted to cut the taxes of multimillionaires by at least 12% so the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Quebec.

[Translation]

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is trying to shift responsibility for the loss of control of the Department of Human Resources Development onto the department's officials. The person primarily responsible for this administrative bungle is the deputy minister, Mel Cappe.

How can the Prime Minister justify his promoting to the position of top government manager the very person who is responsible for the administrative mess involving billions of dollars at the Department of Human Resources Development?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talks about the employees of the department. I really wish she could have been with me when I addressed hundreds of employees in Ottawa and thousands across the country.

The employees of Human Resources Development Canada want a better system. They want the tools they need to provide a quality system to Canadians. The department is fully supportive of the initiatives that we are undertaking to fix this problem, and we will fix it.

* * *

[Translation]

JEAN LESAGE AIRPORT

Mr. Claude Drouin (Beauce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport and concerns the privatization of the Jean Lesage airport in Quebec City.

Given that this issue was identified as a priority by economic agents in the region, will this agreement protect the 52 employees, who are doing an excellent job at the airport, and ensure its development?

Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, the government announced a financial agreement with the Société aéroportuaire de Québec. Negotiations on the legal and human resources aspects are continuing, but we do not anticipate any problems or major delays. In my view, the prospects for future development at this airport appear to be excellent.

* * *

[English]

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Richard M. Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the human resources minister seems to be having a little trouble facing reality. In early August she received the damning internal report saying that her department was a mess.

• (1450)

Instead of getting to the bottom of this mess she stood in the House, smiled and told us everything was okay. In the meantime she doled out almost \$1 million to her own riding, a riding that did not qualify under her own department's rules. The minister has been caught. Why does she not do the honourable thing and just resign, just quit?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I categorically reject everything in the hon. member's question.

When we look at the riding of Brant I want to confirm yet again that no rules were broken. The riding of Brant was identified as a pocket of high unemployment and therefore eligible for the transitional jobs fund and then again for the Canada jobs fund.

I want to point out that there were 250 projects across Canada that qualified for transitional jobs fund money where the unemployment levels were less than 12%, and half of them were in opposition ridings.

Mr. Richard M. Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in December the minister stood in the House, looked you in the eye and these cameras in the eye and said "Folks, everything is all right in my department", despite the fact that she had on her desk an internal audit that said her department was a mess.

She now says "We are going to fix everything". How can she say to the House and all Canadians that everything is okay? How can we believe her now after she misled the House in December?

The Speaker: As much as possible I would like members to stay away from the word misleading because it sort of excites everybody.

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot resist pointing out the double standards of the members and the leader of the party that wants to abolish all these programs. I do not know about the critic. He made a mistake.

In relation to this member, on September 30, 1997, he wrote "I am pleased with the museum's development over the years and your support of this project will have a significant and long lasting effect on our rapidly growing community". He wanted the money and now he is criticizing the government.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, rather than take responsibility for the findings of the HRDC audit the minister blames public servants. Our democracy depends on ministers taking responsibility, yet the government refuses to do so.

I remind the minister that the internal audit raised serious concerns about projects that were approved for political reasons and that a regime already exists of public expenditures. The problem is that the government has ignored it.

Given the extent of mismanagement and political interference, the minister simply cannot run away from her own responsibility. Will the minister do the honourable and the democratic thing and resign?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they should stop a little bit of this double talk that is going on here. She talks about political interference and she is a member who writes all the time to the department to get money for her riding.

She has been successful. She has got money for the Learning Disabilities Association of B.C., the Vancouver Volunteer Centre, KidSafe Project Society, and the Boys' and Girls Club of Greater Vancouver. That was successful political interference.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as usual the Prime Minister is holding up a smokescreen. The issue here is the transitional jobs fund.

We have to say that the Canadian public is not fooled for a moment that this is some sort of administrative foul up. People see it for what it is, a Liberal slush fund.

In the last few weeks alone Canadians have watched in disbelief as a government stood ready to give millions to hockey millionaires and then millions to bank billionaires.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

• (1455)

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member is very close to my chair and I could not hear. The hon. member can begin her question again.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I have to say again that the Canadian public is not fooled for a moment that this is some sort of administrative foul up. They see it for what it is, a Liberal slush fund.

In the last few weeks alone Canadians have watched in disbelief as the government stood ready to give millions to hockey millionaires and then millions to bank billionaires instead of students. It has mismanaged billions in programs that should be helping the unemployed, not the Liberal Party.

These misguided priorities of the Liberal government have lost the trust of Canadians. Will the minister resign? That is the right thing to do.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is getting funny because she talks about the Liberal slush fund. Here is what she wrote to the minister of this department on June 24, 1999, in relation to summer career placement programs in her riding: "This additional funding was sorely needed. Additional jobs mean more opportunities for students and community agencies". I agree with you, Madam.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

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

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal research department's has been working overtime. Earlier in question period in response to a question from the member for Madawaska—Restigouche the minister said "I had to improve the audit".

Was changing the date on the cover page only part of the improvements to the audit? I suggest changing an audit is illegal. Why was the minister trying to hide the truth about when she received the report?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not trying to hide anything. I made the report public, for heaven's sake.

From my point of view the appropriate thing to do when you get information that says there are problems is to let Canadians know so that Canadians can appreciate the significance of the undertaking and they can also measure the impact of our results.

I am going to be looking forward to presenting on a quarterly basis the results of our reviews, the information that we get on the improvements that these undertakings are going to hold. There is nothing to hide here. We are going to fix the problem and it is not going to exist after.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, if there was nothing to hide the minister should have been in here in November explaining what was wrong in her department.

This morning at a press conference we heard from the same HRDC officials described by the minister as being in the dark ages. Over the course of this scandal the minister has blamed everyone from the previous minister to the press.

Would the minister now have Canadians trust the same officials she claims created the problem to investigate themselves? Before the minister resigns will she embark on a full, impartial, independent investigation into this scandal in her department?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was the internal checks and balances of the department that brought this information to my attention. It was my review of the audit that suggested we had to take it seriously. It is the response of the department that is now going to fix this problem.

We are going to make the results of that work public to Canadians so that they can measure our results. That is what Canadians want. That is the responsible thing to do.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the minister's department had an audit that showed severe mismanagement of public funds last summer. Yet all through the fall she kept giving Canadians the clear message that everything was as it should be, everything was under control, everything was being done that should be done.

• (1500)

In December, after the minister acknowledged that she saw the audit, she again kept giving the clear message that everything was fine, that everything was under control and that there was no problem. How can we tolerate anything less than this minister's resignation?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, there is nothing that I said previously in the House that was misleading. I stand by that.

We are talking about accountability. When this hon. member goes back to her riding I wonder what she will say to the taxpayers who ask her why she did not know that tax dollars were being spent in their riding and why did she not know that \$7 million was invested in community undertakings. Her answer will be that she had no idea where the money went, but that she hopes it did some good.

I can tell her that that money has done good and it has made a difference in the lives of the citizens of Calgary—Nose Hill.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphan Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, recently, the current Minister for International Trade, who used to

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be the Minister of Human Resources Development, was telling the minister responsible for Emploi-Québec how to run job programs.

Will the minister, who has the arrogance to tell others how to do their job, now have the decency to answer questions from the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities on how he did his job?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am the minister who received the results of this audit. I am the minister who has taken this seriously. I am the one who is committing to Canadians that we will implement a plan to ensure that this issue is fixed and that our programs will have the integrity that they are depending on.

The Speaker: Order, please. I would remind members that questions are addressed to the government and not to a specific minister.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Boris Trajkovski, President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

* * *

• (1505)

PRIVILEGE

MEMBER FOR WENTWORTH—BURLINGTON

The Speaker: Earlier today the hon. member for Athabasca raised a question of privilege in the House. In effect, in his question of privilege he mentioned the hon. member for Wentworth—Burlington. The hon. member for Wentworth—Burlington is now in the House. Is the hon. member aware of what was said earlier today? He has signalled that he is aware of what was said earlier today.

I would ask the hon. member if he could please address this question in which he was personally named.

Mr. John Bryden (Wentworth—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was taken entirely by surprise by the member for Athabasca's point of privilege this morning. I came into the office and it was remarkable to be named on a point of privilege when I have advanced what I think is one of the most important private member's initiatives that the House has seen for many years.

The member has chosen to attack the very presence of this bill in the House, which has now arrived on the order of precedence.

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In essence, what the member has suggested is that there is some impropriety in the fact that I introduced this bill at first reading two years ago at about the same time as the subcommittee on Private Members' Business, that is, the House procedure and affairs standing committee on Private Members' Business, introduced an amendment and made a recommendation to the effect that any member of this House who had a private member's bill that enjoyed more than 100 seconders from three parties should go directly on the order of precedence.

Indeed, I sought and did obtain 113 signatures, all from backbenchers; none from members of the government and no parliamentary secretaries. But I did obtain the support.

Subsequent to obtaining that support, as a result of representations made to me on my bill, I submitted a revised version of the bill in June 1998, and that bill now is before the House as the result of the member for Langley—Abbotsford, a member of the Reform Party—

The Speaker: Order, please. If members have conversations I would ask them to please take them into the lobbies. I want to hear this question of privilege, as I am sure all hon. members do.

Mr. John Bryden: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your intervention because this is an issue of great importance to all members of this House.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to draw your attention to the fact that the reason this bill is now on the order of precedence for Wednesday—it is to be debated Wednesday—is because the member for Langley—Abbotsford, who is now not in favour with his party, surrendered his position and agreed to change his position on Private Members' Business for Wednesday for my bill, and that is how it advanced.

But I wish to draw to your attention, Mr. Speaker, that the issue of concern to the member for Athabasca pertains to something that occurred on June 11, 1998, 19 months ago, and he has held off making representations about his concern until today. At no time has he spoken to me about his concern. At no time, I believe, has he spoken to other people. He has chosen this very last moment, and so while he had 19 months to prepare his submission this morning, I have only had a few hours. You will have to forgive me, Mr. Speaker, if some of my remarks are a little disjointed because I have had to put this defence together very rapidly. But I am prepared to defend it because I do not feel that the member for Athabasca's charges—and they are very extreme charges—have any substance. I will take my chances and go right from here.

• (1510)

I am just going point by point from the speech this morning, but I only have the advantage of the blues, Mr. Speaker. One of the member's complaints was that the member for Wentworth—Bur-

lington was carrying invalid support for Bill C-264, which is the access to information bill, over to the second session by applying it to the new procedures for Private Members' Business. I contest the use of the words invalid support. The people who seconded my bill, and I have the signatures before me, knew in principle what the bill was about. I would contest the use of the word invalid. There was nothing invalid about the support.

The member for Athabasca claims that he did not second Bill C-264 in the form that he now finds it before the House, in the form of Bill C-206. Mr. Speaker, you will have to understand that after the resumption of the session I had to reintroduce the revised version of Bill C-264 and it has now become Bill C-206. But the point to remember is that the original bill was submitted before this House on June 11, 1998 and had the unanimous consent of this House that it should go forward in that revised version.

Now the member says that he did not officially and wilfully second the new version of Bill C-264. Mr. Speaker, the member for Athabasca was in the House at the time I submitted the revised version. He was here. He has had 19 months to examine the bill. He has had 19 months to decide that he did not like what he gave his unanimous support for, and yet he leaves it to the last minute.

No, Mr. Speaker, the member was in the House and he knew that the bill had changed. If he had objections he has had ample time to raise those objections. He was in the House with his own private member's bill, Bill C-227, and Mr. Speaker you will find it in *Hansard* on that occasion.

I refer to *Hansard* of that particular occasion because the member also raises that issue. What I said at the time, Mr. Speaker—and he was there when I said it—was that the reason why I wanted to resubmit a revised version of Bill C-264 was that many people had made representations to me and felt that there were some flaws and technical difficulties. Mr. Speaker, indeed I feel there were flaws and I did change them accordingly. So it is very clear that I am not talking just about technical difficulties; I am talking about inadequacies in the bill as I originally wrote it as Bill C-264 and some changes were made. The member knew about those changes. He did not know them in detail, but he knew that changes had occurred.

The essence of the member's complaint is that he is saying "I did not support Bill C-264 in its revised version". Now I will set aside for a minute, Mr. Speaker, the fact that he gave his unanimous consent. Remember what is occurring here. When a private member—and this was one of the first times that it happened—seeks seconders for his bill in order to get it on the order of precedence, he only seeks seconders.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I do believe that many people who seconded my Bill C-264 in its original version had not actually read the contents of it. I interpreted the seconding of my Bill C-264

as supporting Bill C-264 in principle. Of course there are going to be aspects of the bill that are going to be subject to debate, to controversy. Of course when it goes to second reading we are going to debate it. There is no guarantee that anyone who seconded the bill is going to actually vote for the bill. Mr. Speaker, all we did by having the seconders was to enable the bill to get on the order of precedence.

I refer you, Mr. Speaker, to an actual document. I will not show it to the House, but this is the petition I sent around with various signatures. It contains the signature of the member for Athabasca and 112 signatures of other members of the House. The wording I used in order to obtain those signatures was precisely this: "I second Bill C-264 and would like to see it be placed immediately on the order of precedence". There was no promise about the detailed contents of the bill. It was simply an undertaking that they would support the bill and to see it on the order of precedence so it could be debated.

• (1515)

I refer you also, Mr. Speaker, to the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, the subcommittee that examined the issue of private members' business when it considered the various representations to have the 100 signatures as a means of seconding a bill and getting it on the order of precedence.

That report came out about a year ago. It says, "If the sponsoring member is prepared to work hard to solicit support, and if enough members feel that the item should be debated", just be debated, "then this alternative procedure" should be instituted. The alternative procedure in the recommendation is that the standing orders be amended to allow items outside the order of precedence that have been jointly seconded by at least 100 members from at least two recognized political parties in the House of Commons to be placed on the order of precedence.

We are not talking about the deep substance of the bill. We are talking about the bill in principle. We are talking only about the bill getting into the House to be debated.

He said that he would expect any changes, major or minor, should have been brought to the attention of members of the House. When we have a very large bill it is impossible to discuss with 113 members every change we might be contemplating, because the details of any legislation in the House, be it private members' legislation or government bills, are a matter of debate in the House and in committee. The committee and the House decide on the fate of the bill based on that debate.

It is totally unreasonable for the member for Athabasca to have expected me to go to him and 112 other members to detail every change I contemplated with the bill. I repeat that the member for

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Athabasca was in the House when the revised version went forward.

An hon. member: He was not paying attention.

Mr. John Bryden: He was not paying attention, someone said, and that may indeed be the case.

Mr. Speaker, toward the end, and this is probably the thing that is most wounding about this, he accuses me of having forged, falsified, altered or fabricated the legislation that came before the House.

I repeat that these are very wounding remarks. That bill went before the House. The House had ample opportunity to read it. He had 19 months. There is nothing in the bill that I have attempted to hide in any way.

The member even sends out a red herring. He complains that I misled the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business.

He says that I only said the bill had technical changes in it, but he is referring to the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business that met on October 28, 1999 which determined the votability of a bill. The contents of the bill in detail were not germane to that debate. The members considered the votability and those members of that subcommittee had the bill before them. So there was no attempt, there was no opportunity.

Why would I as a private member attempt any form of deceit with respect to private members' legislation that every member in the House should want to at least see get on the order of precedence and debated? If there are flaws or problems, if things have to be changed, even if the bill does not succeed, there is no reason to block, stop or halt this bill from going on the order of precedence and being debated in due course.

The Speaker: Earlier today when the point was brought up there were two members on their feet, the hon. house leader of the opposition party and the hon. member for Berthier—Montcalm. I said that I would hear them.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quickly go over why this is a very serious issue and why I believe the Speaker should refer this to the procedure and House affairs committee for further investigation.

To begin with, there is no precedent for this particular case. This procedure involving getting 100 signatures from more than two parties in the House is a relatively new one. We have experimented with it for the last year or so. As far as I know this has never been a problem before because this is a relatively new procedure. I think the Speaker needs to give us some guidance and I would suggest allow the procedure and House affairs committee to give guidance to the House in general.

Privilege

• (1520)

There is no precedent because the rules are new but there are some examples involving signatures and signed documents presented to the House. The authorities on parliamentary privilege agree that the House demands the utmost integrity of the documents presented to it.

Joseph Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* on page 233 states that forgery or fraud in the preparation of petitions could be treated as a matter of contempt since that would constitute an affront to the House of Commons. In other words, the integrity of documents is treated very seriously.

Erskine May talks about an abuse of the right of petition. It points out that it would be an abuse to attempt to alter the prayer of a petition after it had been signed. In other words, a person might think he or she could improve it by changing some words but Erskine May said it would be an abuse to do that, to change something after there were signatures on that page.

I agree with the member for Athabasca that this same type of abuse has happened in the case of Bill C-206. This is not a motion that was presented to the House where we could debate a motion, a generality, something that was just a statement of opinion in the form of a motion and we could give and take on the debate, one side or another. This was a complete bill, a bill in its entirety, presented to members in the House saying "This is the bill I want to present in the House; please sign your name on the bottom". That name was signed in good faith. There is the bill. There is the document. That is the bill. It is not a concept. It is not a theory. It is not even an agreement in principle. That bill is what that signature applies to.

I know the member thinks he has improved this bill. But these were not technical changes such as having the wrong date at the top of the page or the clauses were not numbered correctly. Clauses were added to the new bill. Clauses were deleted from the old bill. This is a new bill.

In fact, I would go so far as to argue that one of the main reasons this bill had the support of over 100 members of parliament is because it specifically said that it could release polling information regarding the national unity file. This is something that the government traditionally holds close to its chest, refuses to talk about, spends taxpayers' money on but will not release to the public. The original bill would have forced the government to release it to the House of Commons and to the public. That is a bill worthy of support.

Unfortunately the revised bill, and the member can stand and admit this, specifically excludes the polling information on the national unity file. It is a huge difference. It is poles apart.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you find a *prima facie* case here, that you ask the member for Athabasca to move the appropriate

motion that this matter be sent to the procedure and House affairs committee because this is the first time we have dealt with it. It involves the changing of documents without the knowledge of the signators on the bottom. It involves a huge change in the content of the bill itself, an additional clause and deletion of other clauses or portions of clauses which changes the essence of the bill.

To fail to refer that to committee would mean that any bill that is signed by 100 members of parliament and subsequently changed by unanimous consent, and people should know that often that is as few as two or three members present in the House, from here on in if members sign their names on the bottom of a bill, they have no idea what will come down the pike a couple of weeks later. That is not right for members of parliament who have the right to know when they sign on the dotted line that nothing will change until they have had their say here in the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I think that it is worthwhile, considering how complicated the process has been—the hon. members who spoke one after the other earlier did not go into the historical aspects—to mention the dates, which are extremely important.

• (1525)

What the Liberal member has also done—and I would like to have his attention—in connection with the consent relating to signatures, raises sufficient doubt to warrant taking our time to address this very important question which affects the privileges of all of the members here, particularly the way signatures are handled.

The ruling of the Chair is a very important one because it will impact upon how this matter of signatures will be handled in future. I think that all of the parties will need to question themselves after you bring down your ruling.

On December 23, 1997—we were in the first session of the 36th Parliament—the member tabled a bill, or in other words Bill C-264 was read for the first time. With that bill, the member obtained a series of signatures. He even boasted of this on June 11, 1998. At around 6.20 or 6.25 p.m., he sought the unanimous consent of the House. I will quote him directly because what he said is very important:

Mr. Speaker, I rise as a private member on a point of order to seek unanimous consent. I feel very awkward after what just occurred two seconds ago.

Last October I submitted a private member's bill dealing with the access to information bill which proposed a great number of amendments to the legislation. I received support from all parties. There were representations from the Bloc, the Reform Party, the Conservatives and the NDP. I received seconders from all opposition parties and seconders to a total of 113 on the government backbenches.

Unfortunately in the time since then I have had many representations on my bill. A lot of people looked at it and made suggestions. They have noticed some flaws and some technical difficulties in a few areas which maybe I did not think out very clearly.

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I emphasize here it is still at first reading; it has not been picked. If it ever does get to be read in second reading I would not want debate to be deflected on the flaws. I would hope the debate would deal with the good points of the bill.

That day, he obtained unanimous consent. No one has yet read the bill he is introducing or the little discrepancies, little changes—essentially technical ones as his Prime Minister puts it on other matters. But when we look at these little changes—and what I am about to say is still very important—these two bills are worlds apart.

I will give only a few changes, and members will see that they are not just little discrepancies or small technical changes.

The member's new bill refers to Canada's constitutional integrity, whereas in the first one there was no mention of integrity or anything to do with the Canadian Constitution.

The second extremely important little change is that clause 9 introduces a section 14. Previously, there was reference to negotiations between the federal and provincial governments. Now, there is reference to federal-provincial—the way it is drafted is very ambiguous—relations.

The following clause, which is the best, and which also was not in the initial bill for which he obtained the signatures of the House, reads “The head of a government institution may refuse to disclose any record requested under this Act that contains information on plans, strategies or tactics relating to the possible secession of a part of Canada, including information held or collected for the purpose of developing those plans, strategies or tactics”.

How is it that the first bill contained no mention of this and this one does? Because the House gave unanimous consent, we are going to let this be done?

Who revised this bill? Who advised the member? Was it the Council on Canadian Unity, the Privy Council, the Office of the Prime Minister, without our consent? We do not know who advised him or anything. This makes no sense.

I think very sincerely that the member is abusing certain privileges and cannot, as indicated here, use Standing Order 87.6, which the Chair knows very well, and use the question of the 100 and more signatures to have his bill given precedence.

• (1530)

You must, Mr. Speaker, with what you have heard in this House, simply withdraw this bill, remove it from the order of precedence of this House, because, otherwise, you will set a precedent and, more importantly, you will change forever how things operate here with the famous system of the 100 signatures of the House.

The member proceeded unreasonably, and you cannot approve that.

[English]

The Speaker: I have now heard from four members of parliament. I see the hon. member for Athabasca is rising. I do not necessarily want a rebuttal but if he has something new and very short to add I will listen to him.

Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of points which I think are relevant. They come out of the member's defence, which was very elegant but quite irrelevant to the issue here.

I was in the House when he asked for unanimous consent to change the bill but I had no idea on the substance of the change. He said that the change was minor and technical and I took on faith that was in fact the case. It turned out that it was not minor and technical. On that basis, I would not have supported the change which, in essence, gave the government a loophole to avoid releasing information that I would support the release of to the public. I thought the change was very substantive and I could no longer second the bill.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I agree that a number of aspects have been covered regarding the standing orders, but I would like to add another one which I do not think was adequately covered. I am referring to the commitment made by a member of parliament when he or she puts his or her signature on a bill.

I have always taken part in the discussions that we have had, all of us together, to include in the standing orders the new possibility for a member of parliament to bypass the rule of the luck of the draw, which was the only one that existed previously, by using the signatures of colleagues representing various parties, including the government, to promote a private member's bill.

When that rule was drafted, no one ever thought that, by putting his or her signature on a bill at the request of a colleague, the member had to make sure that the bill could never be the object of a request for the unanimous consent of the House to be amended. If this were the case, not a single parliamentarian would agree to sign in support of a bill whose nature could be changed at any time, unbeknownst to that member, by another member of parliament.

If you were to agree to the hon. member's request, you would introduce a totally new legal concept. It would be tantamount to saying in the business field “I put my signature at the bottom of a document, on the fifth page of the document, as is required, but the person who is the owner can decide to change the third, the second or the first page, since the signature is there on the principle that we agree.

Point of Order

• (1535)

When a member puts his or her signature, he or she does so while being very aware that the colleague submitted a bill with which he or she agrees. We support the legislation; we show openness. But to try to change anything relating to the very nature of the document is an attempt to unfairly and inappropriately use the signature of a colleague.

There are terms which I will not use in this House to describe this kind of attempt to use other people's signatures for purposes other than those for which that signature was given.

But I implore you, Mr. Speaker, as the guardian not just of parliamentary traditions but of the new standing orders, as the guardian of our parliamentary rights, as the guardian of the spirit in which the standing orders were changed, and in the knowledge that you too, as Speaker, were associated with this change, which you saw come into being and about which you are very knowledgeable, and that you took part in the discussions surrounding it, I am convinced that you have no choice but to reject the member's initiative and to reject any similar initiative in future.

This would make it clear to the member that never, because another change to the standing orders in which I participated and helped to bring about in order to facilitate private members' bills allows a bill that was before the House to be introduced for consideration at a later date, should these two standing orders on which I worked and with which I was in agreement, and I remember very clearly the spirit in which they were introduced, and I would be deeply hurt by this, never should these two standing orders be used today by someone who wants to turn private members' business into something personal and partisan.

We cannot allow a member, not this member or any other member of the House, to use the signatures of colleagues under false pretences, without running the risk of destroying the little trust that remains between members in this House, a trust based on mutual respect, which transcends partisan politics and is rooted in the belief that we are all honest people, people who take a stand and hold what they sign, write and say in respect.

If the member opposite has problems with that, Mr. Speaker, it is your duty not just to reprimand him but to ensure that never again will anyone try to use our signatures for such ends.

[*English*]

The Speaker: It is a very interesting point.

[*Translation*]

This is a new procedure in the House. I have listened carefully to what members on both sides of the House had to say and the points raised are very important to me and to all members of the House.

I would like to have until tomorrow morning at 10 a.m. At that time I will return to the House with a decision. I hope that this

decision will help us to improve how we work with the new standing orders.

• (1540)

[*English*]

I will hold my decision on this until tomorrow morning at 10 a.m. When I come in to open the House, I will give my decision at that time.

* * *

[*Translation*]

POINT OF ORDER

TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a few minutes we are going to debate Bill C-20, a bill aimed at limiting and shackling the basic democratic rights of Quebecers. I ask for the unanimous consent of the House to table a document that will shed some light on this debate. It is an article published in the March 16, 1995 issue of *Le Devoir* showing that the 50% plus one rule is in use all over Canada. It would appear that it should be otherwise in Quebec.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during Oral Question Period, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs talked about the Quebec companies and associations that want to come and testify on Bill C-20, and he called them "mothball groups" or "mothball" associations. Would I have the unanimous consent of the House to table the list of the organizations the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs calls "mothball clubs", which represent more than—

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonnette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a document that could be of use to the parliamentarians in this House whom you appreciate so much and which I could present following the announcement by the federal government that it would introduce a bill denying Quebecers their most basic rights. It is a quote from a recent book entitled *Le pari de la franchise*. Therefore I ask for unanimous consent with a view to—

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Point of Order

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, further to the announcement by the Prime Minister that a bill would be tabled that denies the fundamental rights of Quebecers, I ask for the unanimous consent of the House to table the document entitled “Étude portant sur l’union sociale”, a study by Alain Gagnon.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Yvan Bernier (Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, the government has tabled a bill that seeks to change the referendum rules in Quebec. To shed some light on that matter, I would like to quote from the Referendum Act of Maryland, in the United States of America. It is very interesting and I could read it rapidly.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have here a document that could be of some use to the members of this House following the announcement by the federal government of the tabling of a bill denying the fundamental rights of Quebecers. It is an extract from a recent book entitled “Le pari de la franchise”.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I ask for the unanimous consent of the House to table a document that is most pertinent these days: a study published by the Library of Parliament on the fundamental rights of Canadians and Quebecers and entitled “Electoral Rights: Charter of Rights and Freedoms”. Surely this is something that could be useful.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. René Canuel (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have here an article that was published a long time ago by canon Groulx, which could greatly enlighten this House and which our colleagues opposite should read. I would ask for the unanimous consent to table this article.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

• (1545)

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to table a document, which, I am sure, will enlighten the House.

Following the tabling of Bill C-20, I think the House is not enlightened enough.

This report deals with the territorial integrity of Quebec—

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Maurice Godin (Châteauguay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, following the announcement by the Prime Minister who tabled a bill that does not make any sense and which denies the fundamental rights of Quebecers, I want to table a submission by the Comité intermunicipal de développement—

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table this document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to understand what you are doing right now. Very seldom do you act this way—and the same is true about us—but the hon. member has barely finished talking that you are on your feet, asking for unanimous consent. We cannot even hear the titles—

The Speaker: We are taking up time. You are right in saying that you are doing something you seldom do and I something I seldom do as well, but we understand what is going on in the House. I need to hear enough to make a decision. But it gets to be pretty repetitive.

An hon. member: No.

The Speaker: Not always. This is why I need to hear a little, but not too much.

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do hope you will hear me out. Following the recent tabling of Bill C-20, I have here an exceptionally important document, a presentation by the city of Val-d’Or to the Commission sur l’avenir politique et constitutionnel du Québec.

I seek the unanimous consent of the House to table it.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Point of Order

Some hon. members: No.

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have here a document that could be useful to the members of this House following the tabling by the federal government of a bill denying Quebec's basic rights.

I have an excerpt of a recent book entitled "Le pari de la franchise". I wonder if we could seek unanimous consent of the House to—

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, following the tabling of a bill denying the fundamental rights of Quebecers, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to table—

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Jean-Paul Marchand (Québec East, BQ): Mr. Speaker, further to the announcement by the prime minister that he would introduce a bill denying the basic rights of Quebecers, I would like to table a paper by Guy Tremblay, a professor at Laval University's Faculty of Law, presented to the Commission Bélanger-Campeau, stating "I share the feelings of all those who believe in—"

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table this document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Paul Mercier (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, further to the announcement by the prime minister who introduced a bill denying the basic rights of Quebecers, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to table a paper whose inherent value will be very clear to all hon. members.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table the document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Paul Mercier: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, but I did not even get to say what the paper was about.

The Speaker: It was a document and I understood it to be like all the others, so I made my decision.

Mr. Paul Mercier: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not understand how I could be refused unanimous consent even before I said what it is sought for.

The Speaker: I have heard enough to make my decision.

• (1550)

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have here a speech the Prime Minister of Canada gave in Hull on November 28, where he says that the referendum questions in 1980 and in 1995 were both clear.

Therefore, as a result of the introduction of Bill C-20 denying all the basic rights of Quebecers, I request unanimous consent to enlighten the House—

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are beginning, in this House today, a historical debate for Quebec, the debate on Bill C-20.

Given the extremely serious situation democracy is in in Quebec and the threat hanging over the national assembly, I would like to table a document which will enlighten the House on this point. It is the international covenant—

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, following the introduction of Bill C-20, I have here a document written and presented by the Quebec director general of elections, where he explains what real democracy is and what real democratic rules are.

I would like to have your permission to table this document.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have here a brochure published by my colleague, the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, which shows the historic sites that were the theatre of the fight for democracy in 1837-38.

Given the circumstances, therefore, I request the permission to table the brochure—

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Maurice Dumas (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have here an article, which was published in the December 11, 1999 edition of *Le Soleil*, saying that an ordinary majority, that is 50% plus one, is used everywhere in Canada except in the case of Quebec.

Point of Order

Thus, since the Prime Minister announced the introduction of a bill denying the basic rights of Quebecers, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to table this document which will enlighten the House.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Ghislain Fournier (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since no later than yesterday the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine was afraid to take part in a debate on CPAC, I have got the transcript of that television program.

With your permission, I would like to read an extract to you.

The Speaker: I am sure this is a good speech, but unanimous consent is required to table it. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in view of the introduction by the Prime Minister of the clarity bill, I have here a document that may be of interest to the House. This background paper is entitled “Equality Rights Guaranteed by Canada Charter of Rights and Freedoms”.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the permission to table the document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, following the arrogant and cynical remarks made by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs during oral question period, I would like to table in this House the content of an ad from the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal entitled “Shame on Ottawa”. I ask for the unanimous consent of the House to do so.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, following the introduction of the bill on clarity, I have here an article that was published in the political section of *Le Devoir* on June 30, 1994, and which explains the position of the Conseil du patronat du Québec regarding the percentages required during referendums.

I would appreciate it if the House would give its consent and allow me to table this article.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

• (1555)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I know that you are gifted with an exceptional foresight, but the fact is that my colleague, the member for Rimouski—Mitis, had not yet asked for the unanimous consent of the House when you asked the House for it. I know that you are quick, but maybe a little too quick.

The Speaker: As you have said, I can show a little foresight.

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, following the introduction by the Prime Minister of a bill that denies the Quebec people their basic rights, I would like to table a document which will enlighten the House. It is the brief that was submitted by the Société nationale des Québécois et des Québécoises de Saint-Hubert, from which I quote “A bill—”

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have leave to table this document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have here an extremely important article that appeared in the newspaper *Le Droit*, on October 26, 1995, and that will surely enlighten the House and eliminate the ignorance displayed by the people across the way out with regard to the 50% plus one.

I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to table it.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a document similar to the one mentioned by colleague. It could enlighten the ignorant people across the way, as my colleague just said, and make them understand better the scope of Bill C-20.

Do I have unanimous consent to help—

The Speaker: I would rather members did not use words like “ignorant people”. There may be “ignorance”, but I ask you not to use the expression “ignorant people”.

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

Point of Order

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, following the introduction of Bill C-20, an act that does not have unanimous consent in Quebec, I would like to table an extract from the state of Colorado's referendum act to enlighten our—

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table this document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have here an article from *Le Droit*, dated December 11, 1999, stating clearly how the government intends to deny Quebecers the right to fully chose their own future—

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table this document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, like my colleagues, I too have a document which could be of vital importance to enlighten the whole House.

I beg my colleagues from the other side to give their unanimous consent for the tabling of this document.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the House's permission to table this document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my request is two-fold. First, I will ask for unanimous consent and, second, I will say why I am asking it.

On March 25, 1999, the federal government introduced a bill entitled an act to deregulate transportation by bus. We have petitions and postal cards signed by people saying "I support the Bloc Québécois, which is demanding that those sections be struck out so as to maintain the status quo in transportation by bus".

Is—

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent from the House to table this document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have in my hands an article published today, February 7, in *Le Droit*,

entitled "A Stormy Reopening of Parliament". In the article, one can read that the debate that will attract the most attention—

• (1600)

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one of my constituents gave me a document over the weekend. I am doing this on his behalf; he wanted me to enlighten the House.

It is an extract from a book entitled *Le Pari de la franchise*. I would like to know—

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have permission to table this document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur: Mr. Speaker, I think that some things were overlooked, but now this is a bit much. Seriously, in the case of the member for Rosemont, he asked for consent and you immediately asked the question.

The member belongs to my party but I do not even know what document he wanted to table. I suppose that the Liberal members who said no do not know either what document they were asked about.

I would like you to give him a chance—

The Speaker: To at least give the title of the document, is it not?

An hon. member: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, this article published in *Le Droit* says that what will attract the most attention during this session is Bill C-20. The article was published in *Le Droit*.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I ask for the unanimous consent of the House to have Bill C-20 withdrawn.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Some hon. members: Withdraw. Withdraw.

The Speaker: Is that it? The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

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Mr. Stéphan Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have here a document from the Bloc Québécois which offers a new way of defining the relationship between Quebec and Canada.

I will not ask for unanimous consent, I will simply leave this document on my desk. If members want to take a look at it, it will be here.

The Speaker: If you are not asking for unanimous consent, I do not have to do it either.

Ms. Hélène Alarie (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I hope you will listen to me because I have something very important to table in the House, with unanimous consent, following the introduction of Bill C-20.

It is a recently published book entitled *Le Pari de la franchise*.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table that document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am intrigued by the fact that you had to refer to your list to remember that I am the member for Portneuf.

I am getting to the point. I have here a document dealing with the harmonization of federal legislation with Quebec law. I think it would enlighten our colleagues opposite. Do I have their consent to table this document?

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table the document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that Mr. Jay Hill, member for the electoral riding of Prince George—Peace River, has been appointed member of the Board of Internal Economy in place of Mr. Randy White, member for the electoral district of Langley—Abbotsford.

• (1605)

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 20 petitions.

* * *

CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the administration of the Hull—Aylmer, Mount Royal, Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar and York West byelections of November 15, 1999.

[Translation]

The document is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

* * *

[English]

LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the performance report of the Library of Parliament for 1998-99.

* * *

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ACT

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-416, an act to amend the Department of Health Act (environmental illnesses, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia and multiple chemical sensitivity).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce a bill to amend the Department of Health Act with respect to environmental illnesses, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia and multiple chemical sensitivity.

This bill would amend the Department of Health Act to provide that the Minister of Health be responsible for conducting medical and scientific research to establish the existence of environmental illnesses, to study the causes and effects of environmental illnesses and designated illnesses, and to prevent, diagnose and adequately treat environmental illnesses and designated illnesses.

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

* * *

PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-417, an act to establish the rights of patients in relation to health, treatment and records.

He said: Mr. Speaker, if we can believe the experts in Canada, health care is still the number one concern, despite all of the other

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issues. Therefore, I am pleased to introduce a patients' bill of rights, an act to establish the rights of patients in relation to health, treatment and records.

The purpose of this enactment is to establish the right of Canadians to consistent quality health services across Canada, personal rights in respect of the receipt of health services and the corresponding responsibilities which patients have in dealing with health professionals. The Minister of Health is required to seek the commitment of the provinces to adopt and protect these rights and responsibilities.

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

* * *

• (1610)

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-418, an act to amend the Access to Information Act (Crown corporations and the Canadian Wheat Board).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce and put before the House a bill which would place crown corporations and the Canadian Wheat Board under the Access to Information Act.

The government has been remiss in putting crown corporations and the Canadian Wheat Board under the Access to Information Act, being that there is some sensitivity to competitive advantage. However, the act itself speaks to it and I would like to have the opportunity to debate it.

I am very pleased to table this bill before the House. Even though there have been some discussions about access to information previously, this is very important.

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

* * *

TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT

Mr. Bill Gilmour (Nanaimo—Alberni, Ref.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-419, an act to amend the Telecommunications Act (restrictions on telemarketing).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce my private member's bill on telemarketing.

I am sure that most of us in the House and those listening have been bothered by phone calls from someone soliciting either a service or something we do not want.

My bill would allow Canadians to protect themselves against unwanted aggressive telemarketing by establishing a "do not call"

list. My bill would provide the means for anyone who does not wish to receive telemarketing calls or faxes to place their telephone number on a list maintained by the CRTC. This list would be published quarterly in electronic form and telemarketers would be required to respect it. This is already in place in several U.S. states.

Telemarketers who fail to respect the list would commit an offence and would be liable to substantial fines under existing provisions of the Telecommunications Act.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the membership of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I move:

That the membership of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be modified as follows: Jay Hill for Randy White, Yvon Godin for John Solomon; and that Randy White and John Solomon be added to the list of associate members.

(Motion agreed to)

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I move that the first report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, presented on Monday, November 15, 1999, be concurred in.

• (1615)

I am very pleased to rise today to debate a very important and critical concurrence motion.

I will bring the members of the House, and perhaps those who are watching in CPAC world, up to speed on what is happening. It just so happens that some time ago the auditor general presented one of the quarterly reports. That quarterly report of the auditor general has to do with the accounts of the country and how the public money is being guarded by the government.

As we know, the auditor general's reports are tabled in the House. Following the tabling in the House, they are normally then referred to the appropriate committee. The particular committee that receives this report is of course the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Chapter 6 of the auditor general's report was tabled in the House in April 1999, almost a year ago. The public accounts committee tabled its response to that report on November 15, 1999.

Something that happens here in the House is that we spend a lot of money operating the Office of the Auditor General and a lot of

money on MPs and senators in parliament who try to hold the government accountable. We spend a lot of money in many different departments and many different areas of responsibility asking for reports. The reports are then referred to the committees and in due time the committees report back. That is where it bogs down. The reports are tabled in the House and the government must then bring forward a response. It usually sits on the reports until the next election. Most of those very good reports go completely unnoticed in the country and are not acted upon on behalf of taxpayers.

Today we have the sixth report of the auditor general as responded to by the public accounts committee with its first report being tabled in the House on November 15, 1999.

My motion for concurrence was made just three days later because even back then we were very well aware that expenditures out of the human resources portfolio were not being well managed. This particular auditor's report and the report of the public accounts committee addressed the question back in the middle of November last year. Had we given a sense to that report at that time we probably would have avoided what has now become the billion dollar boondoggle. The recommendations that were made by the public accounts committee should be acted upon on behalf of the taxpayers of Canada.

We need to be very careful. We need to make sure that we do not just routinely sweep this report under the rug. I will take a little bit of time to explain to the members what is actually involved in this particular report. I will urge them to vote in favour of my motion, which is to concur in this report. When we concur in it, the recommendations that were presented by the committee will be enacted. In other words, there will be some accountability to our hard-working, beleaguered taxpayers who send bushels of money—I suppose I should say billions of bushels of money—to Ottawa where it is administered and mis-administered.

We want to address the important questions that address the House these days. The phones in our riding offices are ringing off the hooks these days. Canadian taxpayers want to know what is going on. They want to know how we can tolerate this total waste of money and the lack of accountability for it.

• (1620)

The auditor general identified a number of areas in his first quarter report of 1999. Chapter 6 of the report deals with a couple of the issues that we are dealing with today. It was a program funded by HRDC, the human resources development portfolio. We should listen carefully to what it says.

The report deals with, among other things, the national child tax benefit and the way in which it is administered. The auditor general points out that the benefit has highly praiseworthy goals, such as reducing poverty for children, which is an issue this government

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has put at the forefront and which resonates with many Canadians. None of us want our children to live in poverty. We know that children who live in poverty are living in families that are suffering from poverty. The very government that has this high goal continues to tax Canadian families with incomes of \$20,000 a year or less. It takes \$6 billion a year from those poor families in income tax. One really wonders what it is about.

Along comes the auditor general's report stating that the national child benefit, which, among other things, was supposed to reduce child poverty, is not being properly monitored and that there is not an adequate indication that the goals it has struck for itself are being met.

The auditor general raises some important questions. For example, the audit report talks about the definition of poverty and asks for clarification on what it really means. That has never really been done. When we target programs to people who are in poverty we need to know who those families are.

He mentions that there are many short term goals, some political only, and that we should be looking at long term goals as pertaining to the welfare of our families in Canada.

We need to define our goals so that the target we are shooting at is clearly known. When I was a youngster we used to say that if we shot at nothing we would be sure to hit it. Here we have another government program that does not have clearly defined goals. It just generally shoots at random in some location with taxpayer dollars and wherever it hits it is considered a success. Witness the statements made by the Prime Minister and the Minister of HRDC today. What they are getting away with is really atrocious.

The accountability that is required is spelled out in the report from the auditor general. He mentions specifically the national child benefit and the employability assistance for people with disabilities. I emphasize that when I move for concurrence in this report I am speaking in favour of assisting people who need help. Many times when we bring these issues forward the Liberals and some of our other political adversaries try to characterize us as not caring about these people. That is a false characterization. We do care about them. We care about them so much that we would like the money taxpayers give toward helping them to actually get to them and to actually achieve the specified goals.

When the auditor general wrote his report he said that there was lack of accountability. It is a cost shared program with the provinces.

• (1625)

It is not clear who sets these goals or who monitors them to make sure they are being met. There are general statements of accountability. It always makes wonderful politics to say that they want to be accountable. Every politician will say that because it resonates with the taxpayer. However, are they actually doing it? The auditor

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general said no and the public accounts committee said no. Some specific recommendations were made to correct this.

It is important to have an annual report that supplies in detail the information that is required in order to evaluate whether or not there were proper evaluations and whether goals were appropriately set.

Mr. Speaker, I find it difficult to speak with all the noise I hear with my left ear. I would ask that you intervene on my behalf.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The hon. member for Elk Island has requested that the House pay close attention to his words.

Mr. Ken Epp: I appreciate the indulgence of my colleagues, since I believe these issues are very important. They certainly are these days as we listen to the big questions on the billion dollar boondoggle.

I will now talk a little bit on why I am moving concurrence in this report.

The report makes a couple of important points. Every province and territory in the country, with the exception of Quebec, has reached an agreement with the federal government on the new social union and on the way in which they will fund some of these shared programs. I think there is probably a consensus across the country for that initiative.

I have been in a number of different parts of the country, but primarily my own province, and I have not met people who want to withhold assistance from those fellow Canadians who are in need. However, they are demanding and insisting that the money be properly managed. It is a very simple question: Is it going to be properly accounted for?

The objective is to improve the work incentives for those people involved, to provide benefits and services for low income families with children, and to give those with disabilities the added ability to get jobs and look after themselves as much as possible and to get assistance from fellow Canadians who would like to assist them. We would like to do this through an accountable tax program. The key element is accountability.

In the report, the committee said "Accountability is a key element in the design of both programs. In official statements, all signatories have made commitments to account for expenditures of funds and of outcomes". Having signed onto this shared program idea, the provinces and the federal government have made the commitment. The report goes on to say "Notwithstanding these commitments, it is unclear how the accountability for overall results of these programs will be achieved". There are then some observations and recommendations.

An official from the department, who attended the committee meeting, said "Citizens, legislative bodies and audit offices may justifiably seek assurances that these new arrangements increase or at least do not diminish accountability for expenditures on

shared social programs and their outcomes". That is a very desirable goal. As I said, in the milieu that we are in right now in parliament today, it is so appropriate. That is why I chose to bring forward this motion for concurrence today. We believe we need to meet those joint goals together.

• (1630)

I will move on to some of the recommendations that the committee is making. Let me be very clear on this. On the floor right now is my motion for concurrence. If the House concurs in the report, it means that these recommendations are adopted by the House. I want to read them into the record because they are so important.

Recommendation number one from the auditor general via the public accounts committee is that Human Resources Development Canada and its signatories determine specific quantitative expectations of performance for their respective program goals along with implementation time lines for the national child benefit program and the employability assistance for persons with disabilities program.

Recommendation number two is that Human Resources Development Canada and the other signatories regularly report on progress in setting quantitative goals and implementation of deadlines in their respective reports to the public and their parliamentary legislatures.

This is a critical recommendation and ought to have been implemented about six months ago. That is that there be a regular report and that it be tabled in all of the provincial legislatures as well as in this House so that there is openness and accountability and we do not have to get out the damage control troops to try to ease a problem.

The third recommendation is that Human Resources Development Canada with the other signatories develop a common data reporting framework and protocol aimed at achieving quality, consistency and comparability of program data.

I am running out of time so I cannot explain this, but it is very important that there be consistency from province to province on what the goals are and how the achievement of those goals is measured. If we do not have that, then these reports can be fudged and will be meaningless. Therefore that is a very important recommendation.

Recommendation number four is that Human Resources Development Canada and the other signatories endeavour where feasible to present audited data in the annual progress report. The executive summary of that is simply that we want the data to be reliable, hence the call for it to be audited.

Recommendation number five is that HRDC together with the other signatories ensure that the annual progress reports of these initiatives are tabled in their respective parliamentary legislatures at the earliest opportunity after the report is released to the public.

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Again we have this accountability to the public and to the legislatures.

Recommendation number six is that HRDC and all the other signatories commit resources to implement the necessary evaluations of these programs. I will not read the names of the programs again. What we have is the necessity for adequate staffing so that accountability can be achieved.

I am personally very upset. Imagine if a bank said it had lost \$100,000 of our money and that we could not have it back and when asked to explain where it went, the bank said "We are sorry, we had to cut back our staff". Would we accept that from a bank? No. Will the taxpayers accept that from the government? No, they will not. It is a lame excuse. It is an unjustifiable excuse and the government may not use it. The government must put adequate resources to the accountability of these programs so that we do not get a repeat of the billion dollar boondoggle.

As a little aside, the auditor general also reported on programs such as TAGS. The jobs training fund has been the focus of the media and of the public in the last month, but the issue is much larger. Again it was last April, almost a year ago, when this was said.

The auditor general in looking at TAGS said that 26% had no clear objectives and 33% did not meet the criteria for the labour adjustment measure under which they were approved. Eighty-four percent did not have verification of contracts and 83% had no supporting documentation. This is a completely different program. The auditor general has pointed it out. It has been reported to the committee which said, "Let us deal with these things" and the House said, "No, let us sit on it".

• (1635)

Canadian taxpayers are sick and tired of being sat on. We are being taxed to death. Meanwhile the government through its different agencies is totally failing Canadian people in providing accountability on how the money is spent and also that the objectives that are said to be met are being met.

If members have questions I would certainly be happy to expand on what I have said.

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the House do now proceed to the orders of the day.

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe that after my speech there should have been an opportunity for questions and comments and I do not think you called for that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): No, this is on a concurrence motion. On a concurrence motion there is no provision for questions and comments. The debate went to the government, but the clerk is double checking. We were on debate and when the government was on debate it used that opportunity to call the vote on the concurrence motion. I will double check and get back to you.

The Chair stands corrected. There is a 10 minute period for questions and comments. The House will go to questions and comments.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the comments by our colleague from Elk Island.

I was struck by what he said at the beginning of his remarks to the effect that the reports tabled in this House are just that, tabled. The recommendations in these reports are left to the discretion of the government which, too often unfortunately, will only respond to them at election time.

He very rightly said that excellent recommendations are thus shelved and never implemented.

If I understand correctly, the motion is aimed at ensuring that any recommendation made in a report tabled in this House be immediately implemented with the agreement of the House.

I find it an interesting proposition in several respects and I will ask him to comment on this in a moment.

Is this not the proof that the procedure followed by this House for decades fails to ensure good governance? Are we not faced with obsolete procedure?

At the same time, I would suggest that he might have seen to it that members of this House have the opportunity to debate recommendations further because to endorse them just like that might be just a bit too hasty.

• (1640)

I believe the House procedures are somewhat outdated and should be overhauled. I would like to hear what the member has to say about this.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, I value the comments made by the member from the Bloc.

The government is so eager to get back to Bill C-20 that it is going to shut down debate on this motion. That is what it just indicated.

I honestly think if we had a government in Ottawa that was responsive to the needs of the people in Canada and was accountable and treated taxpayers' money as if it were its own, as I pledged

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to do when I was elected, we would not have the scenario of people in Quebec eagerly trying to get out of this country. I believe the problem is right here in Ottawa.

We have botched the administration of the country and there is not an adequate reason for people to want to stay in the country. We should give them that reason by providing them with openness, accountability and absolute transparency when it comes to stating government objectives and evaluating whether those objectives are being met. We need to ensure that the people in Quebec as in the rest of Canada, the taxpayers who part with their hard-earned money, know for certain that their money is not being misused, abused and boondoggled.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a few comments to make. In Motion No. 14 our friend the Reform member talks mainly about the social union. As he knows, the Premier of Quebec refused to sign the social union framework agreement.

He then said that if everything was working well, Quebec would stay within Canada. I would like him to prove to me that what he has just said is true.

[English]

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, an agreement was reached with all of the provinces except Quebec. I am going to say something now which could come back to haunt me but I am going to say it anyway because I believe in brutal honesty.

I believe that Quebec is the only province standing up for the constitution of Canada. Quebecers are the ones who are saying that this is a provincial jurisdiction and the federal government has been encroaching on provincial jurisdiction steadily over the last 30 years by an increasing use of the spending power. The government has gone into areas where it ought not to be. As a result people in Quebec are saying "We want out of here because you are not even obeying your own constitution".

I am not at all happy that I said that. I am not happy because it is the truth and because it points out a fundamental problem in this country which has not been dealt with by past Conservative and Liberal governments. I am talking about a respect for the law and order of our constitution.

I must add that we want to live together as a federation. I want Quebec to stay in Canada. I want Canada to stay together. We must learn to work together. This means that Ottawa, this parliament, the government, must respect what Canadians are expecting from their constitution and from their individual provincial rights. Too often the government steps on the toes of those people in the provinces who simply want to do things that are good for their country.

I say it is time to fix that part of it. Then we would not have Bill C-20 and all the other stuff that goes with it.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for raising this matter, because the entire question of Canada's social programs is extremely important.

• (1645)

This is one of the sectors in which it is clear that the Canadian federal system is working the least well. In 1989, a motion was passed unanimously to eradicate child poverty. Today we have more poor children than we did in 1989. This is a matter that brings great dishonour to the Canadian government.

In my opinion, on the point raised referring to the auditor general's report, the proposal made by the Bloc Québécois, by the hon. member for Québec, is an excellent one. She has proposed that a commissioner for poverty be created. This commissioner would carry out the duties of the auditor general where poverty issues were concerned, but would go far beyond that, by not only finding if the legislation had or had not been complied with, but also making recommendations on where there ought to be amendments to the legislation, on how the government ought to be judged.

This position would have the same credibility as the auditor general. We know that when the auditor general criticizes something the government has done, the public listens to him. I believe the poverty commissioner could have the same type of responsibility. I find the proposal by the hon. member for Québec to be an interesting one, an interesting strategy within the overall strategy against poverty.

In our system, it is fairly complicated for a citizen to understand what the responsibility of each government is in the social area. The federal government ought to give money back in the form of transfer payments to the provinces, whose responsibility it is to administer programs.

It would have been a good thing if today's report had gone into this a bit further, and this is what I would like to ask the hon. member. Ought we not to have gone as far as to pass concrete judgment on the federal government's interventions? Is it appropriate for the federal government to interfere in things that are none of its business?

[English]

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, again I appreciate the question. Here is a person who says that we should deal honestly with the question of child poverty. Child poverty results from families who

do not make enough money relative to the expenses they need to provide for the needs of their families.

What does the government do? It taxes them. People making \$20,000 a year or less for their families put \$6 billion a year into the federal coffers. The Liberals ought to be ashamed of themselves for doing that.

I believe what we need to do to fight poverty is first of all to allow Canadians to keep some of their earnings. Poor people are taxed at the highest marginal rate of anyone in the country because of this Conservative-Liberal regime we have been under for the last 30 years. That has got to be fixed.

There are also certain people who have very specific definite needs. They need the help of the community, and I would say they absolutely have it. However, for those who are able to work, the best help we can give them and the best way to fight their poverty is to set up an economic climate where there are so many jobs that they all have a job and can provide for their own families.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Call in the members.

• (1735)

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

Routine Proceedings

(Division No. 662)

YEAS

Members

Adams	Alcock
Anderson	Assad
Assadourian	Augustine
Axworthy	Bakopanos
Belair	Belanger
Bellemare	Bertrand
Bevilacqua	Blondin-Andrew
Bonin	Boudria
Bradshaw	Brown
Bryden	Bulte
Caccia	Calder
Cannis	Caplan
Carroll	Catterall
Cauchon	Chan
Charbonneau	Chrétien (Saint-Maurice)
Clouthier	Coderre
Collenette	Copps
Cullen	DeVillers
Dhaliwal	Dion
Drouin	Duhamel
Easter	Eggleton
Fontana	Fry
Gagliano	Galloway
Godfrey	Goodale
Graham	Gray (Windsor West)
Guarnieri	Harb
Harvard	Hubbard
Iftody	Jackson
Jordan	Keyes
Kilger (Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh)	Knutsen
Kraft Sloan	Lastewka
Lee	Leung
Limoges	Lincoln
Longfield	MacAulay
Mahoney	Maloney
Manley	Marleau
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	Matthews
McCormick	McKay (Scarborough East)
McLellan (Edmonton West)	Mifflin
Mills (Broadview—Greenwood)	Minna
Mitchell	Murray
Myers	Nault
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)	O'Reilly
Pagtakhan	Paradis
Patry	Peric
Peterson	Pettigrew
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)	Pillitteri
Proud	Proulx
Provenzano	Redman
Reed	Richardson
Robillard	Rock
Saada	Scott (Fredericton)
Sgro	Speller
St. Denis	St-Julien
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Abbott	Alarie
Anders	Asselin
Bellehumeur	Benoit
Bergeron	Bernier (Bonaventure—Gaspé—
Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok)	Bigras
Blaikie	Borotsik
Brien	Brison
Cadman	Canuel
Cardin	Chatters
Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic)	Crête
Cummins	Davies
de Savoye	Desjarlais
Dockrill	Doyle
Duceppe	Dumas
Epp	Forseth
Fournier	Gagnon
Gauthier	Gilmour
Girard-Bujold	Godin (Acadie—Bathurst)
Godin (Châteauguay)	Goldring

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Grey (Edmonton North)	Gruending
Guay	Guimond
Hart	Harvey
Herron	Hill (Macleod)
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	Hilstrom
Johnston	Jones
Konrad	Lalonde
Lebel	Lill
Loubier	Lunn
MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)	Marceau
Marchand	McDonough
McNally	Ménard
Mercier	Meredith
Mills (Red Deer)	Muise
Obhrai	Perron
Picard (Drummond)	Plamondon
Price	Rocheleau
Schmidt	Scott (Skeena)
Solomon	St-Hilaire
St-Jacques	Stinson
Stoffer	Strahl
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PAIRED MEMBERS

Finlay

Lefebvre

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

AN ACT TO GIVE EFFECT TO THE REQUIREMENT FOR CLARITY AS SET OUT IN THE OPINION OF THE SUPREME COURT OF CANADA IN THE QUEBEC SECESSION REFERENCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-20, an act to give effect to the requirement for clarity as set out in the opinion of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Quebec secession reference, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

• (1740)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): When debate was interrupted the hon. member for Markham had one minute in questions and comments. Does the hon. member wish to use his last minute?

Mr. Jim Jones: No, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre de Savoye: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Bill C-20 goes against everything that is democratic in Canada and in Quebec.

Today, the government has a last chance to withdraw it—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Resuming debate. The hon. Member for Chicoutimi.

Mr. Pierre de Savoye: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. You interrupted me and I had not finished.

I accept that there is no unanimous consent to withdraw the bill. It is within the rules. What I do not accept, however, is the fact that the members on the other side cannot keep a respectful silence. This bill is insulting enough, there is no need to add the injury of members not listening to what is being said.

Those who want to talk should go outside and those who want to listen should stay in.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I am sure the House has been adequately chastized.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I cannot speak with all the insults being thrown out from the other side. I would ask that you see to it that I can express myself as a parliamentarian.

Could you find out if there is without formality a bill that denies the rights of the people of Quebec? I think there is consent.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve has requested that a motion be put to House. Does the member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve have the consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Ménard: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I believe you will find jurisprudence in Beauchesne's to the effect that when there is really a fundamental attack on the rights of Quebec, we are entitled to ask for unanimous consent.

Therefore, we ask for unanimous consent to have the right to have this bill withdrawn recognized.

• (1745)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): That was a nice try, but I will not even go to Beauchesne's on that one.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, the atmosphere seems to be highly charged. People are not paying too much attention to what is going on.

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So that this debate can begin on a solid footing, I ask the unanimous consent of the House to adjourn the business of the House.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The hon. whip of the Bloc Québécois has asked for the unanimous consent of the House to adjourn the debate. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Harvey (Chicoutimi, PC): Mr. Speaker, I intend to preface my comments not with a quote from the executive director of an NPO or other community organization but with one from the International Monetary Fund managing director Michel Camdessus. He urged northern countries as well as Southern countries to think about the fight against poverty, which he feels must become the priority of all governments.

When we look at what has been going on here, in this country, in the past few days, with the government tabling a bill that is essentially a duplication of the supreme court decision, we have the right to wonder what the government is really trying to achieve. It talks about a clear question without defining it very much. I think a question can be clear without being trivial or trite.

It talks about a substantial majority and a qualitative majority. Note that this is not specified either. There is nothing we can do about that as democratic parliamentarians. In the European common market, the Maastricht treaty was passed with a majority of 50% plus one.

This is totally incredible. We are coming back from a parliamentary recess. If there is one member of the House who met people who told him it is important to discuss the constitutional issue, I would like to have a chat with him tomorrow morning in my office.

We know that Canadians are facing huge difficulties. I believe that, in the last 30 years, the problem in Canada, in Quebec and in all the regions of the country, had to do much more with the demagogical attitudes of some politicians, and not of all Canadians.

An analysis of Canada's history in the recent past shows who was elected from 1968 to 1984. There was always provocation to crush Quebec's profound aspirations.

Some hon. members: That is right.

Mr. André Harvey: I will skip the years 1984 to 1993, because I am not at all ashamed to be a member of the Progressive Conserva-

tive Party. Our predecessors drove the debt from \$18 to \$200 billion. They have managed to increase it elevenfold in nine or ten years. We only doubled it.

The constitutional issue was another mess. Had the Meech Lake accord not been a failure, we would not be here discussing this issue.

● (1750)

The failure of this agreement was not co-ordinated by the Canadian people; it was the doing, once again, of a few politicians.

At the time, polls were conducted across the country, not only in Quebec, and 92% of Canadians supported the agreement. But some politicians, and they were not members of the Progressive Conservative Party, made the whole thing fail.

An hon. member: Wells, McKenna and Chrétien.

Mr. André Harvey: I am proud to be a Progressive Conservative because my party has always drawn on the noblest feelings of Canadians, including reconciliation. I am happy to quote our present leader, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, who said that the Prime Minister has been playing a dangerous game for the past 30 years and that he will never be able to hold Quebec back.

Whatever applies to Quebec also applies to Alberta and British Columbia. Whether in a family, a region, a province or a country, it is impossible to force people to remain within an institution against their will. Unfortunately, we underestimate the impact of this bill on the subconscious of all Canadians, starting with that of Quebecers, but also that of our English speaking counterparts, because this will leave a mark.

Canadians have a number of concerns, not only down to earth ones, but also profoundly existential ones. It is not right to monopolize the energies of all politicians in the country, particularly those in this House and in the national assembly, to discuss an issue that does not interest our fellow citizens at this time.

My feeling is that this is pure provocation motivated by political gain because they cannot, in earnest, copy the supreme court decision and make us believe this is in the best interest of Canada.

This is my guess—I could be wrong and, if I am mistaken, my colleagues will let me know: the present government got 38% of the votes and, for it to maintain its current status, there has to be at least four or five opposition parties. There has to be some forty members of the Bloc, the Reform Party, the NDP and the PC Party, and the best way to achieve that is to play that chord.

The chord still elicits a response, but I am not sure that the government will make it to the next election with the 1997 scenario, two weeks before the election, when the Prime Minister

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said that 50% plus one was not enough. We remember what happened in election terms. I am sure that this government will not be able to draw on the same sentiments, Canadians' strongest.

What I fear at the moment is that, when most of the considerations and concerns of our fellow citizens have been improved—the concerns of our fellow citizens must be considered. Imagine people at home without a job, with young children, who have a hard time meeting the basic needs and who see us debating a matter of clarity and significant majority. It is crazy.

It is totally embarrassing for parliamentarians who are supposedly responsible to agree to this debate when we realize that the real clarity our fellow citizens want us to debate, want us to take a stand on, pertains, among other things, to health care. It is totally dramatic, and not only in Quebec.

And all this time the government is busy talking about home care when we know very well the source of all the surpluses it is currently using to create new programs, prepare its platform and play wildly partisan politics.

• (1755)

They were eked out of measures put in place by the Progressive Conservatives. With respect to the free trade agreement, which enabled us to increase our exports in a few years from \$90 billion to \$250 billion, have you considered the net profit from these trading activities?

I notice my colleague from Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, who does not have a selective memory. He remembers very clearly the matter of the GST. We have paid dearly for the matter of the GST. Some members beat us because they promised to do away with it.

An hon. member: Hypocrites.

Mr. André Harvey: This year, tax revenues from the GST, which was supposed to be abolished, will be \$24 billion. The House should be reminded without demagoguery that the purpose of the GST was supposed to be to reduce taxes. Unfortunately, we did not remain in office long enough to complete the tax reform. Taxes have never been reduced.

Concerning the poverty issue, our party, through a committee that is co-chaired by my colleague for Shefford, and with the co-operation of the Bloc Québécois—we should give credit where credit is due—has undertaken to examine seriously the issue of a guaranteed minimum income. The current situation is not normal, and we will not be content with 2%, 3%, 4% or 5% increases in certain small programs in the next budget.

We want the government to consider, as it is being done in Europe and in many other countries, the issue of the citizens' right to an income, commonly called the guaranteed minimum income. We are ready to co-operate with the government, because our

dozens of programs are totally inefficient. We should fight poverty, not the poor. We are ready to co-operate on issues such as this one, but do not count on us to wholeheartedly endorse Bill C-20, which is making use of the supreme court decision as a means to win the next election. I could go on and on.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. Member a question. I think I can say on behalf of all my colleagues from the Bloc without exception that we appreciate his solidarity with Quebec's interests.

In politics, one can respect individuals. I have always considered it a duty not to make debates personal. I want to ask our colleague whether he does not find this situation unacceptable for Quebec. Quebec is a nation that has a tradition of democracy, which goes a long way back and which is clearly superior to the level of democracy of our colleagues across the way. Throughout Quebec history, all the important changes were sanctioned by consultations. René Lévesque, a great democrat, respected the results in 1980. And we respected the results in 1995.

Would the hon. member agree that if one was looking for an example of lack of respect for the rights of Quebec, the best candidate would be the current Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs?

Mr. André Harvey: Mr. Speaker, the least I can say is that I invite the minister to give second thought to the strategy adopted by his government in the last 30 years. The figures are clear. The sovereigntist vote in Quebec went from 20% to 49.4%. What will it be next time?

• (1800)

I ask the government to focus less on the needs of professional hockey teams and on those of our banking system, which is closing branch after branch our regions. I ask the government to focus on the real issues that concern people and every family tonight, instead of proposing a bill which is simply redundant and which shows a lack of respect for the national assembly and for every legislative assembly in Canada.

I am sure that, in order to do productive work, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs will have to work closely with the provinces.

We heard a lot about social union. Nobody understands it. If social union can be instrumental in establishing a guaranteed minimum income for the poorest in our society, it could be a very interesting initiative for the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, and I can assure him of our support and our willingness to analyze this issue, which is presently being looked at all over the world.

Even in the United States, the Americans established an inquiry which decided that this was probably the way to go. They did not implement the report, but it does not mean it was not good.

I ask the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs to put aside for a while his constitutional obsession, to work on real issues and to find solutions that will get the big and small regions of our country out of poverty.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a short and rather simple question to ask my colleague who just spoke brilliantly and courageously. I congratulate him because it is not easy in a party like his to take such a firm position against such an unnecessary and divisive bill.

My question is very simple. I remember sitting with my colleague as a member of the Progressive Conservative Party when that party had many members from Quebec, and I remember that each time the members from Quebec took a stand within the Conservative Party, there was a debate. For example, I remember the debates on constitutional reform, on official languages reform, and Conservative members from Quebec courageously took a stand within their party to bring about some changes.

Can the member explain to me why members of the Liberal Party who come from Quebec have nothing better to do but than to try to crush Quebec instead of giving it its rightful place, as Conservative members from Quebec did when they were in office and as members of the Bloc Québécois are doing right now?

Mr. André Harvey: Mr. Speaker, I must admit that the hon. member saw things in their true perspective and that he has a good grasp of history.

The member has an accurate recollection of what happened and, as a matter of fact, positions which received the support of the Quebec caucus usually dealt with the future.

I invite those from the other side to reflect on the consequences of this bill because I am convinced that, not necessarily in the short run but in few years from now if there is another referendum, this bill will be an asset for those campaigning for the yes side, and I am convinced that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs will bitterly regret what he has done.

I therefore ask him, in a very friendly way, to withdraw this bill. It would be the best proof of goodwill and I ask unanimous consent to do so.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Maybe you were not vigilant enough. The previous speaker asked for unanimous consent, which we believe we have, to withdraw Bill C-20. The House could do so at 6.05 p.m. this evening.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I believe I put the question regarding unanimous consent but that it was not given.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with the member for Davenport.

I wish to speak on this bill, which proposes to give effect to the requirement of clarity expressed by the supreme court in the reference on the secession of Quebec, because I believe that a referendum process leading to something as serious as the separation of a province must be characterized by clarity.

• (1805)

On November 23, Mr. Lucien Bouchard responding to our government's decision to enshrine in a federal act that he could embark into negotiations that might lead to secession only after asking a clear question and obtaining a clear majority in favour of such a proposal, said, and I quote:

I believe this decision is indicative of the bad faith in which the federal government will deal with a Quebec government willing to negotiate after a yes vote.—The federal government's bad faith opens the door to a unilateral declaration of sovereignty.

Answering an English-speaking journalist he gave the following elaboration:

[*English*]

I quote: "The doors will be wide open for a unilateral declaration of independence with the authority of the supreme court".

[*Translation*]

In his comments, the Quebec premier also said, again on the basis of the supreme court's opinion, that our government's decision could strengthen the likelihood of a Quebec having unilaterally declared its independence being recognized by the international community.

These statements were of course welcomed by Mr. Jacques Parizeau who, a few days later, at a meeting of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste at Laval University, was very quick to congratulate his successor, praising him to the high heavens, which was most unusual for the former premier of Quebec, who never missed a chance to criticize his successor.

No matter what some people might say, including the member for Beauharnois—Salaberry who, on November 23 attempted to mitigate the effects of Mr. Bouchard's comments by stating on CBC radio,

[*English*]

I quote: "I don't think it was threatening a unilateral declaration of independence".

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[Translation]

The premier of Quebec did threaten a unilateral declaration of sovereignty or independence, to use the English phrase, depending on whether he is talking to French speaking or English speaking reporters, which says a lot about the meaning the PQ gives to the term sovereignty, in spite of all its complicated attempts to distinguish between sovereignty and independence.

The premier of Quebec uses the words of the supreme court which suit his purpose. Let us come back to certain elements of this reference to see if it supports a unilateral declaration of sovereignty or independence or if it recognizes that international law confers legitimacy to a unilateral declaration of independence such as the one the present government of Quebec is threatening to make.

The first question the supreme court was asked read as follows, and I quote:

Under the Constitution of Canada, can the National Assembly, legislature or government of Quebec effect the secession of Quebec from Canada unilaterally?

To this question, the opinion of the court was very clear: any unilateral secession attempt would be illegal. The Court wrote, and I quote:

Any attempt to effect the secession of a province from Canada must be undertaken pursuant to the Constitution of Canada, or else violate the Canadian legal order.

The secession of a province requires an amendment to the constitution and I quote, "which per force requires negotiation".

What the decision of the supreme court establishes clearly is that the Quebec government should negotiate in a provincial government capacity, under the terms of the Canadian constitution, from which it draws its powers, and that it would not be entitled to proclaim itself the governing body of a sovereign or independent state.

The court also has to deal with the question of international law and the right to self-determination. In this regard, the court established that a unilateral secession would not likely be accepted in international law if it were not compatible with the constitution of an existing state, as it is in Canada. Let me quote the relevant excerpt:

A state whose government represents the whole of the people or peoples resident within its territory, on a basis of equality and without discrimination, and respects the principles of self-determination in its internal arrangements, is entitled to maintain its territorial integrity under international law and to have that territorial integrity recognized by other states.

Following the publication of the supreme court decision, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada said, and I quote:

The government of Canada will respect this decision and abide by it.

Our government's decision to try and ensure the clarity of the question and of the results of a referendum before initiating

negotiations on the secession of a province is totally in line with the decision of the court.

The court stipulated, and I quote "There are legal grounds for refusing to negotiate when there is a lack of clarity."

• (1810)

Moreover, beyond these legal issues, one should bear in mind that a unilateral secession is also unworkable. This is not a simple process, as suggested by minister Jacques Brassard on October 12, 1997, when he said that his government would only have to have effective authority on the Quebec territory, following a unilateral declaration of independence, for international recognition to follow.

Let me remind the House of the thrust of a speech given by the intergovernmental affairs minister before members of the Canadian Bar Association in Montreal on March 23, 1998.

After pointing out that, in the last 30 years, the debate had dealt with the why of the independence, the minister dealt with how Quebec could go from the status of a Canadian province to that of a sovereign state, following a unilateral declaration of independence.

Would the Quebec government really have the means to fulfill its claims? Could it assume all the functions currently performed by the government of Canada? As examples, the minister outlined some important issues. I will enumerate them.

Following a unilateral declaration of secession, which passport and which embassy services Quebecers preparing to travel abroad would use?

What would happen to the many citizens who work for the Canadian government? In the absence of agreements with the Canadian government, would they leave their jobs to work for the Quebec government? What would happen to their pension plans?

Would the RCMP members renounce to assume the responsibilities conferred to them by many laws such as investigations into drug offences and money laundering infractions?

In a commercial dispute between a Quebecer and an American competitor, would the Quebec government, which is not a member of NAFTA, have access to the dispute settlement mechanisms provided in this agreement?

In the absence of a close co-operation with the Canadian government, could the Quebec government retrieve source deductions such as tax deductions, employment insurance premiums, excise taxes and custom duties, to name but a few?

How would the Quebec government keep citizens of this province from benefiting of services provided them by the Canadian government, especially since it does not itself have the means, the expertise or the human resources to offer them the same services?

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We can hardly predict the future but we can foresee it in the light of a recent transfer of the manpower training. This transfer was done in conditions that could be called ideal—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Quebec had been wanting for a long time that the Canadian government—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. There are limits to saying silly things in this House.

According to the standing orders of the House, the debate must remain relevant. I cannot see the relevance of these remarks to the current debate. Moreover, I would even say that they have made impertinent remarks in so far as they are in no position to criticize the Government of Quebec, considering the \$1 billion plus mess at the Department of Human Resources Development.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): With respect, I listened very carefully. Members know I have to do so through the translation. Through the translation, which in my experience is very accurate, the words of the hon. member were appropriate. I did not hear anything at all through translation that was inappropriate.

Mr. Pierre de Savoye: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Just to make sure, Mr. Speaker, that you do understand what is at stake here, it is not that the member opposite used words that are inappropriate, but they were irrelevant to the debate. More than that, it was contrary to what is going on actually with the minister of HRDC through the employment embezzlement of over \$1 billion.

Actually the members opposite should not talk about things. They are looking for a straw in Quebec's eye when they have a two-by-four in their own eye.

• (1815)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): That is obviously a matter of debate and that is why we are here. It is certainly not a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Like you, all the members in the House want a calm debate. You know that you can count on us in this regard.

However, my colleague has made some accusations about the Government of Quebec that are unworthy of us as parliamentarians. Out of respect for what will follow in the House, I ask that our colleague apologize because we have in Quebec a most competent government, far more competent than the one in front of us. Consequently, I am asking him to apologize to the House.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The government of the province of Quebec, I am sure, rests very comfortably in the knowledge that it has such competent defenders of its interests here in Ottawa, but that is still a point of debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I think you will see on page 244 of Beaudesne's that there is such a thing as the indivisibility of the Crown principle. When the Quebec government is insulted, all members of parliament from Quebec are insulted too. In the rest of our proceedings, you should ensure that such insults—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I am very patient, but there are limits. The hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Speaker, had my colleagues opposite listened carefully, they would have realized I did not say anything against the Quebec government. All I wanted to say is that everything was done in harmony.

To answer the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, my remarks are nothing compared to those we hear from the other side. You are the ones who accused me of being a traitor, of having sold out.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I request that members speak to each other through the Chair. To suggest that one member is calling another member a very pejorative word is just not appropriate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ghislain Lebel: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I just heard the member who just spoke say "traitor" and "sold out". These are unparliamentary expressions and I would ask him to withdraw them.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I heard the form and the context and it was reflected toward himself. He was not addressing that to anyone else.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. With all due respect for the hon. member, there were two violations of

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the rules. First, as you appropriately pointed out, the member was not speaking to you. Second, he mentioned some words and accused us of saying these words in reference to him and his colleagues.

I cannot accept being accused of unreasonable and disrespectful motives such as the ones the member just attributed to us.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): We dealt with the question of addressing each other through the Chair. I very clearly heard the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard address his comments in a general sense; not addressing them to any one person specifically, but reflectively.

Having said that, we should have honour for the Chamber and for the debate that is unfolding. Let us use our wit and our imagination. Let us not be mean to each other.

• (1820)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, a unilateral declaration of independence would be illegal, not recognized internationally and impossible to implement, to name just three of the many reasons behind our government's decision to define the prerequisites to any negotiations for the secession of a province.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 26, I move:

That the House continue to sit beyond the ordinary hour of daily adjournment for the purpose of considering Bill C-20.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Will those members who object to the motion please rise in their places?

[*English*]

And more than 15 members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Fifteen or more members having risen to object, the motion is deemed to have been withdrawn.

(Motion withdrawn)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard.

Would he try to tell us, as the Prime Minister did today, that the clarity bill applies to all provinces in Canada? If it does, and if it is a bill that is intended to ensure the clarity of the question in the event of a referendum on secession, can he tell us which other provinces intend, like Quebec, to become independent?

Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert for her question.

The Canadian parliament's legislation applies to all Canadians not just to one people.

This is simply a bill on clarity and its purpose is to follow up on the opinion of the Supreme Court of Canada. This opinion said that the political stakeholders must determine what is a clear majority vote on a clear question given the circumstances under which a future referendum could be held.

• (1825)

Thus, it is very simple, no province should be specified. As far as I am concerned, the province of Quebec will not secede, there will not be another referendum and we will live in harmony.

Mr. Yvan Bernier (Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I understood the hon. member wanted to share his time with some other member. I do not want members opposite to think that I am that other member.

I will first make a comment and then put a question to the hon. member opposite. If I understood well the proposal he made earlier, he wishes us to deal with the bill on the clarity tonight during the night shift.

An hon. member: In the dark.

Mr. Yvan Bernier: They want to enlighten the House but they want to do so stealthily, after normal working hours, when no one will follow the debate.

In a way, this is what the hon. member proposes to do. They refuse to let the committee travel to meet Quebecers and hear their views on the goal of the act, its contents and its effects.

When we say that the act is for all Canadians, I believe it entails that we should travel to the nine other provinces and the territories also. I would like to know the opinion of the hon. member about that.

I noted something else in the member's speech and I hope that other members will use different arguments to defend the bill on clarity, rather than using arguments saying that the Quebec government does not have the capacity to assume functions like passports and similar functions.

I will read the speech of the member. It smacks of colonialism. It is as if they are the only ones able to do something. Now, Quebecers are precisely asking to take charge of their own affairs.

The same issue exists with natives. Natives want to take their future into their own hands. What answer do they get? "No, you're not good enough". This is the attitude of this government. I cannot believe it.

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Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Speaker, in reply to my colleague, the hon. member for Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok, I will say first of all that the member knows as well as I do that the legislative committee will be the one to decide if the committee will travel or if witnesses will come here to Ottawa. Therefore, we will leave that decision to the chair of the legislative committee.

Second, the hon. member asked me questions saying that it was an issue of clarity and that he wanted some clarification.

Well, the purpose of the bill now before us is clarity. I think that all Quebecers have the right to demand clarity, and that includes aboriginal people and each and every Quebecer without exception.

This bill basically explains what clarity means. I was with the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry recently when someone asked him what is a clear question; he replied that a clear question is “Do you want Quebec to separate from Canada yes or no?”.

That is a clear question, and I look forward to hearing my hon. colleagues tell us the exact same thing in committee.

Mr. Pierre de Savoye: Mr. Speaker, it is now 6.29 p.m. We know that the debates must be adjourned at 6.30 p.m. You have the power to decide what time it is and move the clock forward by one minute and, voilà, we will resume debate in a coherent manner, with a whole period of time ahead of us, when the government sees it fit.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): That is a very generous attitude.

Before I go into the final stage I would like to just say a word of thanks to the translators. I know how difficult it is, particularly to translate my French. I think they have done a marvellous job and I thank them very much.

[*Translation*]

It being 6.30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6.30 p.m.)

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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