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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, October 21, 2003

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, October 21, 2003

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)
[English]

ORDER IN COUNCIL APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to table, in both official languages, a number of order in council appointments made recently by the government.

* * *

• (1005)

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the 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 one petition.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates regarding its order of reference of Tuesday, September 23, 2003, concerning supplementary estimates (A).

Mr. Speaker, your committee has considered the supplementary estimates (A) and have agreed to report them, without amendment.

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Jacques Saada (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with deep emotion that I move:

That the member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier may immediately introduce a bill entitled “An Act to establish Holocaust Memorial Day” and a member from each party may speak to the bill for no more than two minutes, following which the said

bill shall be deemed to have been read a second time, referred to and reported from committee, concurred in at the report stage and read a third time and passed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY ACT

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-459, an act to establish Holocaust Memorial Day.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of emotion that I rise today to speak about the introduction and passage of a bill to establish the Holocaust Memorial Day.

One of my best friends, Howard Rudolph, lost his father Albert not too long ago, unfortunately. Albert Rudolph was a holocaust survivor. Tattooed on his skin was an indelible mark of this dark period in human history. His skin bore the mark of a regime that tried to kill him and wiped out his family and friends and his village, just because he was born a Jew. Albert Rudolph's death made me realize that, unfortunately, time is rushing on and that there are not too many survivors left. Hence the numbers of direct witnesses of this dark period are gradually declining.

It is therefore important for society as a whole and for government to take these witnesses' place and ensure that everyone, especially young people, know what happened at that time.

I would like to thank the members for York Centre, Lanark—Carleton, Kings—Hants and Winnipeg South Centre for all their work toward having this bill passed unanimously. I would also like to thank Senator Jerahmiel S. Grafstein and Senator Noël Kinsella, who undertook to ensure speedy passage of this bill in the Senate. I specifically want to thank the member for Winnipeg North Centre who accepted that such legislation should be unanimously passed by the House. I also thank all my colleagues for allowing this bill to go through, to help us ensure—at least as far as the Bloc' is concerned—that Quebec's national motto, *Je me souviens*—I remember—will be associated with what the Holocaust should teach each and every one of us, that is: Never again.

Routine Proceedings

●(1010)

[English]

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with both emotion and privilege that I stand here today as we table an act that would establish a national Holocaust memorial day throughout Canada.

The Holocaust, as we all know, is a unique tragedy in the history of humankind. The terrible genocide murdered six million innocent European Jews, including over a million children. Conducted in a frighteningly systemic way, the Holocaust is more than the worst crime against humanity: it stands as a testament to the evil of which mankind is capable and is a permanent reminder to our global conscience. As the philosopher George Santayana wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it".

At the end of the second world war, the civilized world looked in horror at Nazi extermination camps and said, as we have heard, "Never again".

To ensure that humanity does not repeat its follies, we must learn from our history and remember our past. A Holocaust memorial day would remind all Canadians of the horrors that should never be forgotten. It would remind our children and our children's children of the mistakes that we should never repeat. It would immortalize the millions lost and would permanently join Canada in solidarity with those who survived those atrocities. Finally, it would symbolize the suffering of all people imperilled by genocide, whether they are Jews, Armenians, Cambodians or Rwandans.

All ten Canadian provinces have already established remembrance days to commemorate the Holocaust. This historic act will be nationwide. It will be marked according to the Jewish lunar calendar on the 27th day of Nisan, a day that marks the beginning of the Jewish uprising in the infamous Warsaw ghetto and which falls in our month of April.

On behalf of my colleague, the hon. member for York Centre, who is presently in Asia and who is a co-sponsor of this multi-party bill, and on my own behalf, I wish to acknowledge the efforts of representatives from all political parties who are here today. With the passage of the bill, we will tell future generations that we have not forgotten.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Carleton, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak briefly of why today we memorialize the Holocaust.

We do so, first, to honour and to remember the six million who died in the Holocaust: those who died in the camps, those who died fighting in the Warsaw ghetto, and those who died in so many other places.

Second, we memorialize the Holocaust to comfort those who survive, but who will bear the scars of what happened to them on their hearts as clearly as some of the survivors bear the tattoos of the concentration camps on their skin.

Third, we do so to honour the righteous gentiles, some of whose names are familiar to us, such as Sukahara, Schindler and Wallenberg, but also the many others who, at risk to themselves, undertook to save and protect the Jews who were their neighbours

and friends and also to protect the values of the civilization that is so important to us.

Fourth, and this is the main point, we do so to ensure that the words "never again" have some meaning, because in the past half-century, the past 60 years, quite frankly, never again has become again and again. Every time a suicide bomber kills innocent civilians, our civilization is forgetting never again. Every time in the past 60 years that a government has terrorized its own citizens we are forgetting as a civilization that phrase never again. Every time an invader slaughters the innocents of the country it seeks to control, we are forgetting those words never again.

It is our duty as the Parliament of a great and civilized nation to ensure that the words "never again" are inscribed in our hearts every bit as much as words can be inscribed in stone, every bit as much as these words must go on in our civilization in the future.

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to play a role in moving the Canadian government to officially recognize Yom Ha'Shoah, the Holocaust memorial day.

For years, Holocaust survivors, their loved ones and Canadians of various faiths have come together to honour the victims of Nazi genocide through an annual Holocaust memorial day. By having the Canadian government officially recognize this practice through the proclamation of Yom Ha'Shoah, we are paying an important symbolic tribute to the victims of Nazi atrocities. At the same time, we are making additional resources available to help remind Canadians of the important lessons of this tragedy.

Nazi fascists and their collaborators deliberately executed the planned annihilation of millions of Jews and the genocide of other peoples simply because of their religion, their race, in some cases their sexual orientation, or physical or mental disabilities or even their political beliefs.

Canadians must never forget these atrocities. We must continue to condemn these actions in the strongest possible way and teach Canadian children to abhor and to act against these practices as they persist today in our modern world.

I am honoured to stand with my colleagues this morning in support of this important legislation. Not only does this bill embody the Canadian values of diversity, democracy and freedom, but it serves as a valuable reminder to parliamentarians to stand up and protect those fundamental Canadian values as we continue to debate and create laws based on the fundamental values of human rights and equality for all Canadians. As such, I congratulate all hon. members of the House on their unanimous support of this important bill.

●(1015)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is truly an emotional day, a day of great historic consequence for our nation and for the world. I am very honoured and pleased to be participating in an all-party initiative to create Holocaust memorial day for Canada.

Government Orders

When I heard from my colleague, le député de Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, of the possibility of taking my private member's bill and making it into an all-party piece of legislation that would pass in the House unanimously and become a law in this session of Parliament, I was ecstatic. I want to thank the député de Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier for his initiative and I want to thank all of my colleagues from all parties for this spirit of cooperation in helping us achieve this great historic moment for Jewish people everywhere and for Canadians' determination to prevent history from repeating itself.

I also want to thank those members of the Canadian Jewish Congress, the B'nai B'rith and other organizations in Canada, and survivors and their families who have worked so hard to make us aware of the pain of the Holocaust and our responsibilities to ensure that this atrocity in our history is never forgotten.

There are two very important purposes to this legislation. The first is for us to honour, respect and mourn the victims of the Holocaust. It is also to honour and respect the survivors of the Holocaust. We are aware of the pain of those who have survived this horrific chapter in our history. As the member for Winnipeg North Centre, I am reminded daily about that contribution and I know the importance of keeping that history alive.

The second is to be vigilant in policies that fight racism, which was at the root of the Holocaust, and to do whatever we can in Canada to stop anti-Semitic behaviour, to speak out against the comments by the prime minister of Malaysia and others who have perpetuated a great atrocity. Let us be vigilant forever. Let us honour the survivors today.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Pursuant to the order made earlier today, the bill is deemed read a second time, referred to a committee, reported, concurred in at report stage, and read a third time and passed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time, considered in committee, reported, concurred in, and read the third time and passed)

* * *

•(1020)

PETITIONS

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege this morning to present to the House a petition bearing 46,000 signatures in support of my bill, Bill C-328, which will be considered this afternoon for a second hour.

I hope that the 46,000 petitioners will be heard and that, when members vote on this anti-scab legislation tomorrow, they will remember that over 46,000 people from Quebec and the rest of Canada have signed a petition supporting the bill. Without further ado, I present this petition to the House.

[*English*]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 269.

[*Text*]

Question No. 269—**Mr. John Reynolds:**

As the Cultural Property Export and Import Act requires that moveable controlled cultural property requires permits to be issued authorizing the removal of cultural Canadian property from our country: (a) why was the exporter of the Victoria Cross and war medals of the late Lt. Col. John (Jock) MacGregor allowed to export for sale these medals to an auction house in London, England, without the customary export permits; (b) why, once Heritage Canada and the Department of Justice were made aware of this contravention of the law forcing them to intercede and recover these medals at a cost of some \$176,000 from the auction house, were charges not laid against the exporter and any and all others involved in this transaction; and (c) how many charges have been laid by the Government of Canada since 1977 against those who have contravened the Cultural Property Export and Import Act?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): In response to (a), the export of the items without an appropriate export licence was not authorized by the Government of Canada.

In response to (b), no charges were laid in the matter because of the fact that it was demonstrated that the contravention to the law was made without criminal intent and that both the exporter and the auction house subsequently cooperated to correct the situation and returned the items to Canada. The \$176,000 amount represented the cost of purchasing the items by the War Museum and not the cost of recovering the items.

In response to (c), eight charges have been laid by the Government of Canada since 1977 against those who have contravened the Cultural Property Export and Import Act.

[*English*]

Mr. Geoff Regan: I ask, Mr. Speaker, that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): moved that Bill C-49, an act respecting the effective date of the representation order of 2003, be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I wish to share my time with the hon. member for Halifax West.

Despite the brevity and unassuming title of the bill, it is of great importance to Canadians. Canadians deserve to have the representation in the House of Commons that the census has determined they should have.

Government Orders

[Translation]

I made a long speech on the merits of the bill when it was referred to a parliamentary committee before second reading. I am grateful for the support and contribution of members of all parties.

I know some of our colleagues—and especially the whip of the New Democratic Party, I think—had concerns about the Acadian community. This issue was discussed. Members of the Acadian community have stated that they are now quite pleased with the way we want to go.

That being said, I recommend that the House pass the bill as soon as possible so that Canadians can benefit from the improvements made by this bill in the next election.

[English]

Finally, all political parties, and they are part of the institution of Parliament, all constituency associations and all hon. members deserve to know as soon as possible what the boundaries will be like for the next election so they can proceed with the organizational work that is necessary in a representative democracy.

I also want to indicate to the House that there has been consultation among all political parties about certain constituency names where corrections would be in order. I have had that bill produced. It will be handed to the House leaders later this day. When we approve this bill, perhaps today, and today would actually be my preference, or tomorrow if it is not, then at that time I would propose for adoption to the House amendments to the riding names, which have been agreed to with all political parties in the House of Commons in order to accommodate the wishes of as many hon. members as possible.

With that, I thank colleagues for their support.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out first that the Bloc Québécois agrees with the electoral boundary readjustment process. That is not where the problem lies. What bothers us is that, normally, if we had followed a non-partisan course, as the government and the government House leader claim we have, the new electoral boundaries would not have taken effect until next August. But there was a partisan intervention by the member for LaSalle—Émard, the future prime minister. He sees himself as prime minister already, and is already acting like a prime minister, while in fact he has not yet even been chosen as Liberal Party leader.

That does bother us and I have a question to ask of the government House leader. Is he not uncomfortable with the fact that partisan intervention has interfered with the non-partisan legislative process that should lead to the new electoral boundaries? Is he not uncomfortable, especially when the member for LaSalle—Émard talks about the democratic deficit? That gentleman calls himself a great democrat, but he has interfered from the outside to speed up a non-partisan process whereby the new electoral boundaries would not apply before August. Was it not to further the electoral ambitions of the future prime minister and current member for LaSalle—Émard that this approach was used?

Once again, I would like to state that we support the electoral redistribution process. What disturbs us is that someone like the member for LaSalle—Émard can intervene to serve his personal agenda as future prime minister; the democratic and non-partisan rules governing the new electoral boundaries are being trampled upon.

• (1025)

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question, but I must say that it is a rather revisionist view of how the bill came to be introduced.

The first request to speed up the process came from the Canadian Alliance. This was done publicly. The current leader of the Conservative Party followed suit very quickly; he asked in front of the media that the bill be passed more quickly. Of course, we saw yesterday this same leader and his party vote against the bill. However, the leader of the Conservative Party had made a statement, which was reported in the media, in favour of the bill.

It is true that some members on this side of the House also wanted to support such an initiative. If the government had been against this bill, of course, we would not have introduced it. We introduced it because we are in favour of it. It is just common sense. However, the original request came from two opposition parties, which suggested this initiative to the government. I must add that there were consultations with all political parties. Of course, later on, some members decided to be less in favour of the bill than they had been previously. This is how the bill came to be introduced.

Now with regard to calling this a partisan initiative, it is not. I think that the member wants to play partisan politics with a non-partisan issue. We are not asking to change the electoral boundaries to favour one party over another. There is nothing to that effect in the bill. We are not changing boundaries.

Here is what this is all about. The current system has been in existence for about 40 years, going back to the days when maps were drawn manually. Over the last decade, the new way of drawing maps has changed everything. The member must know that if he appeared before the Subcommittee on Electoral Boundaries Readjustment. I appeared before that committee regarding the boundary between your riding, Mr. Speaker, and mine. I alleged that such a boundary would transfer about 4,000 votes from one riding to the other. We asked the expert if he could do that on the screen, if he could draw the map right away. The expert clicked on a button, and we could see on the screen that maybe 4,800 votes had been transferred. We had the precise number in three seconds. This used to take weeks. Now, with the mapping system that is used today, these things can be done rapidly.

The question that I am asking it this: is it logical for this House not to accelerate the process and not to assure Canadians to the highest degree possible that a new map will be in place for the next election, instead of the current map which could be 18 years old by the time the next election is called? It is not normal to deprive people of that right. We have the tools, we have the mapping system, and the chief electoral officer said that he could be ready by April 1. Therefore, we are doing it.

Government Orders

•(1030)

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, but since two members are splitting their time, it means that the question and comment period is limited to five minutes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Could you explain how the time allotted for the speech can be split without the unanimous consent of the House of Commons?

According to the Standing Orders, time sharing between two members requires the unanimous consent of the House of Commons, does it not?

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: I should keep in mind of course that I chaired the committee on modernization.

The committee, in effect, changed the 40 minute speeches that were originally set aside for the government and the two next opposition parties, being the Alliance and the Bloc Québécois. There was a discussion at that time among the House leaders and others who participated in this committee to go to 20 minute speeches for a more equitable distribution of time.

Originally, there was an ability, through unanimous consent, to change the 40 minutes and split it. It would appear that in our committee we did not go as far as we might have intended to, but we certainly did not make the provision to split the 20 minutes.

Therefore, in this case I will continue the debate. I will now go to the official opposition and the intended speaker.

I would want to hear from the government House leader if he wanted to speak longer because maybe it was his intent to speak less, and probably in this case the parliamentary secretary was going to split the time. However, in accordance with the rules we have presently—and it may be something that the House leaders and others would want to review as to whether the intent might have been otherwise—clearly the Chair does not have the ability to allow for the splitting of the 20 minute speeches.

Of course, as is the practice in the House, we can do most anything with consent.

I will go back to the minister or his parliamentary secretary and ask if they wish to seek consent to split the time. I see a positive nod from the parliamentary secretary.

The government side is asking for consent to split its 20 minute slot. Of course, the minister has already spoken, so in fact the next 10 minutes would go to the parliamentary secretary.

Is there consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I wish to confirm something that the minister just said in response to the question from a Bloc member. It is very unusual for me to agree with the minister on something, but he was actually giving a factual account of what happened when he said that it was the Canadian Alliance which began to push this idea as far back as the summer of last year.

In fact, I had lunch with the Chief Electoral Officer, which I think was in the early fall of last year, and discussed the idea of bringing certainty to this process. The Chief Electoral Officer was first aware a year ago that there was a party in the House that was interested in bringing certainty to the actual implementation date of the new boundaries.

Mr. Kingsley told me at the time that he felt that he could comfortably, with a little stress, get it in place for April 1 as a potential date. It was on that basis that I approached the minister before the end of the session last year to talk about the possibility of bringing this date forward.

The logic did not escape the minister. It makes sense to everybody because the way the system was set up with the coming into force in August, which would be the normal timetable, we had the potential for an election to either occur in the spring, April-May, with the new Prime Minister when he is selected or it could be in September-October.

There was tremendous uncertainty because the riding associations of the parties would have to prepare for two different scenarios at short notice. On top of all that were the complications introduced by Bill C-24, which was suddenly requiring the registration of riding associations or electoral district associations, as they would be known after January 1.

We were faced with an administrative nightmare, not only getting used to the idea of having to fill out paperwork and all the reporting that goes along with Bill C-24, but we would have to do it twice. We would have to do it once on January 1, 2004, in case the election was called under the old boundaries. Then, immediately afterward, during the summer recess everybody would have to re-register under the new boundaries with a whole new set of paperwork and all of the stress that goes with that if an election had not yet been called.

Another motive for us in the west, of course, was that we were getting two new seats in Alberta and two in British Columbia. The process itself is extremely slow. It takes a decade to even get to the point where we get the two seats we were entitled to 10 years ago. We are already entitled to at least three more seats and it is going to take us another decade to get those. We were anxious to ensure that at the time of the next election we would see those additional seats in the west that at least go partway in recognizing the growth in that part of the country.

That is a bit more background for the member. There was a push from this party to obtain that certainty. I am sure that if he was to check with the administrations of any of the other parties in the House, other than the Bloc, they are all behind this initiative. In fact, the party people spoke behind the scenes and all agreed it was a good idea to get some certainty into this process.

Government Orders

Associated with that, though, I would like to inject the comment that it only becomes necessary to do this because of the government's focus on elections every two and a half or three years. We have an electoral cycle that should ideally be at least four years, with the potential to be as long as five years, and now we have elections coming every three to three and a half years. Right now the House is fixated on the suggestion that there may be an election coming up in the spring of next year when what we really should be doing is focusing on the affairs of the country, the things that really matter to the people of Canada.

For example, people want to see an end to the wasteful gun registry. They would like to see the sex offender registry backdated to take into account people who are already in prison. They would like to see the problems fixed with the refugee and deportation processes because they are in disarray. They would like to see an end to the race based fisheries in British Columbia in accordance with the court ruling that came out there last month that criticized the government for its race based policy for fisheries.

• (1035)

All these major issues need to be addressed. Instead of that we are focusing the time of the House on issues that are important to political parties because of the government's irrational approach to elections. It is throwing the whole country into disarray.

It is almost certain that we will prorogue before November 16. For people who may be watching and who do not understand, the term prorogation means that the Prime Minister simply chooses to close the place down without calling an election until it suits him or his successor to open the place up again with a Speech from the Throne and then perhaps an election almost immediately. What a terrible waste of resources and time that this place could be closed down for six months. However some of my constituents say that is pretty good. When we are not sitting, we are not doing any damage, and they think that is not a bad idea.

In summary, because we do not particularly want to hold up the bill, we would like to see the certainty that comes with it.

I will just round off by saying I hope the Bloc does not hold this up too much. It is unnecessary to consume the time of the House arguing about the bill. It is something we need to do so we have certainty. I hope the Bloc will rethink its strategy of trying to hold this up endlessly. It is not really necessary, and the Bloc knows the government will only move closure on it anyway. Let us get on with the job and get the bill passed.

• (1040)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the least we can say is that it is difficult to follow the drift of the Canadian Alliance, as is so often the case.

How can they pretend to be serving democracy and the non-partisan process of adopting new electoral boundaries when in fact they are supporting the member for LaSalle—Émard and the carrying out of his own personal agenda? What would happen if the new electoral map were to be adopted quickly?

Instead of coming into force next August, it would take effect in the coming months. Then the future prime minister would have carte

blanche to prepare a spring election, but most of all he would get out of sitting in the House to answer our questions. That is the game.

I do not understand members of the Canadian Alliance who play along with such a trick, who support such a partisan move which will allow the member for LaSalle—Émard to adjourn the proceedings of the House and prepare for a spring election.

Members of the Canadian Alliance are not easy to follow. They just launched a process to unite the right. They need time. It is not that I am right wing myself but, if we follow their logic, they have just concluded negotiations to set in motion a complete restructuring of the Canadian right into one single united party.

They need time but, instead of buying time, instead of leaving the electoral map to come into force in a year's time, they are giving the member for LaSalle—Émard and future prime minister carte blanche. He will not have to appear before us and answer our questions. The House will recess and he will have all the time he wants to call a spring election.

The member for LaSalle—Émard and future prime minister will not have to answer to us for his actions, for being the man behind the cuts to social assistance, education and health, for stealing the \$45 billion surplus from the EI fund. He will not have to answer to us. The House will recess, he will call an election and that will be the end of it.

People will forget that when he was finance minister for nine years, this new leader of the Liberal Party slashed provincial transfer payments, which were there to help the less fortunate in society.

The Canadian Alliance is playing along with this trick. Talk about wasting the House's time; who does he think he is, blocking our freedom of speech, preventing us from achieving our mandate, which is to inform the public of this trap being presented today for the purpose of preparing the future prime minister's agenda? Who does he think he is, preventing us here in the House from taking the time we need to inform the public of the future prime minister's strategy and personal agenda?

[*English*]

Mr. Ted White: Mr. Speaker, how ridiculous can we get? I am not blocking anybody's ability to speak to the bill. I simply asked the Bloc members to reconsider their strategy. That was all I did. I do not have the power to block them. They can go on as long as they want.

All I was trying to do was point out the background, in agreeing with the minister as to what happened here and the reasons for it. The fact is the people in the west want their entitlement to an additional four seats and the one way to ensure that happens at the time of the next election, whenever it occurs, either the spring or the fall, is to try to bring the process forward so that we have certainty.

Government Orders

Now the first step in that process, as I said when I stood before, was to meet with the Chief Electoral Officer to ensure that we would not do anything in the House that would cause him difficulty, that would upset or be seen as political interference.

When I sat down at that lunch meeting with the Chief Electoral Officer, he told me he could do it by April 1. I do not have the power to impose a date on the Chief Electoral Officer. It was only after a civilized discussion about the problem and how to address it, he gave me a suggestion. I then approached the government, the parties discussed it, and the end result is this bill.

It is a good bill that gives all of us certainty. It tells us for certain we will have the new boundaries in effect at the time of the next election, whenever it occurs. It gives us the certainty of additional seats in western Canada. I do not understand why the member does not understand that. It seems perfectly clear to me.

Finally, I would just like to repeat this. For him to accuse me of trying to block their opportunity to get their word out, is just ridiculous.

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if we consider the electoral boundaries in terms of the democratic process, what is the hon. member's position with regard to both official languages? Does he agree with me?

I am not sure if he knows this, but the Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick asked the court to intervene to review the New Brunswick electoral boundaries commission's decision. In fact, some francophone areas of the Acadie—Bathurst riding will now be part of the Miramichi riding.

If the effective date of the new electoral map is moved up by several months, the court could be prevented from handing down its decision. Perhaps the hon. member does not care because it is not important to him. The Liberals call an election every three and a half years. In truth, it would not be a problem to hold an election in the fall, except if the alternative better suits the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard. He is not yet prime minister, he does not bother to attend sittings in the House of Commons, but he is doing the Prime Minister's job. Canada is lucky to have two prime ministers now. No other country in the world can say the same.

I want to know where the hon. member of the official opposition stands on this. What does he think? Should the court have the opportunity to rule on the commission's decision? The people of New Brunswick think this is a bad decision.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted White: Mr. Speaker, we cannot conduct our business in the House on the basis of what court cases might happen and rulings that might occur. I am well aware of the concerns of the member. I heard them at length in the committee, and I am aware that the minister spoke with him. There were extensive discussions to try to come to some sort of accommodation.

The fact is that in western Canada, as well in my caucus, many people and communities are very upset, particularly in the Edmonton area with the way the boundaries commissions did their work.

However this bill is not about the process of boundaries redistribution. The bill is about bringing certainty to something that is inevitable, and that is the change of boundaries. It occurs and it will happen. All this does is give us the certainty that it will be in place for the next election.

With all due respect to the member, he has a point, he has a problem, but it is not directly related to this bill and I do not feel that it is appropriate for me to comment further.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Loubier: Mr. Speaker, we are very happy that western Canada obtained four more ridings. We agree with the electoral boundaries readjustment process, although we do not agree with the fact that Quebec is losing two ridings and that its demographic weight is being reduced from 25% to 24%.

But this has nothing to do with the bill. The fact is that we will soon have a new prime minister and that he has asked that the new electoral map be implemented as soon as possible to allow him to move his personal agenda forward.

The man does not come here, and he does not make any commitment on the important issues. We will not see his true colours before the election campaign. The problem is that we and the Canadian Alliance are being manipulated so that the new prime minister can map out his electoral strategy as he sees fit, and wipe out the Alliance also.

Very strange things are going on here, with the Alliance showing strong support and Alliance and Liberal members working closely together. We see them together all the time.

• (1050)

[*English*]

Mr. Ted White: Mr. Speaker, it may well be that the new prime minister would want these boundaries in place. In fact I suspect he does because last night he voted in favour of the bill. However that just happens to coincide with what the west wants as well.

In the west we want two additional seats in Alberta and two additional seats in British Columbia. It just happens to agree with what the new prime minister wants in this case.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ghislain Fournier (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to a topic of such significance for my constituents and all the other people in Quebec as well as in the rest of the country, of course. I am pleased to take part in this debate on changing the date when the new electoral map will come into force. This issue is of the utmost importance, in my view. It is all about respecting the laws of the land. It is also all about showing some respect for the people who elect us as MPs.

Government Orders

The government is asking that the representation order under Bill C-49 be effective on the first dissolution of Parliament, that is on April 1, 2004, or after that date. In other words, it is asking that the new electoral map, which gives three additional seats to Ontario, two to Alberta and two to British Columbia and which makes many other changes to ridings, come into force to benefit the party in power. This is too big a favour to ask of us.

To my colleagues I say no on my behalf and on behalf of my political party, the Bloc Québécois. Some things are pretty clear though. An election is looming large on the horizon. The Liberal Party, with a majority in the House although it does not have the support of the majority of the people across the country, is trying to usurp privileges by setting the act aside and replacing it with another one. Is that the meaning of democracy you want to leave as a legacy?

The representation order was to come into effect at the earliest on August 26, 2004. If the new ridings are an absolute must to win the election, wait for another four months. It is not the end of the world, another four months plus or minus. Otherwise, do what we are doing. Do what all the Bloc Québécois candidates are doing: Work hard to get elected.

You are trying to do something really disgraceful. That is petty partisanship. That is totally unacceptable. What about the people's trust? What about the federal government's integrity? How dare you play into the hands of one individual by speeding up the coming into force of the new electoral map? In order to accommodate its new leader, the Liberal Party across the way is going against the spirit of the law.

Under section 25 of the Electoral Boundaries Adjustment Act, the representation order is effective on the first dissolution of Parliament that occurs at least one year after adoption of the change in question. That is a minimum. In other words, it cannot take effect until August 26, 2004.

So far, the electoral boundary adjustment process has been carried out in compliance with the legislation. Note that I have not said that it made use of all means allowed under that legislation. Is the government not duty bound to see that its own laws are complied with, in the best interests of everyone? Whom are they trying to convince of the usefulness of Bill C-49? Who is supposed to be served by it? Certainly not the general public, despite the claims to the contrary by those across the way.

It is not in anyone's best interests for a government to make use of its majority position in the House to undo an act that does not suit its electoral plans. This is antidemocratic. What impression is it giving, to our young people, for example? What about our international image, when it is trying to pass itself off as a model?

• (1055)

Now let us look at this bill from Quebec's point of view. The new boundaries are contrary to the interests of Quebec, and even more so those of the regions. The Bloc Québécois and a considerable number of regional organizations have spoken out against the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission's decision to maintain the number of federal ridings in Quebec at 75, rather than bringing the number to 77, with the additional two reflecting its demographic weight, as the Bloc Québécois was demanding.

It is simple: these measures reduce the demographic weight of the regions of Quebec. This too is unacceptable. The Liberal MPs from Quebec are not unaware of this, as they must admit. It is their duty, as they are well aware, to stand up and vote against this bill when the time comes.

I am a living testimonial to the problems caused by these new adjustments, and most certainly will not remain silent. With them, my constituents and those in the adjacent electoral districts would be doubly penalized.

For one thing, access to MPs will be harder for them. The great distances to our offices will be costly in time and money. I should point out that they are too poor to be able to spend money on anything that is not absolutely necessary, so they will simply be unable to travel to demand services to which they are entitled.

Also, they would see their situation worsen prematurely. I repeat that the member for Manicouagan and the Bloc Québécois say no to Bill C-49. There are limits to injustice, and these would be exceeded if the bill were passed.

Several regions in Quebec have lost one or two ridings. For instance, the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region lost one; it has three left, whereas it used to have four. The Mauricie also lost one, and has only two left. This is not consistent with the needs of Quebec.

With this reform, Quebec's representation goes from 75 ridings out of 301 to 75 out of 308. This is a major drop, especially since the opposite should have happened. As I have said repeatedly, this should have been taken into account.

The Bloc Québécois suggested that the number of seats allocated to Quebec federally be increased from 75 to 77. This would have made much more sense and would have been much fairer. It would have preserved the identity and increased the representativeness of the regions.

The people living in the regions are people like everyone else. How can their electoral weight be allowed to be less than that of people in urban centres or, worse yet, that of people from other states in the same federation? That is pure demagoguery.

Again, it is only fair to have ridings of a reasonable size that can be represented effectively by a member of Parliament. My riding of Manicouagan, for example, will cover 340,000 square kilometres, or 58 times P.E.I., which has four seats, and therefore four members of Parliament. The Island of Anticosti in my riding is larger than P.E.I. This gives you a pretty good idea of how huge the riding of Manicouagan is. I repeat that those who live there are full-fledged citizens.

Believe me, the current riding of Manicouagan is not all forest or all water. Many major issues are ongoing. To meet their MP, people have to travel by plane or boat. On the Lower North Shore, we do not have a road connecting us with the rest of Quebec yet. In winter, I have to use a snowmobile to visit my constituents and, listen to this, between Blanc-Sablon and Natashquan, there is no road at all for 500 kilometres.

Government Orders

• (1100)

However, people are still entitled to be properly represented, on the same footing as all Canadians. Of course, there are more people on Prince Edward Island, but one must admit that it is easier to meet people on the other side of the street than people who live three hours away by boat or plane.

Before I would support a government that wants to pass one law and repeal another for very partisan purposes, I would first defend my constituents and try once more to see them treated more fairly rather than more unfairly.

The distant regions of Quebec should not suffer so that citizens in Ontario, British Columbia or Alberta can be better represented. Quebec has a right to be fairly represented. In addition to taking away this right, there is an attempt to speed up the coming into force of the new electoral boundaries. Once again, I am against it and the Bloc Québécois is against it. If this goes through, in addition to being underrepresented, we will suffer more consequences sooner or later.

It is just not right and not fair. I shall state my opposition formally. I am making enormous efforts to ensure that each of my constituents has equal access to the services I can provide as their member of Parliament. Unfortunately, I have not yet perfected the art of being everywhere at once. But it is certainly not for lack of trying.

The future leader of the Liberal Party has been saying that we need to decrease the democratic deficit. And then here are his colleagues ready to change the law to serve his electoral interests. If the member for LaSalle—Émard, with the help of his collaborators, is blatantly fixing the law for partisan purposes, when he is not even prime minister yet, should we not be seriously asking what he will do in the future?

Is the hon. member afraid to face the opposition in the House? He would like the next election to take place as soon as possible, probably next spring. Why such a hurry? If he were to abide by the dates set out in the act for the coming into force of the new boundaries, he would have the time to define a clear legislative platform. He would be able to state his opinion on issues that are important to Canadians and Quebeckers.

What does the man who aspires to be this government's leader fear? He is afraid of answering questions from the opposition and especially from the Bloc Québécois. We are wondering about his sense of democracy. We have serious doubts about his respect for the fundamental values of the people. How could we think otherwise when a principle as fundamental to democracy as respect for the law is ignored by the very people who have been chosen to defend it?

What can we do when, at the highest level, at the parliamentary level, individual interests come before the the public good? We are not talking about petty quarrels here, we are talking about government rules and legislation.

We are also talking about being honest with the public. People rely on accurate information. Since this suits a few individuals acting out of pure partisanship, one law is being thrown out in favour of another. Power is being used for purposes that I personally feel are unjustified.

Where is the democracy in this? The basic principle of democracy is obeying the law. It is the government that will make the democratic deficit worse. What we are discussing today is not a simple matter of having MPs represent a certain number of constituents, it is an improper use and abuse of parliamentary power for strictly partisan, even personal reasons.

The Constitution commands us to abide by the law. The members opposite are hiding behind a new law to justify their actions. Do they think that the public is ignorant and that people are incapable of analyzing, understanding and judging their actions?

• (1105)

Quebeckers understand and know how to put things in perspective. They remember. On election day, we will remember the way democracy was used, laws abided by, and people in the regions treated. We will remember on election day and we will ask Quebeckers to vote against this antidemocratic government.

A word to those who are prepared to approve Bill C-49; if they cannot heed my advice, then at least let them respect the principle behind the new electoral map. Let them follow their conscience and vote against Bill C-49. Let them show some self-respect as citizens and parliamentarians and show respect for the constituents, taxpayers, and citizens of Quebec and Canada.

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my hon. colleague for his comments that truly reflect reality.

I would like to ask my colleague the following question. During the democratic process launched by a commission, the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Quebec, has he felt that the Liberals took an objective stand?

Along with members of my community, I took part in this democratic process. We appeared before the Electoral Boundaries Commission for Quebec. We were opposed to the second report. I even appeared before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

I do not think that the Liberals have acted in good faith throughout this process. At one point, I was told that the Chibougamau-Chapais community in my riding of Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay would be transferred to the riding of Abitibi at the request of the municipality of Chibougamau. If that were to happen, the riding of Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay would lose 12,000 people.

I met with the municipal authorities and they told me that it was not true. They do not want to be annexed to Abitibi. They want to remain in Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay.

We are also being told that this is a democratic process and that population size must be taken into consideration. The region is of one mind on this. All stakeholders, all MPs, share the same opinion, and oppose the loss of an electoral district in the Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay region.

The Liberals on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs voted against the unanimous report. I might again question the good faith of the Liberals in this process.

Government Orders

As well, we are dealing with a bill intended to move up the effective date of the electoral map. I say that the communities of interest involved, that is Saguenay and Lac-Saint-Jean, could have been allowed to delay the process—should there be an election held after August 2004—and to hold elections under the old boundaries.

This would have given the communities of interest time to get prepared. Why is that needed? Because the two regions contain two rather different entities: Lac-Saint-Jean, with a history of collaborative efforts and common interests, and the Saguenay district. Now they are being backed into a corner and told “This is the new way of doing things and you have to adopt it”.

Once again, I have doubts about the objectivity of this approach. The community is being sent a really bad message by the government. We have a major problem in our area: our youth are leaving us. If nothing is done, we stand to lose 25,000 young people over the next 15 years. We are doing everything we can. Young people are getting involved in politics and all social groups feel a commitment to solving this problem.

We know we are losing some of our industries, but now the federal Liberal government is telling us we are going to lose an MP, who will be replaced by an Economic Development Canada service point. I have some doubts about that.

This is what I would like to ask my colleague: does he get the feeling that the people in the area he represents share these concerns?

•(1110)

Mr. Ghislain Fournier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, for his question. This allows me to provide my views on what happened in my riding and his, of course.

My colleague is perfectly right when he says that this process has been sidetracked. I humbly believe that the decision was made earlier.

For example, in my riding, municipal councils, towns, organizations, the chamber of commerce, unions were unanimous. Here in the House, we were also unanimous. The Bloc Québécois had requested two more members, not only for the demographic weight of my region, but also for Quebec as a whole. Indeed, all the submissions that were made asked for two more members. Everyone was unanimous on this. If one opposing submission had been made, I would have asked myself some serious questions. I would have said: “This is quite a submission. It carries a lot of weight, because it opposes all the others”.

There were about one hundred submissions. I did not count them, but all were in favour of the Bloc Québécois' request to provide two members to Quebec and to keep the riding of Manicouagan the way it is now, that is to keep the same dimensions, because it was large enough, and also to keep the riding of Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay the way it is now.

Mr. Speaker, you are perfectly right. I believe this was a charade. It was decided in advance, and the government had to rush. It had to introduce a bill to shorten the time limits, to hold an early election as soon as possible to ensure that the next prime minister would not have to answer the opposition's questions in the House.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the remarks of my two colleagues. I would like to add my own opinion after the last speech I heard. I find the present situation utterly unfair and even unethical.

In the Mauricie area, everyone was also unanimously of the opinion that it made no sense to eliminate one of the three seats we have. Just like Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, the Mauricie area is faced with the problem of its young people leaving to go elsewhere.

Even though the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard does not answer the questions being asked in the House, we know that at election time, when he travels throughout Canada, he says that he cares about the regions. Well, he lied. I am sorry I have to be that blunt. It is completely false. The only thing he is doing is serving his own interests and his own political agenda.

He does not answer the questions being asked in the House concerning the \$45 billion surplus in the EI fund, for example, or the \$3 billion in benefits withheld from seniors in the guaranteed income supplement program, or the fact that many of his companies pay their taxes in tax havens. He refuses to answer these questions, and he is using what should be a democratic piece of legislation to avoid sitting in the House. He wants to be the next prime minister without letting people know who he really is and what he intends to do when he is the prime minister.

What does my colleague from Manicouagan think about this? Personally, I am saddened by the fact that an area such as mine, his, and Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay are being deprived of the right to express themselves because some politician wants to look out for his own interests. I would like to hear my colleague's comments on this.

•(1115)

The Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed to the answer, I have something to say to the member for Champlain. In his remarks, he mentioned that a member lied. Before we go any further, I would ask the member to withdraw.

The member for Champlain has the floor.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, you are right. Having occupied the position of Speaker in Quebec, I will certainly withdraw, but it does not change what I think.

Mr. Ghislain Fournier: Mr. Speaker, if he did not lie, he certainly twisted the truth.

Therefore, I think that—

The Deputy Speaker: Listen, we can play with words, but I do not want us to continue with this debate all day without showing respect for the practices and precedents of this House, which require that the integrity of any of our colleagues not be questioned. We may have differences with regard to our philosophies, our values and our processes, and that is quite alright. I simply do not want members to go too far.

The member for Manicouagan has the floor.

Mr. Ghislain Fournier: Mr. Speaker, if I may, I have a personal opinion as a member of the Bloc Québécois, and we plan to keep saying it as it is in that respect.

Government Orders

I agree with my hon. colleague. The legislation and the boundary changes show contempt for the people, the citizens. To give you an example, in my riding with which I am very familiar, there is no way the same service could be provided.

The government opposite has just demonstrated that there are indeed two classes of citizens in this country. People from across the country told us in Quebec they loved us, that change was coming and that there would be a place for us. Instead, we currently have a demographic deficit. As was so aptly described, our weight has dropped from 26% of the total population to 25%, in fact almost 24%. We would have needed two MPs more for all of Quebec, and the regions should not have been tampered with.

See how this government which claims to be a government for the regions is defending them. This is not a government for the regions but a government that tramples the rights of the regions.

[*English*]

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to take part in the debate on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada.

We should make it perfectly clear that the bill is not about boundary changes for the upcoming election. It is about pushing the date for the boundary changes up to an earlier date, from August 25 of next year to April 1 of next year.

For our viewing audience, I would like to give some background information.

On September 15 the Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons introduced legislation to accelerate the coming into force of the new electoral boundaries generated by the recently completed electoral redistribution process.

The new electoral boundaries were proclaimed on August 25, 2003, but, under the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, they would not take effect until the first dissolution of Parliament occurring at least one year after proclamation, i.e., August 25, 2004.

As we have heard, the rumour is that the House may dissolve itself as early as November 7.

By virtue of the proposed legislation, this one year grace period would be shortened. The new boundaries set out in the 2003 representation order would now be enforced upon the first dissolution of Parliament occurring on or after April 1, 2004.

The April 1, 2004 date was selected following the public statement of the Chief Electoral Officer that he could be operationally ready to proceed with the new boundaries as of that date.

I raise the question, as other members already have this morning in the House, what is the rush? Why are we rushing ahead to move the date up to April 1, 2004?

There is no doubt that the leader in waiting for the Liberal Party is anxious and wants to call a quick early election, just like our current Prime Minister did in the last election in 2000.

Before the leader in waiting for the Liberal Party calls an election, Canadians need to find out who the man is. The only way that can be

done is to actually have the next leader of the Liberal Party stand in the House and answer some very hard, serious questions. I am sure Canadians from coast to coast to coast would be interested to know what kind of person will be leading the Liberal Party in the next election.

As we know a lot of questions have been raised in the House about some of the past history of the former minister of finance and the dealings of his former company, CSL. People need to know whether he paid his share of Canadian taxes and whether his companies received grants that were really made up of Canadian tax dollars. We need to know whether he operated above board and in a transparent manner. The position of a prime minister is very important. He is the leader of the country. Besides that, there is plenty of time to have a fall election after the boundaries legislation comes into effect on August 25, 2004.

I came here in 1997, as did many members in the House, and since that date we have had two elections in the course of those six years. My understanding, according to the rules of operation, is that the mandate of any government is five years. Roughly, we have had a mandate plus one year and we have had two federal elections. Every time we have an election it costs the taxpayers a lot of money.

Maybe there is some rationale for fixed terms. Every four years on a set date the electorate would go to the polls so we would not have this manipulation of the system. Bill C-49 is a good example of manipulating the timelines and the dates as to when one can have an election. I do not think Canadians are looking for that. They are not looking for governments of the day to waste tax dollars.

• (1120)

This is not the first time that governments, certainly this Liberal government, have attempted to block riding changes. Just to recollect, this is not the first time the Liberals have moved to alter the date on which redistribution takes effect. Unlike their two previous attempts, this bill advances rather than delays the new boundaries. It is rather ironic. This one actually advances the changes; the previous attempts have wanted to delay changes.

In February 1994 many Liberal backbenchers objected when they saw the proposed new maps that followed the 1991 census. Their response was Bill C-18, which would have thrown out the work already done and suspended the redistribution process for two years. The end result would have been for the 1997 general election to be fought on boundaries drawn up after the 1981 census, some 16 years prior.

At the time, the Progressive Conservative Party had sufficient numbers in the Senate to amend Bill C-18. The suspension period was reduced to one year from two. The boundaries commissions were allowed to complete their current phase of their work. After one year the boundaries commissions could continue their work from the point where it was suspended. The end result was that Bill C-18 could not kill redistribution and that an election call in 1997 would have to be fought on boundaries drawn on the basis of the 1991 census.

Government Orders

The Liberals tried again in 1995 with Bill C-69. That bill died on the Order Paper when Progressive Conservative senators insisted on a proper examination of the bill and its related issues in committee.

While we are talking about boundary changes, let me make some comments about boundary changes. There is no doubt that boundary changes are always good news because the country changes, the population base changes and demographics change from province to province. The current change is good news for the west because B.C. and Alberta will get more seats. In central Canada Ontario will get more seats.

In other words, I guess it is an advantage to grow one's province on a population basis, to have more babies. Maybe we need to go back to the plan that Quebec used to have to give grants to families to have more kids. Maybe it would be a good program for all of Canada because we know that one deficit in our country is people. That is why our immigration numbers have increased substantially. Perhaps we could do more to increase our own numbers in the country through birth.

On the subject of boundaries, there are two issues I would like to bring up. They are the changes to the boundaries relative to size and population base. It is a world phenomenon that people are moving from rural areas to urban areas. Not only is it happening in this country but it is happening around the world. That is going to create problems for ridings in our country that are very rural in nature. I noticed that with some of the boundaries that have changed there seems to be an access to large urban centres in most areas. I suppose that eventually the population base in the rural areas will be outnumbered and outvoted by the folks in the city. I suppose that is inevitable with the change in demographics.

One thing I would like to say is that there are also limits to boundary changes in terms of geography. I know that many of the rural ridings which are very rural in Canada have no option except to get bigger. My own riding of Dauphin—Swan River is going to annex, I believe, another two municipalities to the riding and it is already over 200 miles long and over 100 miles wide. The question that needs to be raised is just how much space and population can one member of Parliament serve?

• (1125)

Already my riding has five provincial constituencies in it. Whenever I leave home it takes literally half a day sitting in my vehicle to get from place to place. I am wasting half the day if I am driving. I am fortunate enough that during the summer I can hop in my airplane and fly around the riding, but most people do not have that access.

Again we need to look at service. In Dauphin—Swan River I have eight satellite offices. I have eight offices in the riding and a staff of 11, but most members do not do that. I am very blessed with good staff and they do a great job. In other words, it is about serving the public but there are still limitations to that, not only on the geographic side but also on the dollar side. It costs money to provide service and that is an issue that needs to be raised.

Another thing with which I have a concern, like many MPs in the House, is the names that will come with the changes in the boundaries. At House leaders meetings there have been lists of

submissions from members of Parliament who want the names changed to reflect the ridings. I agree that the members do know best, not a commission that was established because of politics. Members know the history of their ridings.

For example, originally my own riding was two federal ridings. One was called Marquette and the other was Dauphin—Swan River. The problem with the boundary change was that they forgot about Marquette which is of huge historical significance to the riding. Marquette was one of the first French explorers to explore that part of the country. Southwestern Manitoba at one time was known by Marquette. I believe that Joliet and Marquette explored the headwaters of the Mississippi right down to the mouth of the Mississippi. It is very important to the folks who now encompass the south half of my riding. They want the name Marquette put back where it rightfully should be.

I hope that through Bill C-51 all the name changes that have been proposed will be put back where they should be.

Let me close by saying that we as a party support the bill. We do not support this great rush to change the dates to give the new leader of the Liberal Party the option of calling a snap election anytime he wishes after April 1. Canadians deserve better.

Canadians need time in the House to find out just exactly who this new leader of the Liberal Party will be. To be fair to Canadians, I believe that the date of August 25 should remain. In any case, Bill C-51 talks about the name changes submitted by the members of the House. We support the bill. We will certainly vote in support of the bill, but we are not very happy about the intent of this bill.

• (1130)

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the issues raised by the hon. member for Dauphin—Swan River was the name changes. I am not sure whether he heard today the leader of the government in the House indicate that he will be sharing with House leaders of all the parties today a draft bill that deals with the name changes. I hope the member will be satisfied with what he sees in terms of his riding. Others will be pleased to see the changes they have asked for in that bill. That should deal with that issue.

One of the things we have heard today a number of times from the Bloc as well as from others is the notion that this whole idea was initiated because of the next leader of our party, or because the member for LaSalle—Émard wishes to do this. I find it interesting that members opposite persist in this fiction, especially in view of the fact that the member for North Vancouver from the Alliance Party made it very clear today that his House leader initiated this idea last spring before anybody else initiated it. For them to persist in the fiction that it comes from one member on our side when in fact we have had an outright statement—

Mr. André Harvey: And the Bloc leader would agree with that.

Government Orders

Mr. Geoff Regan: The Bloc leader I am sure would concur with that. He would be aware of it. He should speak to the House leader. He should speak to the House leader of other parties. He would find the same thing out, that it was raised by the House leader of the Alliance, as he readily acknowledges and accepts.

I do not understand why they persist in the fiction that it comes from one member on this side when we know that it was initiated from that side, and with good reason. It makes sense. Why have us go into the next year with uncertainty about whether or not we are going to be operating under old boundaries or new boundaries? Why not have boundaries that reflect the 2001 census rather than the 1991 census? Why have an election based upon a 12 year old map when the technology today allows us to do this more quickly? The process would take less time and we would not have an election based upon an electoral map from 12 years ago. It does not make any sense.

I would like the member to address these points.

Mr. Inky Mark: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that we can have the next election on the new boundaries. All we have to do is wait until August 25. That is pretty simple. It does not take a brain surgeon to figure that one out. What is the rush? The fact remains that from 1997 to 2004, which is seven years, we are going to end up with three elections. Does anyone think that the taxpayers out there watching this are going to be happy? We will have had three elections in seven years when the mandate for one election is actually five years.

It is pretty obvious that members on the government side are playing games with this whole business of an election and when they should call it. It is not fair to the taxpayers. If there is one reason not to have it, it is the money that we are wasting by doing it.

• (1135)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member said that maybe the only reason the new prime minister, or the person he thinks will be the prime minister before he is elected, is the person that he does not want Canadians to really know. Canadians do not know who he is yet. The only thing that people know is that he was supposedly doing what the prime minister used to tell him to do, but he is supposed to be a new person. Why is he worrying about waiting until the fall of next year?

It seems that the opposition is being accused because it wants to follow the law of our country. The law on the boundaries was produced after the last commission produced its report 12 months ago and the 12 months was for a reason. Why are we talking about an election when in normal times, and I know we are not living in normal times around here, but in normal times an election is called every four years? That would bring us to next fall. Now because of that the opposition will be accused of not being democratic, like the Canadian Alliance has said.

I will be very sorry for the members of the Progressive Conservative Party when it becomes the Conservative Party. It is going to have to join those two groups and the Canadian Alliance already agrees with the Liberals that we should go ahead and please the member for LaSalle—Émard when he is not even in his seat yet as prime minister and all of that.

I would like the member to comment on the feeling I have and maybe the feeling he has about the whole suggestion that we are anti-democratic if we do not allow this change to go through. Why do we have to please only one person in our country, which is the member for LaSalle—Émard? Why do we have to change everything in our country for one person? He does not exist yet, though he is supposed to exist come November 15.

I would like some comments on that, please.

Mr. Inky Mark: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from the NDP for his question.

It is rather ironic, as I indicated in my speech, that the Liberals were the ones in 1994 and 1995 who wanted to block the changes to the boundaries. For 16 years they wanted to block them. That was before the 1993 election. All of a sudden they now want to reverse the trend and go ahead of the one year period. It makes no sense.

There is no doubt, as I said earlier, that Canadians will want to know the real deal. Who are they going to vote for as prime minister of this country? They want to know the prime minister in waiting, if that is the case, with the changes that are going to come about in the next week, I believe, with the leadership process for the Liberal Party. It is only fair to all Canadians that whoever the new prime minister is stands in the House and answers some hard questions because he has a lot to account for in his term of office in the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I think that we must make things clear in this debate. I heard the deputy government House leader say things that made my blood curdle.

In his testimony before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, Elly Alboim admitted to my colleague, the hon. member for Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, that he had intervened directly with Mr. Kingsley in the spring, when the member for LaSalle—Émard expressed his preference for an early election in the spring of 2004. On that occasion, Mr. Alboim said, and I quote:

Well, obviously I was calling because of my interest as an adviser to Mr. Martin and the need to establish information about what Mr. Martin had publicly articulated as a preference.

This was in connection with an early election in the spring.

That statement was made before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on September 30th. Mr. Elly Alboim, a senior adviser of the strategy team for the member for LaSalle—Émard, admitted candidly that he had contacted the chief electoral officer. I have the highest respect for the chief electoral officer, but when they say in the House that there were no interventions and that the Canadian Alliance leader was the first to express his preference for an early election, I have to say that this is not exactly what happened.

There was a public statement made by the member for LaSalle—Émard, who said he preferred a spring election. Right after the interventions by Mr. Elly Alboim, towards the end of the summer, the process was initiated for the tabling of this bill.

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They have to stop laughing at us and treating us like fools. The member for LaSalle—Émard did make a statement. If we are discussing this bill today, it is because he spoke out publicly, because he wants to carry out his own personal agenda and because he is too cowardly to stand before us. He does not want to answer our questions about the drastic cuts made to employment insurance, social welfare, education and health. He is too cowardly to answer our questions about the companies he still owns. He lacks the courage to table the letter of assignment transferring Canada Steamship Lines to his children. I suspect he is still drawing benefits from that company.

• (1140)

[English]

Mr. Inky Mark: Mr. Speaker, I would echo the comments from the NDP member. These are strange times indeed and it is abnormal the way this whole thing has happened. Again, who does one believe and who started this whole thing? Whether it was a story from the media, it is an intervention that should take place. If we are going to write legislation and follow procedures and rules, then that is what we should doing in this House.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak on Bill C-49. This bill is unusual, because I did not think that the Liberals in 1994 did the opposite of what they are doing today. This was news to me this morning; I did not know that.

Apparently, to guarantee democracy, we have to do what we are now doing. Under this bill, when the Electoral Boundaries Commission tables its last report—its final report—in Parliament, the effective date will be twelve months later.

What effect will this have on certain regions, and what do we as members do if we object?

First, anyone who objects is thought not to want Canadians to have the best possible representation, because the new electoral map means more members. There are currently 301 members, and there will be 308 once the new electoral map comes into force.

Why, as members, should we deny our constituents the right to be represented by additional members in the House of Commons? It is easy, I will not lie: our party will vote in favour of this bill at third reading. However, we first want to make known our objections.

The Liberals have brought us here. On the one hand, we are told we are free to do as we like but, on the other hand, we have to consider how this bill benefits Canadians.

I would not want to be accused of having prevented British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario from having more members. But it is quite normal, if an election is called, for people to receive the best representation.

However, I have difficulty accepting the fact that members are being accused because they want to have an indepth debate in the House on the government's position, particularly since one member has been campaigning across Canada for the past year and a half, at the taxpayers' expense, and he is almost never in the House of Commons. I remember one senator who did not attend sittings in the other place, and everyone knows what happened to him. That hon.

member is supposed to represent the constituents of his riding in the House of Commons, not to wage an election campaign for a year and a half. He should know his position now and what his job will be as of November.

The fact is that the power of the government or of a single individual can deny people the democratic opportunity to be represented, as well as the opportunity to contest the commission's decision. It makes me laugh when the government says it is not being partisan, that it is never partisan. According to them, it is only our side that is partisan.

Who has something to gain? I will give you the best example we have, at present. The riding of Acadie—Bathurst has a majority of francophones, some 80%, with about 20% anglophones. It is a riding where people have learned to live side by side. If we look at the boundary criteria, when one can deviate by as much as 25% from the provincial quotient, we are talking about history, culture, and so on.

Historically and culturally, I can tell you that the population of Acadie—Bathurst has more affinities with Bathurst.

• (1145)

I can say that in South Bathurst, there is the Big River, the Little River and the Middle River. In our area, we have a lot of rivers. The people in North Tetagouche and South Tetagouche have more affinities with the people in Bathurst than they do with the people in Miramichi.

If we look at the way the members of the Electoral Boundary Commission for New Brunswick were appointed, it is clear and obvious. The member of Parliament, who is the minister responsible for the Liberals from New Brunswick, recommended the names of the two commission members to represent New Brunswick to the Speaker of the House of Commons. No other members of the House of Commons, except the Liberals, were aware that suggestions could be made to the Speaker of the House.

The way the commissioners are chosen is this: the chief justice of each province decides who the chair will be. Now, remember that the chief justice of the court is usually appointed by the Prime Minister of Canada, and once again, it is a Liberal. The chief justice of New Brunswick was the former New Brunswick Liberal leader. It is not a coincidence; it just happened that way.

It just so happens that the chairman of New Brunswick's commission was the future father-in-law of the member for Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, who is a Liberal. It is quite the coincidence, but no one knew it.

In the meantime, people from Acadie—the Bathurst are not happy at all, but not necessarily because of the appointments. It was a little later that people began to dig and question what happened.

For the benefit of those who are listening to us, ten years ago, people from the town of Saint-Louis-de-Kent, which was part of the Beauséjour—Petitcodiac riding, opposed the changes to the riding because they were going to become part of the riding of Miramichi. The Commissioner of Official Languages said this was not right, but the commission did not reverse its decision.

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It is funny, this time. I am happy for the people of Saint-Louis-de-Kent because I think they were lucky that the commission sent them back to the riding of Beauséjour—Petitcodiac. If the people of Saint-Louis-de-Kent are sent to the riding of Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, and the people of their town, 98% of whom are francophone, are sent to the riding of Miramichi, then all the intentions do not hold water.

One has to wonder. We can only hope that it is not political influence, since the rules state that an MP can appear before the commission to table briefs, as I did in September 2002.

At the time, I had asked the chair of the commission why he included the town of Saint-Louis-de-Kent in the riding of Beauséjour—Petitcodiac. The transcript will show for certain, but I remember him saying, “The problem that the former commission created ten years ago has been fixed”.

I told the chair that if the problem from ten years ago was corrected with respect to the linguistic aspect and the community of interests, why, for instance, were Allardville, Val-Comeau and Saint-Sauveur included in the riding of Miramichi? He said the problem was that there were not enough people in the riding of Miramichi. The provincial quota was less than 21%, whereas the riding of Acadie—Bathurst had more than 14%. So a certain number of constituents from Acadie—Bathurst had to be included in the riding Miramichi.

The people in Allardville as well as in Saint-Sauveur and Val-Comeau protested for the same reason as the people in Saint-Louis-de-Kent did. One cannot fix a problem at one end of a riding by creating the same problem at the other end.

• (1150)

I asked the chair why he was doing that. He told me, “Because I need bodies. I must do it and that is that”. It is hard to understand.

This is why I believe it is important that people be allowed to appeal the commission's decisions. Under our electoral boundaries readjustment process, the commission publishes its final reports, after which it is disbanded. It does not exist anymore. It is gone. It then comes under the government's responsibility. However, in this respect, the regions have the right to appeal; they have the right to go to court to ask for a ruling.

That is why I say that Bill C-49 is regrettable because the member for LaSalle—Émard will be the Prime Minister of Canada—we will know for sure in November. One member of his staff, who works on his election campaign, Elly Alboim, came before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and clearly stated that he had appealed to the Chief Electoral Officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, to see whether it was possible to change the date and get the machine in gear now. In the meantime, the Canadian Alliance is trying to make people in Vancouver believe that it cares about the people in Vancouver and that is why it asked the government to change the date, resulting in the bill before us. This is shameful. The Alliance does not even have the support of the Conservatives right now—oh, I beg your pardon—the Progressive Conservatives. It could not even get them to vote the way it did, yesterday. And now it wants to take the credit for that. I find that rather shameful.

This morning, the Leader of the Government in the House stated that, with our new electronic system, members press three or four

buttons and the monitor appears. If so, then surely we can know where our riding starts and ends. However, in July 2003, I asked Elections Canada, “Is part of Saint-Sauveur in Miramichi?” Again last week, no one could answer my question. From July 2003 to today, quite a few seconds have passed. Surely the computer and the monitor have been operational since then.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, Elections Canada has a good system. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and of the Subcommittee on Electoral Boundaries Readjustment. Yes, we can say, “I am going to change that street and put it here or there”. Yes, we can say that, in Toronto, Yonge Street is in another riding and, bingo, we know where it ends. However, when it comes to rural areas, it is not that simple.

So, two weeks ago, I personally asked the Chief Electoral Officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, if he could tell me if the inhabitants of Saint-Sauveur in New Brunswick were part of Miramichi on the new electoral map. Once again, I received a letter saying no one knew the answer yet. There is still no answer.

If we look at the map, the boundary seems to include Saint-Sauveur. However, when it comes to people, no one can say. The people of Saint-Sauveur have been in the dark for three or four months now. They still do not know what riding they will be part of.

As a result, in terms of representing people in a democracy, an increase in the number of members in the House is good, but it is also important to ensure that all constituents are represented. This is not just a one way street.

It is unacceptable, when we see people from back home, from the Bathurst chamber of commerce, opposed to changes to the riding. It is unacceptable when we see the Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick demand a judicial review. It is unacceptable when people from the Société des Acadiens et des Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick ask for the status quo.

• (1155)

This is unacceptable, when we are told that 7,000 people in Acadie—Bathurst signed and mailed in postcards to the Speaker of the House of Commons indicating their unwillingness to see changes made to their riding, because of the communities of interests.

This is unacceptable, when we are told that the English speaking constituents themselves do not want to be moved to Miramichi, because they will feel still more of a minority with its francophone minority.

This is unacceptable, when we are told that 2,600 people in the electoral district have signed a petition calling for the status quo to be maintained.

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This is unacceptable, when we are told that the Commissioner of Official Languages has indicated to the commission that it is not right to make changes to Acadie—Bathurst because of the community of interests.

This is unacceptable, when we are told that the Commissioner of Official Languages was invited in March 2002 to tell the commissions for all Canadian provinces that they needed to respect Canada's official languages.

This is unacceptable, when we are told that the Standing Committee on Official Languages has said that the position of the Commissioner of Official Languages and of the people of Acadie—Bathurst must be supported.

This is unacceptable, when we are told that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has told the commission to support the Commissioner of Official Languages.

In light of all this, we have no choice but to say that there is something wrong here; we have no choice but to tell Parliament that we do not agree with the date change the Liberals are trying to bring in on behalf of the member for LaSalle—Émard, who is afraid of showing his true colours to the people of Canada. He is afraid to be in the House and to make decisions. He is afraid, lastly, to take his proper place. All of his team, all of his advisers, tell him to make sure he does not have to make any decisions. In fact, the decisions he has made since 1993 in the Finance portfolio have been to cut employment insurance, to make cuts to health and social programs. That is what the future prime minister has done. As a result, he cannot show his face before the election. He is making himself scarce; Canadians need to know this.

Depriving an electoral district of the possibility of going before the courts to see whether the right thing has been done is, in my opinion, unacceptable.

Two weeks ago, at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I put forward an amendment to exclude New Brunswick from this readjustment. I can say that, pursuant to the committee's procedure, when I spoke about my amendment and explained it, the Liberals refused to accept it. Granted, I planned to speak for a long time, to try and make them understand how important this amendment was.

We eventually came to an agreement, and I appreciate that. I will state publicly that I am pleased with the agreement we have reached with the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. I must give credit where credit is due. I am pleased with the agreement under which the government committed not to put up objections, drag things on or put forward dilatory motions. I am pleased with it.

The House leader said so publicly and the letter he signed was put on the record, still I think government could go further. It could say, "Partisanship aside, there is no reason to get involved. We will let the Association des municipalités francophones go before a judge and explain its case, and let the judge decide".

This would at least be one area in which the Liberals did not interfere. Granted, the chair of the commission was a Liberal, and the two commissioners were Liberals, to say nothing of others. They should let the court make a decision based on all I said in this House

today. Seven thousand people have signed postcards and sent them to the Speaker of the House, a person who should be impartial and who appointed the two individuals on the recommendation of the minister responsible for New Brunswick.

• (1200)

This would show some willingness to give democracy a chance and to make decisions that are good for and fair to all Canadians, and the people in our area in particular.

I will close by saying that we can only hope that the Liberals will change their minds. They should tell their future leader, the future prime minister—who may be afraid of going before the Canadian voters—that he ought to call an election in November next year and let us adopt the necessary procedures, so that we can represent the people in our areas.

[English]

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is necessary to point out that this is a government bill that has the support of the official opposition. We know the idea originally came from the House leader of the opposition, as we heard today from the member for North Vancouver, and yet members of the parties opposed to this legislation have persisted in the fiction that the idea came from the member for LaSalle—Émard.

What I find interesting is that opposition parties normally are anxious for an election. They want the government to call an election because they hope to win. I wonder if they are so afraid of having an election now that they have taken a different stance. Maybe it is a fear of democracy. Are they afraid of having people express their will under these fairer and more representative boundaries of the latest census? Why is that the case?

If the new leader of our party, after he becomes prime minister, were to wait six months before calling an election, the parties on that side would be saying that his government has no mandate. Those members should admit that. They would want him to call an election unless, of course, they were afraid of an election, of democracy and of the results of an election. Is that their problem? If it is, they should tell us. Why do they not admit that they are afraid to have an election because they are afraid of what the results would bring for them?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Madam Speaker, I am not afraid of an election. If the government were to call an election tomorrow morning I would be ready for it.

The member for LaSalle—Émard is not helping the government when he has all the Liberal backbenchers working against their own Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has said that he will resign in February but what has the member for LaSalle—Émard done? A convention has been called for November to push the Prime Minister out.

The government has problems in its own house. Government members cannot even get along with each other. They have a hard time knowing who their leader is and as a result our country has been paralyzed. It is about time we had an election. However even if an election is called, we should not take away the rights people have in their ridings.

We only have to look at what is happening in Acadie—Bathurst. This legislation will put people in my riding into another riding, and those people do not want to be in another riding. They should be given the chance to go to court to have justice done. It should not just be the member LaSalle—Émard who decides on everything that happens in our country.

If the Liberals do not have control of their backbenchers that is not my fault. I will not walk on my knees for the member for LaSalle—Émard, as the Liberal backbenchers have been doing for him. The member for LaSalle—Émard has been doing this since the beginning. He has not had respect for the Prime Minister who was elected democratically by the Liberals in a convention, and yet those members want to give me a lecture on this. Canadians know better than that.

The member for LaSalle—Émard is asking Canadians to tighten their belts and yet he cannot even pay his taxes in our country. He registers his boats someplace else to make sure he does not pay any taxes. He asks Canadians to save their money for our country because we are in a deficit and yet he has taken money from the EI fund and from people who have lost their jobs and cannot even feed their families. He should be ashamed of himself.

Yes, call an election tomorrow and we will be ready for him at any time, my friend.

• (1205)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, BQ): Madam Speaker, allow me to reply to the hon. member.

We, too, are not afraid to go into an election. Still, I have one fear, considering that one riding in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region has been eliminated. That sends the wrong signal to the people, and the people are not naive. They know they are losing population. They know that 7,000 people have left and that is why the riding is being abolished.

They have taken arrogance to such a point, that I would like to direct my question to the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst in order to demonstrate, once more, to what extent the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs is partisan.

The hon. member will remember that when I appeared before the committee, I was told that the problem was the Chibougamau-Chapais area, which wanted to be part of the riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik. Seeing this problem, I went with my colleagues and staff to see this community and meet all of the elected officials and municipal councillors. In the end, we realized it was all a subterfuge.

The mayor of the town had sent a message to the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik saying that Chibougamau-Chapais should be part of the riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, while that was untrue and against the wishes of the municipal representatives.

When these facts were pointed out, when I was later told that it was the basis of the reason we were losing a riding, I did my homework. I came back with the results, but they ignored these recommendations, going so far in the final decision as to remove

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Chibougamau-Chapais against the wishes of its people. That is partisanship. I am sorry to say so, but I think it is despicable.

And why am I afraid for my community? Simply because, at this moment, if the election were called after the date the new boundaries were to come into force, it would give us some time to prepare the community. Some 7,000 young people have left the riding. If we make immeasurable efforts every day, we could reverse this out-migration. We are doing just that. On the other hand, with the loss of Chibougamau-Chapais, it is not just 7,000 people we need, but 20,000. And there goes our riding.

I want to say that we will oppose this to the end. They will have to answer to the people for the decisions made here in the House.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Madam Speaker, it is not the only place where partisanship is visible. One need only look at the riding of Acadie—Bathurst, where people were against the changes made to the riding for the simple reason that the same thing had occurred ten years earlier with the riding of Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, when Saint-Louis-de-Kent was included in the riding of Miramichi.

To answer the question or to continue in the same vein as the member, I will say that 14 briefs were submitted and they all said that they did not want changes, except one, and that one brief was not submitted in the riding of Acadie—Bathurst, but in the riding of Miramichi by a man from Acadie—Bathurst. His brief begins like this, “My name is Claude Boucher, former Liberal president for the riding of Bathurst. You did not go far enough, Mr. Commissioner. You should go as far as highway 11 in Bathurst”. On top of that, we will lose the airport and the whole economic region.

The chair of the commission said that the best brief that he had received was from Claude Boucher, former Liberal president for the riding of Bathurst. This is unbelievable. This is what I call true partisanship, when you see how they support each other.

This has been going on for 100 years. This is what the people of Acadie—Bathurst had to go through. After 100 years of Liberal rule in the region, they decided to kick the Liberals out. It would be just great to see them kicked out elsewhere in Canada because they are arrogant. That is typical of the Liberal Party. It is arrogant and thinks that it owns Canada. One day, I think that the Liberals will pay the price for this kind of attitude.

• (1210)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The member for Winnipeg Centre has a minute and a half for a question or a comment.

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be very brief. I sympathize with the member for Acadie—Bathurst, because surely the most egregious examples of gerrymandering of boundaries in recent history have happened in the riding of Acadie—Bathurst. The only defence the Liberals seem to put forward is that they want the next election under the new boundaries.

Government Orders

What is stopping the new prime minister from calling an election on the new boundaries in September instead of April? Why should we be bound by his agenda and not by a reasonable agenda as the normal course of events?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Madam Speaker, I think the only answer is that the new prime minister does not want to show up in the House of Commons and be questioned by the opposition. He does not want Canadians to really know who he is. He wants to go along with what is in the media; that he will be the prime minister, that supposedly the opposition is divided and that he will get there automatically.

It is funny. Liberals in the country are talking about the member for LaSalle—Émard. In regions where they are very conservative, they are saying that he was a good finance minister because he took our country out of deficit and balanced the budget. In other places where people are little more to the left, thinking NDP maybe, they are saying that if he ever has a chance to run our country, he will make good changes on the social side. I call that speaking out of both sides of their mouths. That is why he does not want come into the House of Commons under his term now.

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise on debate at third reading of Bill C-49, an act respecting the effective date of the representation order of 2003.

At the moment we have in force an electoral map that is 12 years old and based on the census of 1991. It has become clear that it is possible to have the new redistribution, as has been done based upon the census of 2001, come into effect in less than the 12 months it would normally take and has taken under the old statute, which provision has been in place and in force since the 1960s. I guess at that time, when redrawing the maps, it was complicated and took a long time to do that.

With modern technology, as we have heard from the Leader of the Government in the House, it is possible now to do it much more quickly. In fact, with the click of button, the people at Elections Canada can show if the boundary were moved in one direction what that would do to the population numbers and if it were moved in another direction what that would do. This would have taken a lot of time 30 years ago.

The question is, does it really make sense to have a full year delay? The commissions went through a long process from their hearings, to their first set of reports and proposals, to preparing responses to those, to coming in with their final reports, to having Parliament review them and make objections or not, to their responding to those. After that long process, does it make sense to add another 12 months beyond that before their order comes into effect?

It is important and necessary to take some time because it takes time for Elections Canada to redraw the boundaries, make the changes it has to and prepare the new maps. However the point is that it has been made clear by Elections Canada that the period of time now required for that is not 12 months. The new boundaries can come into effect by April 1 next year.

The question becomes, does it make sense? Is it democratic for us to proceed now on the basis of a 12 year old map? Is it democratic to

have the possibility of an election next spring under the old boundaries which are based upon a census from 12 years ago, now almost 13 years ago? Is that logical and democratic to have seats based upon where people lived 12 years ago when we can have it based on where they live today, or at least where they lived three years ago, rather than 12 years ago. It makes much more sense. It seems to me that we should not want to delay beyond the minimum amount of time we need to bring these new boundaries into effect.

One thing the change would do is allow political parties to organize themselves. If we do not do this, we could have a situation next year where the parties would be asking if the election was under the old boundaries or under the new boundaries. We know we will probably have an election next year, but under which boundaries. Do we organize ourselves now, January 1 for example, under the new boundaries or do we exist under the old boundaries and then have to scramble at the last minute when we hear the election will be under the new boundaries. What do we do?

I think members ought to agree, and I hope that they would agree, that it makes sense, that it is logical and that it is fair to all parties to have certainty in that regard. They will know what boundaries they will run under in the next election and that the boundaries will reflect the population, as closely as possible, as it is today, not as it was in 1991.

We are aware that under the proposed distribution the provinces of Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario will be entitled to more members of Parliament. Do we really wish to deny them those members if there is a spring election? Would that be fair? No it would not. We know the opposition members are saying that the election could be in the fall. We also know, and it has frequently occurred, that when we have a new leader, a new prime minister, the new prime minister seeks a mandate from the people to govern the country.

If that were not done, we would have outcries of rage from the opposition benches. Really they cannot have it both ways. They cannot say the individual has to have a mandate, then say there should not be an early election. In fact they would demand and insist that the person have an early election. Moreover, as I said a few minutes ago, if the members across the way were not afraid of that election, if they had real confidence, they would want an early election, but they seem to be afraid of that and are opposed to it.

● (1215)

Therefore, we ought to cooperate in this regard. We ought to be cooperating among the parties to move this forward, to make this change that makes our electoral map more democratic, more representative of today's situation, and makes it come into effect as of April 1. We know from Elections Canada that this can be done effectively and there is no real reason to delay it further.

I hope that members will strongly consider supporting the bill. I move:

That the question be now put.

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Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I support the motion and the passage of Bill C-49 at this time because, and only because, it would permit for elections to be held next year, ensuring that they reflect to a slightly better degree the growth of population in the country.

However, I would like to focus my remarks on the fundamental inequity in the system of electoral boundary division in the Canadian federation. Indeed, it is my conviction that the division of districts by population, province and region in no way reflects the convention amongst democratic countries, nor indeed I would submit the intention of the Fathers of Confederation, to allow for a lower chamber which represents as closely as possible the citizens of this country in districts by population, where members of Parliament have roughly an equal voice in terms of the number of constituents they represent. That is not at all the case in this place today.

In fact, the gross inequities which we find in the populations of electoral districts across the country will only increase under Bill C-49 after the proposed redistribution.

What am I referring to? I am disappointed that I cannot share these remarks directly with the member for Acadie—Bathurst who is outraged about any changes to the electoral map.

However, I would ask him and others to consider the principle of fundamental fairness, and the longstanding and broadly held principle of representation by population. We do not have such a system in the House today or contemplated in the bill now before us.

What am I talking about? In Canada there are roughly 31 million people according to the most recent census data. After this redistribution there will be 308 seats in the House of Commons. There should almost be an exact average, if we had a system of representation by population, of 100,000 people per constituency. If we were to actually have a lower democratic chamber that reflected representation by population, each one of us would represent more or less 100,000 people.

In fact, today, before redistribution, there are some members of this place that represent fewer than 30,000 people and others that represent more than 140,000 people. There is an enormous variance in the size of electoral districts which I believe is fundamentally unfair and unhealthy for democracy, particularly in a complex federation.

This has real implications for the future of the country. The reality is that there are trends in population growth. It is true that three provinces tend to see significant population growth: Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.

Some members may think that is unfair. Some members may regret it. I originally grew up in Saskatchewan in a small town. I have seen depopulation and I feel badly about it. I wish desperately that underpopulated parts of the country could turn that trend around. I support thoughtful policy initiatives to create meaningful private sector economic development in areas of the country experiencing underpopulation, particularly rural regions and remote communities.

However, reflecting on the tragedy of depopulation of some parts of the country does not change the fundamental fact that Canadians and newcomers to this country make a free choice to move to areas

with greater economic opportunity and that those areas continue to grow.

• (1220)

I represent the fastest growing city in the country, Calgary. Every year some 25,000 newcomers arrive to make their lives in Calgary because it is a city that presents them with marvellous opportunities to live, work and raise a family.

I have a constituency which is in full growth in every direction. There are new housing developments springing up. My constituency has grown by over 40,000 people since the 1990 census. Every month thousands of new people arrive in Calgary, many of them in my constituency.

Today I am left with the disadvantage of speaking for and representing some 140,000 Canadian citizens while there are other members of the House who are representing fewer than 30,000. I submit that it is fundamentally undemocratic and it runs contrary to the basic Canadian value of fair play. We should all have our equal say and we should be equally represented in our federal democratic institutions.

If the average riding ought to have 100,000 citizens on the principle of equality of representation, what in fact is the case? Let me go through the numbers from west to east.

British Columbia has a population now of slightly under four million people. Under the bill it would have 36 federal electoral districts. British Columbia would have just over, on average, 110,000 citizens per riding which is 10% more than the national average ought to permit.

In my province of Alberta there is currently a population of three million people. We have 26 seats which means an average population of 116,000 per constituency. That will only go down to an average population of 107,000 per riding after redistribution. Of course, that will change rapidly because over 50,000 people a year move to Alberta. That is the equivalent of the entire population of a federal electoral district in certain provinces.

Saskatchewan, with a population now of a little over 900,000, has 14 seats and after redistribution it would still have 14 seats because this is one of the provinces that is protected in terms of seats. These are provinces that can never see their number of seats in the House of Commons go down. Saskatchewan has a population per riding of 65,000.

In Manitoba it is not much different. There is a population of about one million. Again, there are 14 seats before and after redistribution. The average population per riding in Manitoba would be 71,000.

Ontario has 10.5 million people and after Alberta it is the fastest growing province. With 104 seats after redistribution, the average population per riding would be about 104,000. Again, that is an inequity that will continue to grow as more and more people move to the province.

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The Province of Quebec is another province that is guaranteed 75 seats forever in federal redistribution regardless of its percentage of the population. With a population of around seven million it has an average population per riding of 93,000. It is not too far off the average, but I think we all recognize the unfortunate demographic trends in Quebec. A lower birthrate in the future implies that it will continue to have smaller ridings in terms of population because of the effective floor of 75 seats.

New Brunswick, with 10 seats and a population of 650,000, has roughly 65,000 people per riding.

Nova Scotia, with 11 seats and a population of 940,000, has an average of 86,000 people per seat.

● (1225)

Prince Edward Island stands out because it is by far the smallest province. Of course, as part of this guarantee of floor of seats, it cannot have fewer seats than it has seats in the Senate. Insofar as there is no momentum to create a more equal balance of seats in the Senate, it is guaranteed four seats in the House of Commons notwithstanding having a population of only 130,000. This means 32,500 on average per seat in the province of Prince Edward Island.

In Newfoundland, with a population of a little over 600,000 and 7 seats, there is an average population per riding of 86,000 per seat.

Mr. Speaker, I know that you who are now in the chair represent one of the three great northern territories of the country, populated by a marvellous, brave people who keep the sovereignty of our country in some of the harshest climates that we have, but it is very thinly populated. All three northern territories together have fewer people than live in my constituency. In fact, Mr. Speaker, perhaps when you are back on the floor you can correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that none of the three northern territory seats have a population of 35,000.

This is not an argument against any of those underpopulated regions. I want to reiterate that I have a great heart for rural communities, for people who live in the regions and for places that are not in great economic shape right now. We need to support those regions as best we can with good policy. But that has nothing to do with the principle of equality, of representation by population, which is central to the institutions of modern liberal democracy.

I would submit that this bill, this redistribution and the one before it, and the one after it if we do not correct the system, will do Canadians a gross injustice.

Some will say we need this enormous disparity in representation in the House in order to reflect the differences of the country, that Prince Edward Island deserves its say and so forth. I agree with that principle in the democratic institutions of a federation, but I believe, as does my party, and I believe a majority of Canadians would agree, that the regional disparities of the country ought to be reflected in a democratic chamber designed for that purpose, and that would be the other place. That would be the Senate.

In fact, it is not accurate to say that by supporting equality of representation by population, I or my party wish to diminish the democratic authority of the provinces or the regions. Quite to the contrary, I and my party have consistently supported a Triple-E

Senate, one that has equal representation by province with effective powers and is elected and therefore accountable to the Canadian people.

What I and my party propose is that if we were to adopt the norm among modern democratic federations by adopting equal representation by sub-national jurisdiction in the upper chamber, i.e., equality by province, we could then reconstruct the redistribution framework for the lower house to allow for real representation by population.

As it is, Mr. Speaker, when you stand up in this place you represent nearly one-fifth as many constituents as I do. Mr. Speaker, your 30,000 and some constituents get five times as much say, proportionately speaking, as my constituents do. I do not begrudge the citizens of Yukon a strong voice here and you certainly are an effective parliamentarian. I do not begrudge the citizens of Prince Edward Island a strong voice. But I believe the strength of that voice should be in the house of the regions, which is the Senate, allowing this place to properly and truly reflect the diversity of this country on the basis of population, because the long term demographic trends that we see reflected in the bill today are going to continue exponentially. We are going to see continued population growth.

● (1230)

In 1950, my city of Calgary had a population of less than 200,000. Today we have a population of one million. It is entirely conceivable that in another 50 years it will be a population of two million or more, but if we continue the current system of floors and special treatment for particular provinces in the framework of electoral redistribution, then increasingly, the citizens of Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario will have proportionately less say in this, the lower chamber, which is supposed to represent the people.

I stand here knowing that we are not going to see immediate change on this question at any time in the foreseeable future, but I want to use my voice on behalf of my 140,000 constituents to sound a wake-up call, a call for us to recognize that a system of electoral redistribution created in 1867, when there were four provinces with a total population in the country of a couple of million people, is not going to be appropriate for the dynamism of this country as we grow in this century, and a call for us to recognize that we must have an electoral system which reflects, in this lower house, representation by population.

Government Orders

This is a plea for democratic reform of both houses of Parliament. Let us give the smaller provinces an equal say for their regional concerns and interests in the upper house, because as it is, the inequity there is just about as bizarre as it is here. The province of British Columbia, which is arguably a region in itself with four million people, has six seats in the upper house, whereas the province of New Brunswick, a beautiful province with great people, has a population of 650,000 and 10 seats in the Senate.

I do not begrudge the people of New Brunswick their proper say, either by representation by population in this House, or an equal say, even as a smaller province, in the upper chamber. In fact, I think the 650,000 people of New Brunswick should have the same number of senators as the four million people of British Columbia. But I think it is outrageous that people in one smaller province should have 40% more Senate seats, like New Brunswick does compared to British Columbia, and at the same time should have their MPs here represent on average 65,000 people while the MPs in British Columbia, like my colleague from North Vancouver, today represent on average 115,000 people.

Essentially, what we are telling the people in British Columbia is that they are second class citizens. That is fundamentally unfair. We are telling them that not only do they not have the same voice and their voice does not carry the same weight in the lower chamber, but they do not even get status in the upper regional chamber equal to that of people from provinces with 10% of the population.

Prince Edward Island, one of my favourite provinces, has four senators for 130,000 people. British Columbia has six senators for four million. I do not begrudge P.E.I. its equal say. The opponents of a Triple-E Senate say that we could not possibly give Prince Edward Island the same number of seats as other provinces. Why could we not give them an equal voice? As it is, Prince Edward Island has almost as many Senate seats as my province with its three million people.

On top of that, and this is the problem, in this House the 130,000 people of Prince Edward Island, fewer people than live in my constituency, have four MPs. The people who have the great blessing to live on that beautiful island get four times the say in this place that my constituents do.

I am not making this case for special pleading for my community, for my city or for my constituents. I am just asking that we consider a democratic system founded on principles of basic fairness. I am not asking for anything exotic. I am asking for democratic institutions: a lower house based upon equality of representation by population, and an upper house based upon equality of regions, which is the norm among modern, liberal, democratic nations.

• (1235)

With that, I will close by once again reiterating my support for this bill, because at least it does something to provide a better reflection of population growth in the growing regions. But I issue a plea that we as a Parliament seriously consider the need for fairness as the population of this country continues to grow in particular regions.

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his fine deliberations. What he has said is so true. I have been around long enough to hear

many leaders, particularly in the opposition, say that they are all for upper house reform.

I have heard that many times over many years and over many elections. Now we have the time to do it, but every Senate position has been crammed full so there will be no hope for Senate reform for decades. As long as we have this imbalance in representation, we are not going to have a united Canada. It will not be united because of the government's ability to manoeuvre figures in the placement of people.

I wonder if my colleague would like to comment on that.

• (1240)

Mr. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague. I believe that unfortunately these very Byzantine rules of redistricting, which allow for such wide disparities in representation by population in this House, are open to political manipulation. Indeed, I believe that there would be a much greater chance of a different government being chosen by the Canadian people if this House were actually based on the principle of representation by population.

I think there are certain parties that have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, and that is an argument against maintaining the status quo. We should not look at our own partisan interests. Quite frankly, here we have a member who comes from a province with, unfortunately, a declining population. I hope that in the provincial election in Saskatchewan the people choose a Saskatchewan Party government that will get that population growing again. But here we have a member who comes from a province with a declining population who agrees, even though it may not be in his own interests, with the principle of representation by population.

So this ought not to be a partisan question; it should not be a question about what best serves the interests of our communities. It should be a question of fundamental fairness in our democratic institutions.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in this House, not a day goes by that the merits of democracy are not praised, and rightly so.

In the name of democracy, we exchange ideas, we debate social issues and we legislate. In this whole process, there are rules to be followed that our legislators have set out and that we must abide by. We can decide together to change some standards, since nothing is permanent. But this must be done in accordance with the system in which we live.

Can we decide to change the rules to accommodate just one person? I doubt that very much, and I will take the few minutes I have to show that the purpose of Bill C-49 is not to further the public's general interests, but only to look after the interests of the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard.

Government Orders

First, for those who have just joined us, I want to say what the debate is all about. After each decennial census, the House of Commons reviews the number of its members according to the Canadian population. After numerous steps and consultations, a representation order is proclaimed to confirm the new electoral boundaries. However, the legislation provides that the coming into force of the new electoral map cannot occur less than a year following the proclamation date. Why this time frame? Although the government tries to pretend that this is just a formality to accommodate the Chief Electoral Officer, it is much more complicated.

When, as representatives of the people of our respective ridings, we have the interests of fellow citizens and respect for democracy at heart, we cannot proceed without the required formalism. We are the first ones to deplore the lower voter turnout, to deplore the lack of interest for politics.

Is it possible that we are prepared to effect major changes, so major that some people's ridings will disappear—as is the case for Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and Mauricie—without even taking the time to provide the public with proper information on the impact of these changes? This is where we have a major disagreement with the government. Here, as in many other areas, what is worth doing is worth doing right.

The present time frame in this bill makes it possible to do as I am doing at this time in my own riding, that is to inform people of the changes being made and what to expect when the next election is called. People need to feel that we have taken the necessary time to keep them informed and have not rushed to push through at top speed the election of the future crowned head of the Liberal Party of Canada. The Liberals claim the purpose of what they are doing is to reflect as well as possible the new demographic realities. That is not where we have a problem; it is with the government trying to convince us of the urgency to do something. That is why we have no choice but to denounce this as false.

The last federal election was held in November 2000, which means that the government has until November 2005 under the law to call people back to the polls.

Since the order on the new electoral boundaries was issued on August 25, 2003, this leaves us until August 25, 2004 for the new electoral map to take effect. From August 2004 to November 2005 is more than a year. The government can very easily leave the legislation as it is, and call an election after August 25, 2004. That is, moreover, what logic would dictate, because it would allow Parliament to make progress on some very important matters that have, unfortunately, been at a standstill since the Prime Minister's announcement during the summer of 2002 of his intention to retire in February 2004. Everyone knows that the candidate for his position is the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard, whose coronation, nothing more than a formality, will take place in November.

I will digress for a moment to talk about this famous convention to be held in November, and the way the government has been paralyzed for more than a year now. Hon. members are aware that rumours abound in the best of families, in the most respectable of circles. The Parliament of Canada is no exception.

Although I am aware that rumours must not be given more credence than they deserve, I would still like our audience to know about the most persistent rumour that is going around the Hill at this time. It is obvious that the government does not know which way to turn, with a present PM and a future PM both around.

• (1245)

The members opposite would have a hard time telling us with a straight face which one of the two caucus meetings is the most important: the one organized by the member for LaSalle—Émard or the one organized by the member for Saint-Maurice, the present and real prime minister. This is why it is rumoured that Parliament could adjourn as early as November 7 until February. That is right, February. Because of an ambiguous situation, a clear lack of leadership and a childish fight for power, Parliament could recess for several months, leaving a lot of work undone. And if an election is called after that for the spring, we might as well give the Liberal government's score for its third mandate right away. The result will be quite simple. Nobody will ever forget it. Efforts: zero. Work: zero. Listening to the people: zero. Accomplishments: zero. In short, the Liberal government's global score on ten points will be zero, four times over.

But let us get back to the issue at hand. We were saying that this future prime minister should take office in February 2004. Is it really that urgent to call an election right away? There is no doubt that this is what he wants to do, since his friends and supporters are already working to pave the way for him, for instance by promoting Bill C-49. Why does the government feel it has to adopt an act before the new electoral boundaries take effect? Did it get confirmation that the member for LaSalle—Émard intends to call an election for the spring, only three years and a bit into its current mandate?

Parliament is neither a place for reflection nor a portrait gallery of former prime ministers. We are here to legislate on important issues. The Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, of which I am a member, is currently considering Bill C-18 on citizenship. This is the government's third attempt since 1977 to modernize the Citizenship Act. Many witnesses have appeared for the third time before the committee due to the prorogation of work and election calls. This time, the committee has reached clause by clause consideration. Things are plodding along: slow and steady wins the race, as the saying goes. However, there is nothing to indicate that we will be able to complete work on Bill C-18 once again, particularly since we have had to put it on hold to consider the thrilling idea of a national identity card.

If the future prime minister decides to call a spring election, Parliament will be prorogued, and all our work will be abandoned. What credibility will this Parliament have when we need to call witnesses for a fourth time and start all over again? Will they trust our wish to move on this? With Bill C-49, we risk once again playing the fools, and it comes down to this institution's credibility.

That is the danger with this bill. It is much more than simply advancing the effective date of the new electoral map. It is about respecting people.

Government Orders

By considering an election call in the spring of 2004, the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard is saying that he is not bothered by such considerations. Voters who brought in a majority Liberal government in November 2000 expect more from him. The change in leadership will not change this government. It is the same party with the same members. Under the new prime minister, the government will still be formed by members of the Liberal Party of Canada, as per our democracy. It is and will be merely a continuation, no matter what that 65-year-old greenhorn would have us believe, in his attempt to personify renewal. The hon. member for LaSalle—Émard should not count his chickens yet; everyone will remember that he was one of the key players in this government over the past ten years. We do not need to be fortune tellers to know that this is not the coming of the messiah.

We still have to wonder why the future prime minister is so eager to call an early election. Instead, he should use the next few months to show Canadians how his government would be different. If he were not afraid to show his true colours, he would not be concerned that a few months would cost him a lot of seats in the House of Commons.

• (1250)

He is also showing a total lack of leadership. He is trying to avoid setting up a ministerial team and, in doing so, alienating some of his partisans, and that could cost him dearly in the next election.

Election organization is usually partisan in nature. There is however one basic fact that is really crucial to proper elections. I am talking about the administrative structure that ensures the proper enforcement of the Elections Act, including the role played by the returning officers, the ROs.

Raising the number of federal ridings from 301 to 308 will not be done without some major changes to the boundaries. When the boundaries are changed, the mandates of the ROs are over. New returning officers will have to be appointed, based on their knowledge of the law and their judgment—meaning their respect for democracy. Once the ROs are appointed, they will need to be trained and given the necessary tools to properly enforce the law. Support staff will then have to be trained, polling divisions will have to be set up, polling stations accessible to everyone, including the handicapped, will have to be located, and the list of duties to carry out goes on and on.

Reducing the time set aside to complete the electoral administrative process is deliberately choosing amateurism and a “who cares” attitude. As a matter of fact, with Bill C-49, it is “who cares as long as we win as soon as possible”.

The opposition parties have grown accustomed to seeing the government call general elections after only three years and a bit, even though it is a blatant waste of time, energy and, mostly, public money. By the way, do you know that the last federal election, which took place in November 2000, cost taxpayers close to \$250 million? As a matter of fact, in 2004, it will be the fourth election since 1993 for a total of about one billion dollars. With four elections in eleven years, when traditionally there is one election every four years, one does not need to be an accountant to realize that we have had one too many under the Liberal regime. It is high time we looked at fixed election dates.

We are all ready to face the music should the next election campaign take place in the spring of 2004. However, we are no fools and we know full well that an election campaign is not something you plan on a paper napkin between the aperitif and the crème brûlée. To be well structured and more than smoke and mirrors and a litany of empty promises, something the party in power is so good at, a campaign must be carefully orchestrated. The stakes are huge and the challenges many.

First, each party must have enough time to make people understand the true choices as well as the ins and outs of the various stakeholders' positions. To do this effectively, political parties must rely on a proven and well thought out platform. That is done in cooperation with party members and in consultation with a number of social players in order to clearly reflect the needs of the people.

However, it is an entirely different story when it comes to the Liberal Party of Canada, which is not in the habit of consulting the public, let alone listening to and following up on their concerns. Nevertheless, for anyone who truly has the public's interests at heart, this process should be given the time it needs and not be rushed in a moment of defiance for purely electoral considerations.

The other challenge is to have the opportunity to oppose ideas and hold real debates that rise above the ongoing partisan trench wars. To do so, political parties have to rely on the mobilization of their members and try to convince those less inclined to support them so that their view is at least considered. If the campaign is organized on a whim, or a power trip, then some groups risk being left out in the cold. What do we stand to gain as a society if our government represents only a very select part of the electorate? The answer is obvious.

• (1255)

The organizational side of things is nothing without the many people who become actively involved during the election. And most volunteers do not come knocking at the door.

Hundreds, even thousands of people across Canada have to be recruited for this undertaking to run smoothly. These are people who, through their work, foster the emergence of a political conscience and sense of social duty. If we want to have a higher turnout than in previous years, then we must ensure that these volunteers do not feel rushed by a last minute deadline. Without their invaluable support, rest assured that voter turnout will decline at an even more alarming rate than we have seen over the past few years.

Among all these challenges, the greatest remains that of convincing the public that politics is much more than what they read in the paper or see on television.

Government Orders

Beyond partisanship, political power is the source of the major policy thrusts are made. Is this an issue so insignificant that a handful of elected members can decide to call an early election to serve their own personal interests? I think that our duty goes way beyond such considerations. Can we accept a voter turnout of about 60% in a so-called democratic society such as ours? I for one am not satisfied with that; in fact, it is a source of serious concern for me.

Can we ignore the fact that people are losing interest in politics while major debates are taking place? Let us look at issues on which the involvement and interest of the public are crucial. Should same-sex marriage be allowed? Should we have a national identity card? Should abortion rights be challenged? Should the federal government recognize its responsibility in the fiscal imbalance experienced by Quebec and the other provinces of Canada?

All of these issues concern the public. Public participation is important at election time, so that these topics can be discussed and voters can make informed decisions regarding the party they want to put into office. It is up to us to ensure that the public feels concerned by these issues and by our work.

However, it is difficult to ask people to become actively involved and make themselves heard in an election campaign when at the same time we are trying to pull a fast one on them.

It has been demonstrated that Bill C-49 is futile. By moving up the effective date of the new electoral map, we are denying the public the right to be properly informed about the changes that will take place at the next election.

In closing, allow me to make a final prediction: if under the guise of showing respect to the public the government gives it a slap in the face and shows it contempt, rest assured the public will remember come election day. Unfortunately, this could result in an even lower voter turnout than in the 2000 election. No one will be a winner, especially not democracy.

• (1300)

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Laval Centre. It is always a pleasure to listen to her speeches since she is a very competent and experienced person.

We have here a debate which shows that democracy is becoming less and less important in this country. We hear the future leader of the Liberal Party talk about the democratic deficit everywhere he goes.

I would like to say this and turn it into a question for my colleague from Laval Centre. If what we hear is true—and everything indicates that it is—by amending the legislation to allow an election to be called as early as April 1, it means that we will be sitting a total of three months at the most over the next 12 months, that is between October 2003 and October 2004.

Coming from someone who is talking about a democratic deficit, I find this rather outrageous. To serve the interests of one man who does not want to be held accountable for his actions before the people, this Parliament will be sitting a total of three months at the most over the next 12 months, since we will not be sitting in the summer of 2004.

The election will be held at the end of the spring, and we will probably resume sitting at the beginning of September. This means that for 9 months over a period of 12 months, this country will be governed through orders in council made by a small group of people that are cabinet members.

Is my interpretation accurate? I would say to my colleague from Laval Centre that I believe that this would create a huge democratic deficit. Is my interpretation accurate?

Ms. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Champlain for his kind words. Let me share a secret with the House: he is extremely generous, so you cannot believe everything he says.

To answer his question, true, the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard has repeatedly stated publicly that he is sorry about the democratic deficit. He is probably as sorry about that as he is about the national deficit.

Most of the time, talk is cheap unless it is backed up by action. On the democratic deficit, the future prime minister does not seem to be setting a good example, as evidenced by the fact that, as an internationally renowned and respected finance minister, he took care of Canada's deficit by going after the underprivileged while he had no qualms about doing business in warmer climates to avoid paying corporate taxes.

This is rather strange talk. How can he, on the one hand, say that cuts have to be made—and he intends to continue to make further cuts—to protect the state and, on the other hand, refuse to recognize that, if there is a deficit in the Canadian provinces and in Quebec, it is because management at the federal level is self-centred, with an “all for me, nothing for the others” philosophy?

The member for LaSalle—Émard is saying, “Since I am getting very rich, I will be able to give presents to anyone I want, and I will force the provinces to grovel before me”.

A democratic deficit is a situation where the people governments deal with ultimately are not powerful enough to force the governments to listen and to think. It occurs when people do not vote, when people tell us very clearly that they are not interested in politics and that all governments are the same. What people must know is that by not being interested in politics, they leave the door wide open to some individuals who get into politics to pursue their own interests first.

Bill C-49 is an example of this. For the future prime minister of Canada, calling an election in April is the way to avoid answering questions in the House, to avoid dealing every day with journalists, some of whom are pretty tough. This is probably something that the member for LaSalle—Émard does not feel like to do at all. I understand how this could cause stomach ulcers or a bit of high blood pressure, or even an absolutely horrible nervous breakdown.

This is what I had to say about the future prime minister and the democratic deficit.

• (1305)

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to hear what my colleague from Laval Centre has to say on the opinion that I am about to give.

Government Orders

We recognize the fact that in the last decade, way too many people from the regions and the rural areas moved to the big cities. To me that is a very sad exodus.

Given this problem, which I do not want and which I would like to see corrected, does she not find it a little odd and even dangerous that, after touring the regions to listen to what people had to say on the new electoral boundaries, the commission members have based their decisions on statistics only? This seems to be what they have done.

It is said that there should be 89,000 or 90,000 voters in a riding and what they are trying to do is find 90,000 voters, regardless of what will happen in the regions when they lose their representation.

I would like to know if my colleague from Laval Centre agrees with me that this is a dangerous situation and that in a not too distant future, twenty years maybe, there will not be one rural or regional politician or member of Parliament left. They will all be from the city.

Ms. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

I will take advantage of my colleague's question to read from the brief I presented to the travelling commission that went from region to region to consult on new electoral boundaries. In my brief I talked about the rural areas. I will quote from my text:

The brief I am submitting today represents the position taken by the caucus of Bloc Québécois members representing the people in this vast region of Laval-Laurentides-Lanaudière, which has seen significant population growth in recent years, so much so that the commission, in all mathematical rigour, thought it would be a good idea—among others—to eliminate one riding from the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and another from the Gaspésie—Bas-du-Fleuve, and add them to Laval-Laurentides-Lanaudière.

Such generosity did not trivialize regional representation from Canada's Parliament. Reflecting on the importance of rural areas, we have come to the conclusion that their importance should increase with their distance from the centres of decision-making. We strongly believe that the sheer size of the ridings offsets the relative scarcity of people.

In their speeches all members of Parliament proclaim the need for promoting the strengths of the regions, maintaining their vitality and their role in the national economy. But how does that align with the reduction of 25% in the current representation of Saguenay—Lac Saint-Jean?

That is still the case under Bill C-49; in Gaspésie—Bas-du-Fleuve things were done somewhat differently.

In this region, the procedure is even more worrisome because the 1996 changes caused a reduction from 5 to 4 federal ridings. There are many ways to bleed the regions. Reducing their electoral representation is unacceptable in terms of equity and dignity for the region's residents.

Because of time constraints, I shall just give my personal thoughts on what I call the famous dogma of "one man, one woman, one vote". Can I say this is simplistic? Yet it is very clear to me that if I live in the riding of Westmount—Ville-Marie, for example, my vote is worth much more than one person, and if I live in Gaspésie—Bas-du-Fleuve, perhaps my vote is worth much less than one person.

If, as a society, we want to be fair to the rural areas, it is time to look at the issue another way and recognize that voters can be well looked after in population groups of up to 140,000.

● (1310)

[English]

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise this afternoon to speak on Bill C-49, which is hopefully going to make certain the parameters under which we go into the next federal election.

I would like to support my colleague from North Vancouver who brought his concern about the uncertainty that we were facing with the new boundary redistribution. He tried to find some way to make it easier for all constituencies across the country to deal with this issue.

In my riding, we have a particular situation where for the first time in a long time—more time than we would have liked—Langley will have its own constituency when the election is called. It is hard to organize a brand new riding unless there is some certainty in the process. I would commend my colleague for seeing some of the problems and coming up with suggestions on how to deal with them.

This bill would allow constituency associations to get organized in preparation for the new boundaries after January. Considering that there will probably be a spring election, I think it is imperative that the new boundaries come into effect in order to bring at least some attempt to equalize representation in this country. I do not know if Canadians are aware of the discrepancy that we have in representation.

I wish to criticize Elections Canada for having only numbers based on the 1991 census on its website. It is abhorrent that Canada's election organization is at least 10 years behind the times with its numbers. However, even using those numbers, I want Canadians to know why British Columbians have a concern with their representation in the House of Commons.

I want to share with them that, as of 1991, in Prince Edward Island one member of Parliament represented 32,441 people. And we all know how populations have grown, particularly in my home province of British Columbia. In British Columbia, at that time, one member of Parliament represented 93,773 people.

Considering that our democratic system, and particularly the House of Commons, is based on the concept of one person-one vote, it is hard to convince my constituents that 93,000-plus equals the 32,000-plus in Prince Edward Island.

There is a concern in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario that this discrepancy would not really be looked after by these boundary redistributions and things would not change very much. I am at a loss to explain to my constituents, many of whom are concerned about the growth of this place, that Parliament would not be able to maintain the number of seats and just increase the representation, nor would it be able to reduce the number of seats.

Government Orders

The United States, over the last 90 years, has maintained the number of seats in congress. The population distribution is within half a per cent as far as one congressman representing X number of constituents. So we have this example of this very close representation on the concept of one person-one vote. Then we have Canada with the discrepancy I mentioned, with 32,400 in Prince Edward Island and 93,700 in British Columbia.

It gets worse. Alberta has the greatest discrepancy. It has 97,900-plus people. This, again, is using 1991 figures. It does not take too much to suggest that Alberta and B.C. were probably two of the faster growing provinces over that period of time.

● (1315)

Keeping that in mind, it does bring to light some of the problems that we have with equal representation in the House of Commons.

The bill at least allows for the next election to be fought with an increase in a number of seats in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario. My concern is that this is just a drop in the bucket as far as bringing equity into our parliamentary system.

I do not think Canadians are aware that Alberta and British Columbia have been allocated six senators and New Brunswick, which is a considerably smaller province, has ten senators; that the western provinces of Alberta, B.C., Manitoba and Saskatchewan have 24 senators and the Atlantic provinces have 30 senators.

Some of it is historic. Some of it is covered under the Constitution, but I think it is time that all Canadians put their heads around the issue of equal representation in the House.

I know that there was an amendment in 1985 to our Constitution that froze representation. It said that no province could lose representation regardless of population distribution. How do we think that makes people feel in some of the larger provinces like British Columbia, which is the third largest province in the country, when they know that, forever basically, unless we get our heads around it and change it, they will never have the representation in Parliament that their population justifies?

I must bring forward these issues because they are of great importance to our citizens. However, the proposed legislation does at least allow some semblance of trying to even the playing field, although it falls far short of coming anywhere close to it.

The Bloc members have raised some concerns. I do not really understand what their concerns are. I do not know why they would feel that Canadians should not be more represented based on population. It is not undermining the representation that they have in their province. I fail to see why they would not want to have some certainty in allowing the future to play a part in the next election.

As I mentioned earlier in my comments, this legislation is there just to bring certainty to support constituencies in their effort to organize before April 1 when the bill becomes a done deal.

I want to add my comments to those of other colleagues who are in support of bringing certainty to the process of making it easier for candidates who wish to run in the next election and have the opportunity to organize and be prepared. The legislation would also recognize communities like Langley city and Langley township

which have for a great number of years been tag-alongs with other parts of other communities and never having one voice, one person to attend to their needs.

I am sorry I will not be representing Langley city. I have in the past represented part of Langley township and I will miss representing it. I am very happy that in the next election Langley will be able to vote for its own member of Parliament who will be able to give full attention to that one constituency. Therefore, it is very important that the proposed legislation make it through the process and be proclaimed before the next federal election is called.

I wish to thank the House for the opportunity of putting in my two cents' worth and wish that the Bloc members would support the bill because it is important for those parts of Canada which are terribly under-represented and will be for many years.

● (1320)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—L'Érable, BQ): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak on Bill C-49. I am very upset by this bill, because it will result in the disappearance of the riding I have represented for seven years. I do not challenge this decision, but I do challenge the consultation process and the lack of recourse so people could change this terrible decision.

I represented the only rural riding in Quebec that fully covered three RCMs: L'Érable RCM, Bécancour RCM and Lotbinière RCM, as well as some municipalities in the Arthabaska RCM, for a total 70,000 constituents. This was the only rural riding in Quebec, with Plessisville as its largest town with a population of barely 8,000. However, its economic strength is based on the rural strength of L'Érable, Lotbinière and Bécancour RCMs.

The first phase took place in December 2002, when the commission advised us of its first recommendation. It made no changes to my riding of Lotbinière—L'Érable, other than suggesting the inclusion of three municipalities in the western part of the current riding of Lévis. That seemed acceptable and increased the number of constituents from 70,000 to approximately 95,000.

In March 2003, when the commission returned to advise us of its proposal based on its consultations and mathematical calculations, my riding had literally disappeared. From that point on, I consulted, and I received resolutions. During my numerous travels around my riding, I met people who asked me to do my best to preserve the only rural riding in Quebec.

Despite all my efforts, including appearing before the standing committee considering this matter, where I saw a dozen of my colleagues making recommendations all rejected out of hand by the commission, it became clear that the commission's goal was to take the population of Quebec, divide it by 75 and establish equal ridings of 90,000 to 100,000 people. No consideration was given to regional specificity nor socio-economic profile. Expert accountants merely applied mathematical formulas.

Government Orders

The changes were based on statistics compiled from the 2001 census. On that basis, we have to accept things, because if the population increased or decreased, some modifications must be made while obviously respecting the socio-economic profile of the regions.

My riding was divided in three, and my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay is also losing his riding. My colleague from Manicouagan is being assigned a 1,300 square kilometre riding. My colleague from Champlain saw his riding disappear, or almost, and was forced to annex the current riding of Saint-Maurice. This redistribution affects almost 60% of the ridings in Quebec.

I would have liked to have seen an appeal process in Bill C-49. Just imagine. We, as MPs, have been working with a certain portion of the public for six or seven years. When it comes time to go back to the ballot box, and for us to stand before our electorate, it will have changed dramatically. I have a decision to make in the next few weeks. I have to decide whether I will run for Érabie or for Lotbinière.

• (1325)

One thing is certain, I will still be around to fight the Liberals during the next election. I will fight the person who I feel is responsible for the most antidemocratic act we have ever seen in this House.

Let us review the facts. In June 2002, the Prime Minister fired his finance minister because of his lack of loyalty. Then, frustrated at having lost in 1990, the member for LaSalle—Émard set things in motion to become the next leader of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Even though the Bloc Québécois has strong reservations about the way the current Prime Minister does and manages things, we still think he was the victim of an incredible mutiny within his own party.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: By a ship captain.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: As my colleague for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles says, it is like wanting to change ships' captains, but I do not want to talk too much about ships. The present member for LaSalle—Émard is engaged in what I would call a popularity contest rather than a leadership race. We have reached the point where the Liberal leadership race has become a competition to see which advertising agency can sell Paul Martin the best. No one can get a word out of him any more. We cannot get him to speak. He does not know what to say.

I have never seen a government as cowardly as the one over there. In 1997, a new leader was elected by the Bloc Québécois. The Prime Minister called an election a month afterward, for fear of losing them.

In November 2000, another new leader showed up, the leader of the Canadian Alliance. Again, the Prime Minister called an election. When Liberals are re-elected, government becomes a temporary thing. No longer one in place for four or five years, but rather one in place for three years and a bit. This costs the taxpayer a lot of money.

The present member for LaSalle—Émard and future Prime Minister is the most cowardly of the cowards I have ever seen. He is trying to find a way to become Prime Minister without being one.

Bill C-49 leaves me greatly disillusioned with the government House leader, who I always felt was the most loyal supporter of the present Prime Minister. But no, he too has got involved in the fancy footwork of the member for LaSalle—Émard. With Bill C-49, he is proposing an affront to democracy, in order to help the most cowardly member of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Madam Speaker—

• (1330)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but since we are in the House of Commons, we must choose our words carefully. I ignored it once, I motioned to you, but please, we are in the House of Commons, after all. Even though you did not attack personally a member of the House, our language must remain within acceptable and reasonable limits in an institution such as this one. We all belong to it and we respect it.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I just heard your concern. I would like to know what inappropriate terms my colleague for Lotbinière—L'Érabie is supposed to have used. If it is the word coward, I do not believe it is unparliamentary.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I did not ask the hon. member to withdraw. I asked him to be more careful, and I believe those are two different things. We can still proceed with your point of order if you wish. I did not ask the member to withdraw, I just cautioned him. If you do not mind, we will forgo this kind of language, which is unacceptable in the House of Commons.

The hon. member for Lotbinière—L'Érabie.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Madam Speaker, instead of saying coward, perhaps I should say “lack of fortitude” or “lack of leadership”? A man who has been waiting for 10 years to become prime minister and is unable to face his responsibilities is a man who lacks fortitude, lacks leadership, shirks his responsibilities and uses the Liberal majority to change, through Bill C-49, a process provided for by an act that normally should be a most objective and non-partisan act.

By moving up to April 1, 2004, an order that was supposed to come into force on August 26, 2004, the future prime minister is obviously showing that he has trouble facing his responsibilities.

Earlier, my colleague from Champlain said that the way the democratic deficit has been increasing in this House, we might sit for only 3 out of the next 12 months. In the meantime, there are problems in our society and people are counting on the future prime minister.

As I said before, it is a real competition among advertising agencies. They show him from every angle, but when the time comes for him to say something, he seems to be at a loss for words. We are facing a real democratic deficit.

Government Orders

You will understand why I said at the beginning of my speech that I was deeply disappointed to see my riding disappear. When I learned the news, I was confident, because under the Canada Elections Act that governs the approval of new electoral boundaries, I would have a year to meet with the new people and to get them to know me. These 12 months seemed to me like a reasonable time frame for those members who were greatly affected by the changes to the electoral boundaries.

But no, Bill C-49 brings us back to a five to six month time frame. I do not want to engage in a direct attack against the future leader of the Liberal Party, but I doubt that there will be a democratic process for the nomination of the 308 Liberal candidates in Canada.

The way things are shaping up, once the order comes into effect, there will be a partisan nomination process like we have never seen before in Canada. That shows that there is a democratic deficit and that Parliament is currently paralyzed. Nothing is getting done.

We have one king who is on his way out, and another who is anxious to take his place on the throne but who looks for opportunities to greet his loyal subjects without saying anything to convince them that he deserves to accede to the throne.

I would have liked Bill C-49 to be a little more democratic, with an appeal process for the people of Quebec and for all the ridings that were greatly affected by the new electoral boundaries.

What happened is that boundaries were imposed and a committee process was put in place, and then the commission decided that there was no recourse available any more.

How can we go visit our constituents to tell them that we live in a democratic country, that we are sensitive to the needs of the people and that we live in a country where consultation is allowed, when the government shows no respect for such a fundamental issue and for the sense of belonging that exist in a riding?

● (1335)

All this is part of a plan developed by the member for LaSalle—Énard in June 2002, when he was fired by the Prime Minister. This is a plan to ease him into power. Not only will it take him there, but it will also allow him to stay quiet, letting this series of images convince the general public.

It is too late, but I would have liked Mr. Kingsley at Elections Canada to put off the decision, and I wrote him about that. We all know how it went with the report; we waited and waited, not knowing when it would be presented and, finally, it was released on August 26. I wanted those of our colleagues hard hit by the readjustment to be able to run in the election using the current boundaries.

There could have been eight more seats. Of course, none were assigned to Quebec. Western Canada and Ontario got some, and the four in Prince Edward Island were maintained. The population of Quebec is larger, but the number of ridings remains the same, at 75. Once again, there is a political will not to treat Quebec right.

Why should we keep quiet when there is a democratic deficit in this place? Why should we not condemn this approach in this House? Why should we not worry about an adjournment, perhaps as

early as November 7, to allow the future king to be crowned in Toronto in November? There will be a pre-election, but most members affected by the readjustment will be torn between the services they must provide to the public and the efforts they will have to make to get re-elected.

In making my decision, naturally my priority will be those who put their trust in me on November 27, 2000, but at the same time, understandably, I ought to intensify my efforts to try and convince the 50% or 60% of new voters I will have in my riding. Is it right that we should have another election now? Normally, we should be asking the public to assess and justify our work, which will not happen in my riding. Wherever I go, I will end up with about 30% or 35% of my riding. That makes no sense, and it is undemocratic.

In closing, I want to say that Bill C-49 does not solve anything. It is only the result of the future leader of the Liberal Party working with the House leader in order to be able to call an early election and especially to avoid his responsibilities as prime minister in this House.

● (1340)

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member raised a number of interesting points. I would like at least to make a comment about an impression that I received from his speech, and to quote him “the boundaries that we are creating here”.

The House of Commons, the members of Parliament, do not create the boundaries. The member knows there is a process which is established under existing law. It is the Chief Electoral Officer and the commissions that have been established who, based on the census information, provide a distribution of ridings across the country. They will adjust them to take into account the growth in the average population per riding. They also take into account that pursuant to our Constitution, a province like P.E.I. regardless of its population is guaranteed to have four seats. There are some exceptions, and I am not sure if the number is the same in these provinces, but by and large in Ontario the average population would be something like 116,000.

The census was completed some time ago. The commissions initially came forward with proposed boundaries based on the assessment of the population distribution of the census. That process then went through very extensive public consultations. The member and the public at large had an opportunity to appear before the tribunal to make representations to ensure that communities of like-minded interests were not divided, et cetera.

I understand that many members will have a situation where even though Quebec's population may have increased, the population of a member's riding may not have increased to the same extent. Therefore that member will find that his riding now has been attached to another riding which has not grown to the same extent.

Government Orders

The point is that although we had an opportunity through this legislation and we had an opportunity through our own committee to make final representations, those representations were not binding on the commission. The commission could consider them but this place had no say in the final boundaries. We had an opportunity to make suggestions either at hearings or through our committee.

Having said that, does the member feel that he needs the year to find a new riding? Maybe he could explain to the House when he found out that his riding did not have a sufficient population and that it would have to have a significant change to its boundaries. I suspect the answer is that it was at least two years ago and therefore, his argument about needing a full year to figure out what he might do about it simply is not a valid argument.

• (1345)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Madam Speaker, I have proof once again that members on the other side do not see things the way we do.

I said it before and I will say it again, if the order were to come into effect on April 25, 2004, as planned initially, instead of April 1, my new constituents would have had 12 months to get to know who I am.

Second, I never said that the government and the House of Commons were creating the boundaries. What I pointed out, and I think my hon. colleague is a democrat, is that there is no appeal process. Once the commission has made a decision, if the people do not agree, it would be interesting to have an appeal process.

Or is this like the pre-budget consultations, which I call bogus consultations, since they are for naught? Is this what we are aiming for, bogus consultations that distort the truth and reality?

I do not play those kinds of games. I represent a riding. I represent my constituents. I want to be able to clearly express their needs and their expectations, which is more than can be said of members opposite.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I often meet with Canadian and Quebec women's groups. I heard a comment this week and I would like to hear what the member for Lotbinière—L'Érable thinks about it.

First, people told me that if the House adjourns because of an election and if we in fact move up the implementation of the new electoral map, that will mean that what they have said to their members before the election will get lost. To them, this means that it will take almost a year before they can get an answer or a solution to their problems.

Somebody else asked me: "What do we do about Bill C-22 to amend the Divorce Act? What do we do about Bill C-25 on labour relations in the public service? What do we do about victims of harassment? What do we do about same sex marriage? What will happen with all these bills that people are waiting for? What will happen with poverty and social housing?"

That is what the women's groups were asking and it is also what I am asking my colleague.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Madam Speaker, the answer is quite simple: everything is done here to please one man, the member for

LaSalle—Émard. He wants to become the prime minister and he does not want to talk, to take his—

An hon. member: He is already the prime minister.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Not yet officially, but he pretends to be the prime minister: he holds caucuses and organizes meetings. What is happening here is amazing. Imagine the image of Canada that we are projecting internationally.

Nothing has happened in this Parliament for the last year. The American president, Mr. Bush, even refuses to meet with the current Prime Minister, because he knows that the Prime Minister does not make the decisions, that it is not him who is the Prime Minister, but the member for LaSalle—Émard.

All the bills that are ongoing, everything that has been done in committees will be lost. We will go backwards. We have been wasting our time for the last year and we will lose another year for just one man. We are waiting for this man in the next election campaign. You will see.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I would simply like to reiterate the point that the office of the Chief Electoral Officer goes through this process not to accommodate the wishes of members of Parliament but rather to structure the boundaries so that it can efficiently run an election with ridings of relatively equal size.

That is the way it is. It is not a subjective thing. It has guidelines to take into account communities of interest, et cetera. It has to be an efficient configuration based on natural boundaries and so on. The member has to admit that the process is not for the benefit of that member or any other member in the House, but rather to run an efficient electoral campaign.

Let me conclude simply by also noting that half of the member's time was spent talking about the member for LaSalle—Émard. Let me assure the member that he will never get ahead of the member for LaSalle—Émard as long as he keeps kicking him in the backside.

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The hon. member for Lotbinière—L'Érable has almost 30 seconds to answer.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Madam Speaker, the decision is really not complicated. On the issue of Bill C-49, if you, the Liberals, are so democratic, why do you want to pass Bill C-49, whose purpose is to change the normal process, which is to wait one year before applying an order?

If you are great democrats, you should propose today to maintain the date of the order at August 25, 2004, instead of moving it forward to April 1, 2004. Then you would prove that you are democratic. Currently, the only thing you are proving is that you are fiddling with democracy.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, once again I have to apologize for my rather weak voice, however, it is excellent because it prevents me from yelling at people. I will be sure to be extraordinarily gentle today.

S. O. 31

I am very pleased to speak for a few minutes to Bill C-49, the bill which would advance the time at which the changes to the new boundaries take effect. I am very much concerned about this. Realistically speaking I should be voting against the bill but I will be supporting it when it comes to the vote. The new prime minister will be able to call an election whenever he chooses. It could be soon after his inauguration or at least as soon as the present Prime Minister resigns. It is a very interesting dilemma that faces the country politically at this time. He could call the election as early as February or March, but we are pretty sure that will not happen.

If he does wait until after April 1, which is the date proposed by the bill, then the question is whether it will be done under the old or new boundaries. If this bill does not pass, then we will live with that total uncertainty. For me it is a huge uncertainty. As I have mentioned previously in the House, I will no longer be called the member for Elk Island, nor will anyone be called the member for Elk Island because under the new boundaries, Elk Island will cease to exist. It will evaporate.

Of course, we want to believe in the total impartiality of the commission that made that decision. I have serious questions about that, but it is a real change in the way we are organized politically in Alberta. The commission has chosen to annihilate several of the rural ridings, one of which is the riding of Elk Island, and to use a hub and spoke approach. The new riding will now include part Edmonton, a major city and in fact Alberta's capital. The boundaries go out in spokes from the city in order to include larger numbers. I think that is an error.

I know it will be manageable. If elected to one of the new ridings, I will serve to the very best of my ability. It is going to be more difficult because of a serious mismatch in the community of interest definition, which is in the legislation and which the commission was duty bound to observe but which it deliberately chose to ignore. As a result, parts of the city will now be competing for the attention of their member of Parliament on issues which will be quite diverse from those which affect the rural parts. However, as I said, this is a reality and we have to live with it.

In that sense, I would like to vote against the bill. Personally I would like the election to be called using the old boundaries because we have a very good, closely knit riding. We all get along very well together. We have an extremely high degree of connectivity among the members of the communities that are involved. It would be much more effective to continue under that. However, as I said, I will be supporting this legislation because, among other things, this increases the representation of Alberta to within one seat of the number that it should have.

In listening to the speeches when this bill was debated previously and at third reading today, one of the things I have observed is that Bloc members are opposing this bill. They say that they are now being under-represented. According to the Constitution, Quebec has 75 seats regardless of its population. It is my understanding that the population of Quebec has increased at a much lower rate than the population of Alberta and British Columbia. As a result, the fact that they remain the same, relatively speaking, is still giving them a numerical advantage.

● (1355)

If we were to check the numbers I believe we would find that the number of voters per constituency in Quebec is lower than the number in either Alberta or British Columbia. In fact, an argument could be made that Alberta should have had three more seats instead of two, although I will concede that the strict application of the formula, as it exists, results in the two additional seats.

I will be supporting Bill C-49 because I believe Alberta should have additional representation. I also believe British Columbia should have additional representation because it has grown a lot in the last number of years and is certainly entitled to two more seats as the new boundaries would provide. That is the reason I want the next election to be under the new boundaries but I wish the boundaries readjustment procedure could be reviewed and changed so there would be fairness.

What has really distressed me is that the commissioner in Alberta, instead of addressing the issue of commonality of community interests, gave reasons why he should not listen to that.

Alberta has two major cities, Edmonton, which is the capital, and Calgary, which is probably a more major industrial and business centre. Calgary, which has grown more within its boundaries, was entitled to two more seats. However, the commission, instead of just saying that its mandate was to provide for equal representation based upon population, said that if Calgary received two more seats then Edmonton should as well. I totally disagree with that. That is not the case. If Edmonton's population had grown within its boundaries, then yes, but the fact is that it did not.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The hon. member for Elk Island will have 12 minutes and 52 seconds remaining when we resume debate this afternoon.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, October 5 marked the 10th annual World Teachers' Day, to which Education International has given the theme "Opening Doors to a Better World".

When we reflect on the role of teachers in our society, we cannot restrict our notions of teaching to the mere relaying of facts and figures to students. Teachers accept wholeheartedly the responsibility of inspiring, guiding and developing values of tolerance, equality, peace and respect. Our teachers are, indeed, pillars, not only of education but of citizenship.

Our teachers, from pre-school onward, are invaluable to our society and to our citizenry. What happens every day of the week in classrooms across Canada must be appreciated in terms of how our democratic society has benefited. How many among us say that the choices we made were made because of the influence of a teacher?

In recognizing World Teachers' Day, we celebrate the courage and dedication of our teachers in expanding our minds and understandings. We thank all teachers for opening the door to a better world.

* * *

• (1400)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, imagine a country where your race determined your treatment by the justice system. Such a country would be violating the most fundamental tenet of justice. Only one such country exists and we are in it. It is Canada.

The appalling truth of the 1996 Liberal amendments to the Criminal Code and the 2000 Youth Criminal Justice Act is that they require sentencing judges to treat aboriginal offenders differently than other Canadians.

That is wrong. It is an insult to law-abiding aboriginal people. It is an insult to the victims of aboriginal crimes, most of whom are aboriginal people. It sends a sickening, perverse message to aboriginal young people. Most important, it fails to address the causes of higher aboriginal crime rates: the deplorable socio-economic status of aboriginal Canadians.

On behalf of aboriginal Canadians, I urge all members to support my private member's bill, Bill C-416, which will restore a true and equal justice system to our country.

* * *

[Translation]

RICHARD AND CAROLYN RENAUD

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to commend the exceptional work of two of my constituents, Richard and Carolyn Renaud of Montreal West.

[English]

The Renaud family generously donated \$5 million to create 100 bursaries and 12 assistant professor positions for Concordia University students. Mr. and Mrs. Renaud are now recreating this program at the Universities of Montreal and Quebec. The couple has also made a donation of over \$13 million to Concordia University.

[Translation]

Because of these exceptional donations and his extraordinary community involvement, Concordia has honoured this alumnus by naming its new science building the Richard J. Renaud Science Complex.

[English]

I ask all members to please join me in congratulating Mr. Renaud for his philanthropic works and his family for their dedication to ensuring the completion and quality of university level education in the Montreal area.

S. O. 31

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Environment Canada reports that in the year 2002 an estimated 2 million TV sets, 1.1 million VCRs and 348,000 CD players were disposed of, with most of that sent to landfills. In all, Canadians threw out approximately 155,000 tonnes of so-called electronic waste.

It should be noted that each TV set can contain up to two kilograms of lead, a dangerous substance for children. Mercury, which is used in stereos, is also appearing in landfills.

The report recommends the adoption as a matter of urgency of an electronics recycling policy.

I therefore call upon the government to implement the Environment Canada report's recommendations to reduce this type of waste and the damage to land and, eventually, to groundwater.

* * *

PETER MCGINN

Mr. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I am sad to rise and report to the House the death of one of my constituents.

This past Saturday, while helping his friends and neighbours unload lobster traps donated by fishermen in West Nova to assist fishermen in Halifax West affected by hurricane Juan, Peter McGinn passed away as the result of a heart attack.

A pillar of his community, Pete lived and worked around the ocean most of his life. After a distinguished career with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Pete retired and became even more involved in his community. He was the secretary of the Prospect Area Full Time Fishermen's Association and played a key role in forming the Prospect Peninsula Ratepayer's Association.

Pete was a likeable guy with a great sense of humour. I know I speak for myself and many people from the Prospect area in passing on our sympathies to Pete's family. He will certainly be missed.

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FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Reed Elley (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, raw log exports from British Columbia continue to be a very serious issue, particularly for Vancouver Island and my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan.

It has been reported that last year log exports hit an all time high of 3.7 million cubic metres; 100,000 truckloads of timber. The sad thing about this is that there are no signs of this slowing down. This amounts to one in every four trees that are cut down being shipped out of B.C.

Why is this a serious concern? It is because with every log that we allow to be exported goes jobs, and we seriously impair the much needed development of secondary forest industries that could produce more value added products.

S. O. 31

With the loss of these jobs, there are serious economic and social consequences. These jobs are needed to pay the family bills, support local small business, pay taxes and provide economic stability at all levels.

I urge the government to work with its provincial counterparts to put a stop to the export of raw logs, particularly off crown lands. Shame on the Liberal government for shipping our logs and our jobs south of the border and to Asian markets.

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● (1405)

YWCA WEEK WITHOUT VIOLENCE

Mr. Janko Peric (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week Canadians from across the country will be participating in anti-violence activities as part of the eighth annual YWCA Week Without Violence.

The goal of these activities is to develop practical and sustainable solutions to the issue of violence in our communities. This includes the raising of awareness of the plight of women in abusive relationships, children exposed to bullying or violence, and the fear of violence present in our homes, workplace, schools and streets.

The YWCA Canada provides programs and services to over 1 million women and their families through its 40 chapters, including the YWCA of Cambridge.

YWCA volunteers, members, participants and staff have always been at the forefront of the struggle for the equality and empowerment of women in our society.

I congratulate all YWCA volunteers and staff for their ongoing dedication to this cause and the betterment of our society.

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[*Translation*]**NOBEL PEACE PRIZE**

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate Ms. Shirin Ebadi, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. This Iranian lawyer is the first Muslim woman to receive such an honour.

In awarding her the prize, the Nobel Committee has emphasized the importance of human rights in general, and in particular the rights of women and children for whom Ms. Ebadi has worked for over 25 years.

Shirin Ebadi was the first Iranian woman to become a judge, but she was removed from that office in 1979 when the Islamic Republic was created in Iran. She had to struggle for more than 10 years to regain the right to plead as a lawyer. Iranian women owe to Ms. Ebadi and her colleague Mehr-Anguiz Kar the family law amendments that give more rights to women. Ms. Ebadi also gained fame by defending children before the courts, as well as intellectuals imprisoned since 2000.

On behalf of all Bloc Québécois members, I want to pay tribute to this defender of the rights of women in Iran.

[*English*]**SIERRA LEONE**

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Sierra Leone is emerging from civil war. Canadians are helping at this difficult time. Our high commission and CIDA staff are doing fine work. So are members of the armed forces, the RCMP and other police forces.

Canadians are helping with the special court for war crimes and the reconciliation commission. Canadians in NGOs and the private sector are involved in areas like health care, education, agriculture, mining and journalism. Our Parliament is helping to strengthen governance there.

Although the maple leaf flies proudly over the RCMP's Canada House in ravaged downtown Freetown, most Canadians in Sierra Leone work quietly, effectively but anonymously.

Let us take the time to think of the people of Sierra Leone and all the Canadians who are assisting them. As we do so, let us recognize the fine work of the member for Nepean—Carleton who was our special envoy to Sierra Leone at the height of the war.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister wrapped up a two day summit with the 21 Pacific rim leaders at the APEC summit. These included the Malaysian prime minister who last week said:

The Europeans killed six million Jews out of 12 million, but today the Jews rule the world by proxy.

They get others to fight and die for them.

World leaders from Australia, Germany, Italy, Spain and the European Union condemned his comments. President Bush took the opportunity at the APEC summit to pull him aside and tell him his comments were wrong and divisive.

The Prime Minister has once again failed to voice Canadian values and looked weak and unconcerned. Why did the other world leaders recognize the need to criticize Mahathir's comments?

Canada's Prime Minister should represent Canadian values and have condemned the Malaysian prime minister's statements.

The Prime Minister's legacy has been not to offend any world leader's comments except, of course, those of our traditional allies, the British and the Americans.

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[*Translation*]**REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Mr. Gérard Binet (Frontenac—Mégantic, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Secretary of State in charge of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec announced the extension of the Amiante MRC's Regional Strategic Initiative.

A budget envelope of \$7.5 million will be used to carry out projects in the region until March 2006. Of that amount, over \$3 million has already been invested in innovative projects, thus creating over 250 jobs and generating investments of \$16.2 million.

This good news fits in well with 2003 Small Business Week, which focuses on the power within every entrepreneur to turn dreams into reality by creating businesses that fuel regional economic growth.

The Frontenac—Mégantic region is a good example of this dynamism. It has reached a level of excellence in Quebec thanks to our small business leaders who turn innovative ideas into reality.

* * *

• (1410)

[English]

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. John Herron (Fundy—Royal, PC): Mr. Speaker, last year when I called for the elimination of the parental contribution standard, the Liberal government said that its loan system was already sufficient. Yet earlier this month Statistics Canada proved that the door to post-secondary education is shut to students of middle-income families.

Students simply cannot get the loans they need to go to university because many parents cannot or will not give what the government expects. It is unreasonable that parents are expected to fill the void after the prime minister is waiting repeatedly sliced into post-secondary education funding.

Despite swelling tuitions, the maximum weekly amount paid by the government student loan program has not increased since 1994. It is almost 10 years that the program has been lying stagnant.

Three principles must be instituted so students are no longer punished. We need stable and consistent funding to the provinces. We need to modernize student aid programs, we need effective student debt reduction programs and we need excellence and accessibility. We need leadership not neglect from the Liberal government.

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[Translation]

FOOD BANKS

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a report made public last week by the Canadian Association of Food Banks confirms that the number of men, women and children turning to food banks to put food on the table has doubled since 1989.

The numbers are staggering. According to this report, at least 750,000 people use food banks each month.

Increasing numbers of people are living in poverty and must beg for their bread and butter. Meanwhile, the Auditor General will soon tell us that, during the sponsorship scandal, the current Prime Minister chose to scandalously waste public funds on propaganda, rather than invest in a real strategy to fight poverty.

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This sad saga in Canadian politics was written by the current Prime Minister, along with the former finance minister, who still prefers to use tax havens rather than contribute to the taxes of the country he dreams of leading. This is a sad legacy for one, and a sorry start for the other.

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[English]

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY WEEK

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West—Mississauga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the beginning of National Occupational Therapy Week in Canada. Occupational therapists work with anyone who is having difficulty doing the activities that are important to them.

Their vital work is done with almost all age groups. They work with seniors helping them to enjoy more years of independent living. They work with children who suffer from developmental difficulties to help them enjoy all the benefits of growing up.

Unfortunately their work sometimes goes unnoticed and far too often funding for occupational therapy services are cut to finance more acute medical services. However, for those who have been treated by an occupational therapist, their services are invaluable.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank occupational therapists across Canada for their hard work and dedication to their profession. I wish them a successful National Occupational Therapy Week and good luck for the future.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to condemn in the strongest possible terms the racist, anti-Semitic outbursts of Mahathir Mohamad, the prime minister of Malaysia.

It is easy to dismiss these remarks as the ravings of a madman, but he is a head of state with status and influence, and as such his racist lies incite hatred and violence and give licence to too many others who share his warped world views.

Anti-Semitism is the most virulent and enduring form of hatred the world has ever known and within living memory this hatred has manifested itself into the most shameful event in human history, the Holocaust.

On this day when Parliament has agreed to establish Yom Ha'Shoah, as Holocaust Memorial Day, I call upon our Prime Minister to publicly denounce Mahathir Mohamad and to state clearly that we consider his shameful racist comments a hate crime on an international level.

* * *

2002 WINTER GAMES

Mr. John McKay (Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, honesty pays. I rise in the House today to honour a great Canadian champion, Becky Scott from Alberta, who represents our country in the sport of cross-country skiing.

Oral Questions

Among her many achievements in world and Olympic competitions, Becky Scott was awarded a bronze medal at the 2002 Winter Games. In a dramatic turn of events, it was later announced that the two skiers who finished ahead of her in the 10 kilometre classic race were both found guilty of doping infractions.

After lengthy negotiations, Becky has been awarded a silver medal during a special ceremony held today at the Canada Olympic Park in Calgary, in front of her friends and fans.

This singular twist to Becky's story comes as a just reward for sticking to her sport's ethical values in the face of strong pressures to achieve success at all costs. It can inspire other Canadian athletes in their quest for excellence, showing them that hard work and perseverance alone can lead them to the top. Honesty does pay.

* * *

•(1415)

CANADA PENSION PLAN

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, here is a letter from a constituent. He wrote:

The number, frequency, and high rate of government mismanagement incidents are totally outrageous to people such as myself. I'm being assessed by Canada Pension Plan for my fitness to receive my money plus they can't figure out why I, a legally blind person, can't find work.

He then indicates that for the third time in five years he is being required to prove to Revenue Canada that he is legally blind. Here is more from his letter:

In the face of the Governor General's million dollar tour of the north, I could live for 50 years on that amount. Being interrogated by CPP while she takes all her friends to travel the north and eat at fancy restaurants really offends me. Why do they waste taxpayers' money while hassling disabled folks? Something has to be done about this government which steals from the poor and gives to the rich.

That is how he ends his letter.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

ETHICS

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am forced today to return to the industry minister. After staying at the Irving fishing lodge, the industry minister was subjected to a blackout on the Irving files by the ethics counsellor.

We have reviewed the industry minister's statements from yesterday and contrary to his statements, we believe he was involved in these files.

I will get to these conflicts of interest in a second, but my question for the minister is this. Has he tendered his resignation or has he spoken to the Prime Minister or the new Liberal leader about the appropriateness of his actions in this matter?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I told the ethics counsellor fully about the trip. After taking his advice to disqualify myself from involvement in other Irving matters, I disqualified myself.

Issues were raised last week to which I have responded. I have also referred some of those issues to the ethics counsellor to have his views on the subjects, as well.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, he should be speaking to at least one of his leaders so we know whether that party thinks these are appropriate actions.

In May 2002, after the industry minister began lobbying for a bailout package for the Irvings, the ethics counsellor told the minister to stay out of these files, to stay out of decisions on Irving business. However in June 2003 we know that the industry minister actually co-signed a \$55 million package for Irving, while under the blackout.

Why did he not consult the ethics counsellor on the deal before signing off on it?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very important to know that the decision in respect of that matter was made by people other than me. I had disqualified myself. The decision was made and contained in the budget of February 18. The document at the end of May was solely for the purpose of putting the matter before Treasury Board so it could decide on releasing the funds.

The Minister of Industry is required, as a technical matter, to sign the document. I do not believe that is a conflict. I have asked the ethics counsellor to look at it. I believe that I was well within the terms of the recusal, but I have asked the ethics counsellor to look at it, and he has agreed to do so.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I submit that the minister has asked the ethics counsellor now because he knows he should have asked then and he should have not done it. That is why he is asking now.

I will give another example. Once again, while under the ethics counsellor's blackout, in March 2003 the minister successfully lobbied cabinet for a financial aid package for the shipbuilding industry. The changes would result in direct benefit to the Irving business, one of the largest shipbuilders in the country.

On this conflict of interest, could the minister tell the House how he could not possibly have known that Irving would benefit directly from his decision in this matter?

•(1420)

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member may be referring to the structured financing facility, which is to assist purchasers of ships who come to Canada to get ships made or to buy them to buy down the interest rate they pay. That was a program started under my predecessor. I brought to my colleagues a proposal to change that program. It was for the shipbuilding industry as a whole, not for the Irvings or any particular yard.

I believe that is within the terms of my recusal. However, again, because this issue has been raised, I have referred it to the ethics counsellor and he has been kind enough to say he would review it.

Oral Questions

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, shortly after the resignation of the public works minister over his weekend jaunt to chateau Boulay, the Minister of Industry jetted over to see the ethics counsellor to find out how he could cover his tracks of his extravagant escapade to the palatial Irving fishing lodge.

The former minister of public works was relieved of his duties because he violated the code of ethics. The industry minister has done the identical thing. He is in a clear conflict of interest.

Why then does the Prime Minister simply not fire the Minister of Industry for having committed an identical breach?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can only speak for myself. I can say that I approached the ethics counsellor after I became Minister of Industry and when the nature of the files before me made it obvious that I should do so. I spoke to the ethics counsellor in detail about the trip. He provided me with advice, which was to get out of files where the direct interests of the Irving company were involved by decisions that might be taken. I followed that advice.

Last week questions were raised about the items raised by the Leader of the Opposition. I referred those matters to the ethics counsellor. I believe I acted within the appropriate terms of the recusal, but the ethics counsellor has agreed to review it and for that I am grateful.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, after checking with an independent broker in New Brunswick on the cost of the industry minister's trip to the Irving fishing lodge, it was revealed that the cost of a private jet to New Brunswick was \$19,000, the cost of staying at a luxury resort for a couple of days, \$2,000, the cost of a New Brunswick salmon fishing licence, if he bought one, \$40.25, and the savings to the Canadian taxpayer if the minister resigns, priceless. When will the Minister of Industry do the right thing and tender his resignation?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. The Deputy Prime Minister has the floor and hon. members will want to hear the answer.

Hon. John Manley: Mr. Speaker, it is more than a little ironic to hear this member talking about ethics when there are still some outstanding questions that Mr. Orchard has put to him about his reliability.

Let it be understood that this is a minister who has acted with the utmost integrity. He has referred any outstanding issues to the ethics counsellor for his commentary. It would behoove the House to await the response of the ethics counsellor to those questions.

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[Translation]

1995 REFERENDUM

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a book to be released, journalist Lawrence Martin says that the federal government was prepared to send the army into Quebec the day after a yes victory in the 1995 referendum.

The journalist even quoted the current Minister of Transport as saying, and I quote, “I was minister of defence. There were things that went on that had to be prepared for”.

Will the Minister of Transport tell us whether the army was at the ready to move into Quebec in the event of a yes victory?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately for Mr. Martin, the Prime Minister has already denied these allegations.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately for the Deputy Prime Minister, this would not be the first time the Prime Minister denied something that was true.

I am asking the Minister of Transport, who refused to answer, who refuses to answer today and who said they were getting prepared for certain things. When he was Minister of Defence, was he preparing to send the army into Quebec in the event of a yes victory? The people of Quebec and Canada have the right to know. If he has courage and respect for this House, he will stand up and answer.

• (1425)

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time that Mr. Martin has written things that are not true. The Prime Minister has already denied these allegations, period.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs has had more to say outside cabinet. According to him, Ottawa's position had not changed since the Trudeau days. The federal government must ensure that order is respected, which was what led to the War Measures Act and its many excesses in 1970.

Can the Minister of Transport tell us whether, following in Trudeau's footsteps, the federal government was prepared to send the army into Quebec the day after the 1995 referendum, if there had been a yes vote? Is that what he was referring to?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is taking a peculiar approach. Might he be claiming from his seat that this is what I said? What he has said is not at all what I said.

I can find no parliamentary terms to describe such a bending of the truth.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, he was not there in 1995 when the Prime Minister said the following in Verdun just days before the referendum, “To stay or to leave. This is the issue of the referendum—the fundamental and irreversible choice of a country”. Once the outcome was known, that is the no vote, that very evening he said, and I quote again, “In a democracy, the people are always right”.

Is the minister trying to tell us that the government had decided to do the exact opposite of what the Prime Minister said, and to thumb its nose at democracy and send the army into Quebec?

Oral Questions

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two days after I was sworn in as a minister, I said the following, which is still the government's policy, "If a strong majority of Quebecers unfortunately voted in favour of secession in response to a clear question, I believe that the rest of Canada has the moral obligation to negotiate the division of the territory. In a democracy we do not have the resort to force".

Those were my words, and that is the government's policy.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the industry minister was told to cease and desist with respect to Irving family businesses, but he continued to represent their interests. He appointed a member from the Irving empire to advise him. He lobbied on behalf of the Irvings for money and federal contracts. He co-signed a \$55 million grant for the Saint John shipyard, which is owned by the Irvings.

How can the minister say that he was not acting on behalf of the Irvings when he was the one who co-signed the grant in the first place?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the member. The facts are not as stated. First of all, in relation to the document, the only document I signed was after the decision had been made by cabinet. The money was provided for in the budget. Treasury Board required that the Minister of Industry sign technically to get the money de-blocked, which was done.

With respect to the appointment of the man to the advisory council, that advisory council is 30 volunteers from across the country who serve without pay to give advice to the government on ship policy generally, including labour unions and manufacturers as well as shipyards. A representative of Irving was appointed but there was no pecuniary interest to the company.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that the industry minister actually co-signed the \$55 million grant to the Irving shipyard. In fact, in May 2002, ironically just at the time he was consulting the ethics counsellor, he was lobbying cabinet for \$100 million for these two shipyards. This goes against his direct testimony in question period today. He violated the terms of the conflict of interest. He violated the blackout period. When is the minister simply going to stand up and resign?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, these matters have now been referred, at my request, to the ethics counsellor. I spoke with him on Sunday when I came back from Asia. I recognized that these issues had been raised; I am satisfied I acted properly, but I have referred them to the ethics counsellor so that he may look at them, and I am grateful that he will.

On the points raised by the member, the only document I signed in relation to the \$55 million was after the decision had been made. I was not part of the decision. I disqualified myself from it. Because technically a document has to be signed to release the funds does not

constitute, in my view, a breach of my obligations. The ethics counsellor will look at that as well.

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FINANCE

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. It now appears that the federal surplus will be in the neighbourhood of \$6 billion and yet the new Liberal leader—

Some hon. members: Ho, ho.

Mr. Bill Blaikie: You should take that out of their time, Mr. Speaker.

Yet the new Liberal leader is promising 100 days of cuts, so I want to ask the Minister of Finance, who is still the Minister of Finance and who has some say in these matters, does he believe that an increased surplus is a reason for cuts or a reason for building and investing instead of slashing?

● (1430)

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow I will release the annual financial report for the year ended March 31, 2003. I can confirm that it will reveal that for a sixth consecutive year the government's fiscal account will be in surplus. It is the first time in 50 years that we have done six in a row, and I would say that is cause for celebration.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is probably the first time we have had a surplus and we have had somebody talking about cuts. That is what I wanted the minister to address, but he did not.

I have a question for the Minister of Industry, who understandably is anxious to redeem himself given the situation with respect to the Irvings and the fishing trip, et cetera. I say to the Minister of Industry that all he has to do to show us that he is not under the thumb of the Irvings is to release the details of the \$55 million deal. He should release all the details to show he is not under the thumb of the Irvings.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the information about the arrangements to rationalize, to diversify, the Saint John shipyard are very clear. We will engage in an environmental remediation on a cost shared basis. We will work with the Irving shipyard to look at a diversification for the economy of the province and the region. It is very simple. That is well explained within the press release that was issued to the public.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, in 2002, shortly before resigning, the then minister of public works presented a cheque in the amount of \$800 for his weekend at the home of the president of Groupe Everest. The situation of the Minister of Industry is identical, except that there is no cheque to cover the over \$20,000 cost of his fishing trip to New Brunswick. Where is the cheque? If there is no cheque, where is his resignation?

Oral Questions

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, I made full disclosure to the ethics counsellor in the circumstances that I have described, not only about the trip but about my own activities subsequent to that time. The ethics counsellor gave me advice, which I followed.

I know that issues have been raised across the way. I believe that I complied fully with the advice, but because those issues have been raised, I have directed them to Mr. Wilson. He has been kind enough to say he will look at them. I look forward to his response.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, the ethics counsellor's advice is clear: no gifts over \$200.

You received a gift worth 100 times—

The Speaker: No, I did not. The hon. member, I am sure, is addressing his remarks to the Chair.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Industry received a gift worth 100 times the allowable amount. Can the member explain to the House how accepting a gift worth 100 times the allowable amount is not breaking the rules? Or would he prefer to have the Prime Minister answer that question for him?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is the very reason why I spoke to the ethics counsellor, told him what I had done, told him about the circumstances and told him about my activities as minister after that time. As a result of what I told the ethics counsellor, I received his advice to disqualify myself from any further involvement in matters involving the Irving family. No decision had been taken in relation to their matters before that point. After that point, I disqualified myself. Decisions were made by others.

There are issues that have been raised. I have referred those to the ethics counsellor. I am grateful that I will have his advice.

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[*Translation*]

1995 REFERENDUM

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his book, journalist Lawrence Martin quoted the then Minister of Defence, who is now the Minister of Transport, as saying, "I was minister of defence. There were things that went on that had to be prepared for".

I would like the Minister of Transport and then Minister of Defence to tell us what it means "to be prepared" in the context of a referendum in Quebec. That is what we want to know.

• (1435)

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is only one Minister of Defence at any given time. The hon. member is referring to a time when I was not the Minister of Defence. I was not even in politics.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the defence minister's logic is implacable. He was not there. Therefore, he does not know what happened. If he does not want to take part in the discussion, he should not get involved.

My question is for the Minister of Transport, who was quoted as saying that they were prepared. We want to know what it means

when the Minister of Defence talks about being prepared in the context of a referendum in Quebec. We have the right to know, and I urge him to stand up and justify his own remarks.

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member insists on asking questions that are out of order, because there is, of course, only one minister at any given time. He must accept that the Prime Minister has already denied what Lawrence Martin wrote.

* * *

[*English*]

ETHICS

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, when the Irvings lost a 2002 ExxonMobil contract, the industry minister threatened ExxonMobil's president. He wrote that "ExxonMobil is risking the good working relationship with Canada and Nova Scotia". The minister had already taken his Irving vacation and was now returning the favour. This is a clear conflict of interest and over the line for a minister.

Will the minister now resign?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I recall the circumstances, there was important work for ExxonMobil. The possibility was that it was going to be taken south to the United States, to Louisiana as I recall. Efforts were made in conjunction with the provincial government to keep that work in Canada.

Along with others, I interceded to get ExxonMobil to award those contracts to Canadian firms. Speaking up for Atlantic Canada and trying to keep the contracts here I think is fully consistent with my obligations as Minister of Industry.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the industry minister accepted a trip from the Irvings that was well over the \$200 limit in the code of conduct.

He threatened the ExxonMobil president on behalf of the Irvings. He failed to notify the ethics counsellor about his trip until after he had lobbied for the Irvings. After the ethics counsellor warned him, he continued to lobby for the Irvings and even co-signed the \$55 million grant to their company.

Will the minister now resign?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must correct the facts as stated by the member.

The fact is that after I received the ethics counsellor's advice, I took no further steps to advance the interests of the Irving companies. I respected the ethics counsellor's advice.

Oral Questions

The only document I signed in relation to the \$55 million was after the decision had been made, a decision in which I played no part. There was a technical requirement the Minister of Industry had to sign to process the matter before Treasury Board. It was under those circumstances that the document was signed.

However, because that issue has been raised I have referred it to the ethics counsellor and he has been good enough to say he will consider it.

* * *

[Translation]

ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last May, Canada and the United States signed an agreement to analyze the current and future needs of the St. Lawrence Seaway, thereby opening the door to widening the seaway, approved in principle by the Minister of Transport and in accordance with the wishes of the U.S. military.

Can the Minister of the Environment tell us if he also gave his approval, thereby ensuring Canada's involvement, no matter what the environmental cost?

[English]

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, this started in January 2001 when the United States army corps of engineers was authorized by the United States congress to initiate a reconnaissance phase of a possible five year study to review the feasibility et cetera.

In July the corps of engineers recommended further research. We are very far from any firm plans to expand the seaway.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that the government has signed an agreement. It signs first and evaluates second. However, the study on the future needs of the seaway is just the starting point. In a memo dated February 13, the U.S. Department of Defence hoped to ensure Canada's cooperation in conducting a study on widening the St. Lawrence.

Can the Minister of the Environment tell us if Canada is taking part in a study specifically on the widening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, as the U.S. military wants? Has he let military considerations take precedence over the environment?

• (1440)

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I already answered this question, yesterday, in the House of Commons. As I said, we are studying this in cooperation with the U.S. military. These are simply studies to determine if widening the seaway is in the interests not only of Canada, but also the United States.

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[English]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister tried to justify the purchase of

Challenger jets for the cabinet by saying, "We wanted to have Canadian planes".

So what did he do? He tendered a contract without any competitive bidding. The rules say there should be competitive bidding.

My question is for the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. Is this a major purchase?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously, this is a significant contract compared to, for example, the contract for purchasing military helicopters.

This is a relatively minor contract in respect of the jets. The two are not in the same order of magnitude when we compare the value. The best information I have is that the rules were appropriately followed.

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, so to the minister of public works \$100 million is just a tiny issue. Here is the issue.

The minister, who was not there at the time, says it was not his problem; however, his assistant deputy minister, a Queen's counsel lawyer, said this deal would be very difficult to justify in court.

My question is to the minister. Is this the sort of deal that he today approves of, yes or no?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman is a master at twisting but not very good at the facts.

The facts of the matter are that a decision has been made with respect to the procurement of certain aircraft. Based on all of the information that has been presented to me, the appropriate steps were followed.

For the record, there was a warning extended that there could be legal proceedings. In fact, there were none.

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AGRICULTURE

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, given the growing opposition to genetically modified wheat by farmers and given the Canadian Wheat Board's intention to prevent the release of Monsanto's genetically modified wheat variety because it poses an economic and environmental risk, can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food inform the House as to whether he will reject Monsanto's application?

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows and the House knows that the first concerns we all have, whether it be products of biotechnology or whatever, are that of science and safety. Both must be reviewed by the Ministry of Health or the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT**

We also know there are other concerns in areas such as roundup ready wheat. We are discussing the implementation of another step in the process with the industry, the provinces and everyone in order to recognize the concerns that are out there before any product is commercialized, even if it did pass all of the safety tests. That step needs to be put in place and we are working toward doing that.

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GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Deputy Prime Minister defended a one day contract to purchase new Challengers by saying that ministers should fly in airplanes made by Canadian workers.

Can this minister explain why the government bought used submarines from Great Britain when Canadian shipyards sit idle and he wants our military to float its used submarines?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I regret that we did not have anybody making submarines at the time

However, I will defend everyday the need of Canadian ministers to fly in Canadian made airplanes, made by Canadian workers at Canadian facilities, using parts that are made in Canadian plants, just the same as I defend using money to help the conversion of the Saint John shipyard, which is something she was wanting to take credit for that very thing being done.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

• (1445)

The Speaker: Order, please. We have to be able to hear the supplementary question from the hon. member for Saint John. She has the floor, but with all the enthusiasm for her next question I cannot hear it.

The hon. member for Saint John has the floor.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, I have worked to keep the shipyard going; however, no Liberals have helped us one little bit.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, yes, indeed, you know and I know that the old Challengers were made in Canada. When the government bought the Challengers, it put aside the rules governing procurements on the basis that it was buying Canadian made equipment.

Will that policy extend for the purchase of the Sea Kings? Will the government choose—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Public Works and Government Services.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a procurement process is underway in pursuit of the replacement helicopter. It is our objective to get a vehicle that satisfies the military requirements, that can be achieved at a good value from the taxpayers' point of view, and that, in fact, can be on hand as rapidly as possible.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a bit of a Kyoto update. This federal government is paying \$15 million to burn eucalyptus trees in Brazil. At the same time, the Ontario Liberals are backing off their election commitment to convert coal-fired plants in Ontario to natural gas.

When will the government show some leadership by investing in the conservation and conversion of these coal-fired plants to natural gas in Ontario, rather than burn eucalyptus trees in Brazil?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the coal-fired plants in Ontario, we are looking forward to working with the new government of Ontario which has committed 2007 as the year when coal-fired plants will be phased out.

We think it is a very progressive step. It is in line with our agreement with the United States that I signed with my American counterpart a year ago and we are looking forward to speedy progress in this program.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one would think that 74 years after being declared persons, women would be enjoying full equality. Not so.

The recent United Nations report shows Canada is way behind in the elimination of discrimination. We are even losing ground under this government. Today, advisory councils on the status of women gather in Ottawa calling for a plan to pursue equality issues.

I ask the government, what happened to the government that once had the courage to create a Royal Commission on the Status of Women that did make a difference? What mechanism does the government offer today's women? Where is its equality agenda?

Hon. Jean Augustine (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to women's equality.

When we made a presentation to the United Nations committee earlier this year, it acknowledged the progress that Canada was making in this area, but it said that much more needed to be done.

We are conscious of what that "much more" is, and we are working very steadily on an agenda for gender equality. We are working with our provincial partners and with organizations so that we can proceed on progress for women.

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GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this whole Bombardier Challenger jet deal has blown up. Everyone over there is running for cover. Even the new Liberal leader is trying to avoid responsibility.

Oral Questions

When he was finance minister, did the new Liberal leader sign the cheque for the Challenger jets?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know who he thinks is running for cover.

We have built, in Canada, one of the largest aviation industries in the world. I do not care where the Prime Minister, the Minister of Industry or the Deputy Prime Minister fly, but they should be in a Canadian-made plane, the best in the world for its price and we are proud of it.

• (1450)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that is all fine, but Canada already had four perfectly good Canadian-built Challenger jets and we did not need any more.

This whole deal stinks. A \$100 million deal is untendered and cleaning out the bank account at the end of the fiscal year.

Why did the former finance minister, the new Liberal leader, approve this deal?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): I get it, Mr. Speaker, old ones are okay but new ones are not.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Hon. John Manley: Let us just speculate on the—

The Speaker: Order, order. How is the member for Lakeland going to hear the answer to his important question if there is all this noise, especially close to him? He cannot hear and neither can I.

The hon. member for Lakeland is entitled to hear the reply. The Deputy Prime Minister has the floor. We will hear the answer.

Hon. John Manley: Mr. Speaker, the fact that we use the best Canadian technology is something that Canadians ought to expect of us. The fact that we acquired them in a year when we had an \$8.7 billion fiscal surplus demonstrated our prudence.

We do not sell our technology by showcasing the old stuff. We sell it by showcasing our best and newest.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec minister responsible for the Gaspé region is asking the federal government to carry out a study on the impact of the Belledune project on the aquatic fauna of the area.

Why does the federal government continue to refuse to assume its responsibilities under section 35 of the Fisheries Act, particularly now that the Government of Quebec has added its voice to that of the Bloc Québécois and of all the people in the region?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is astonishing to see the Bloc Québécois members asking the federal government to get involved in issues that are in the provincial domain and to help them in fields of provincial jurisdiction. Clearly, in constitutional terms, these issues are in the provincial domain. It is really unbelievable that the Bloc Québécois

has taken such a position, namely that the federal government can do anything it wants in any province.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the protection of resources is within the federal government's jurisdiction and responsibility.

An aquaculture operation with 10 million scallops, located close to the Belledune project, could be affected by the incinerator. That is sufficient grounds for the federal government to apply section 35 of the Fisheries Act.

What is the government waiting for before it acts as it should? What is the government's problem? Why does it refuse to enforce its own law? Whose interests is it protecting?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's interpretation of the Constitution of Canada has no basis in reality. The jurisdiction here is provincial. That is the end of the matter.

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[English]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, according to an Alliance Order Paper question, the government claims that the new Liberal leader's shipping empire only did \$137,000 of business with the government since 1993. We have already found at least \$20 million in contracts between the CSL empire and the government.

Why this outrageous discrepancy? Why the at least \$20 million difference between the government's answer and the actual truth?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of the allegation the hon. gentleman is making. If he would provide me with the specifics, I would be happy to see what further information I could get for him.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the minister should be aware. This has been an Order Paper question for some time now.

This is an amazing coincidence. The new Liberal leader forgets to declare Lansdowne and its \$12 million in federal government contracts. The government in response to an Order Paper question forgets to mention at least \$20 million in contracts with the new Liberal leader's shipping empire.

Is it not true that the government is trying to cover up the extent of the new Liberal leader's business dealings with his own government?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely untrue. In fact, I am aware of absolutely nothing inappropriate or untoward. It is—

Oral Questions

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

• (1455)

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Public Works has the floor. I know some hon. members may have rejoiced in a part of the answer he has given, but we have to hear the rest of it. The hon. Minister of Public Works has the floor. Order, please.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you have in fact made the point that the opposition is best served when they only hear half the answer.

There is nothing here that is inappropriate or untoward in relation to this matter. As well, of course the holdings of the former minister of finance were disclosed through all of the holding companies that were in fact always listed in the record.

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RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, medals of honour are granted by Canada's research councils to the deserving scientists and researchers.

Would the Secretary of State for Science, Research and Development tell the House the impact that these awards have on our nation's science, research and development agenda?

Hon. Rey Pagtakhan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of State (Science, Research and Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, medals of honour give distinct recognition to the quality of our research scientists and the quality of their work.

Indeed we can take pride that the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's highest honour, the gold medal, recently went to Dr. Charles Taylor of McGill University. With the \$100,000 award that goes with this honour, we can be assured that Dr. Taylor and his team will continue to generate new knowledge for Canada, the world and its citizens.

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GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, apparently this is the summary of the new Liberal leader's ethics code: First, insider deals with large corporations should be eliminated, except when they go to the family firm. Second, the obligation to disclose your personal assets is really an obligation only when caught playing outside the rules. Finally, when the public eventually learns that the leader benefits from millions of dollars of taxpayers' money, the government simply covers up 95% of the problem and admits to \$137,000.

Why is the ethics code of the new Liberal leader really only an ethics suggestion?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Wilson has already indicated that because of the identification of the holding companies in the declarations made by the former minister of finance, in fact all of

those holdings were covered by the rules at all relevant times. There is no allegation here that can be sustained that anything was concealed or deleted because the parent companies were always covered.

I have no information before me that would indicate with respect to the contracting procedures that there was anything entirely wrong or inappropriate.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I kind of liked his earlier answer where he just admitted he did not know what he was talking about.

Here are the facts: The new Liberal leader failed to disclose assets that violated cabinet rules. He accepted millions in federal tax dollars even when he was in charge of the nation's bank accounts. Now, though the facts are clear and the new leader received more than \$20 million in government contracts and largesse from the taxpayers, the Liberals will admit to only funnelling \$137,000 his way.

The question is, why the difference in those two numbers and why the cover-up?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in terms of the information provided in the Order Paper question that was referred to in the first instance by the member for Medicine Hat, I am not aware of the specific allegation he is making. I repeat my first answer and that is, when I have had a chance to review those facts, I will provide him with the information.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—L'Érable, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to leaks of the Auditor General's report, the federal government paid for polls that might have been used for partisan purposes in the last election in Quebec.

Will the government confirm whether federal funding was used for polls that ultimately benefited Jean Charest during his last election campaign in Quebec?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. gentleman is inviting speculation to be made on a report that is yet to be filed by the Auditor General. When her report is made available, there will be full and ample comment on all sides by the government.

* * *

• (1500)

ETHANOL INDUSTRY

Mr. Jerry Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Natural Resources recently announced new measures on ethanol production that will address climate change and bring economic opportunities to rural Canada.

Government Orders

Will the minister tell the House how investment in an ethanol expansion program will both assist world communities and meet the objectives of gas emissions?

Hon. Herb Dhaliwal (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me congratulate the member for Chatham—Kent Essex on his great work on the ethanol file. Both he and the rural caucus spent a lot of time looking at programs to expand ethanol.

We were happy yesterday to announce \$100 million for the ethanol expansion program over and above our announcement in the past of \$140 million in loan guarantees as well as reducing the excise tax by 10¢.

This is a great announcement for Canadians. It is a great announcement for ethanol and for the good work that the Liberal caucus has done.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, everyone in the government knows that the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs voted unanimously that the war widows who were cut off their pensions as recipients under the VIP should be reinstated.

Will the government reinstate these war widows into the program so that they can continue to be treated with the respect that war widows deserve?

Hon. Rey Pagtakhan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of State (Science, Research and Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge that the motion was passed unanimously by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and National Defence. I thank the member for Nipissing for introducing that particular motion.

We will continue to do more for our veterans and their families.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN GRAND PRIX

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the owner of the Montreal Canadiens, George Gillett, maintained yesterday that the federal government had promised funding to save the Canadian Grand Prix in Montreal.

Can the government tell us if this is indeed the case and how much funding it promised?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have no knowledge of the matter raised by the hon. member, but I will do my best to determine the facts and come back with an answer.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1505)

[*English*]

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-49, An Act respecting the effective date of the representation order of 2003, be read the third time and passed, and on the motion that the question be now put.

The Speaker: Before question period in debate on this matter, the hon. member for Elk Island had the floor. He has 12 minutes remaining in the time allotted for his remarks.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to continue my speech on Bill C-49. As I was saying before question period, personally I would like the bill never to be enacted. I wish that there were no realignment of the boundaries because of the terrible, horrible job that has been done on it in the Edmonton area, including the annihilation of the Elk Island riding.

The commission totally missed the point on putting together in an equitable way people with community of interest. It totally missed it. Furthermore, the organization of ridings in Alberta now, the geography of the different ridings, is such that the work of members of Parliament will be made much more difficult due to its inefficiency.

The boundaries have been changed so that instead of having several members of Parliament with large ridings, it has pretty well been arranged so that every member of Parliament in Alberta will have a large riding. That is simply going to put us into vehicles. We will have to sit for hours in cars while we drive from the middle of the province to the boundary of the province. That is how long three of the ridings are. It is totally not needed.

The whole press to move this forward, to advance the date from the point of view of getting a better situation for the representation of our constituents in the House of Commons, and better work on behalf of the constituents by their members of Parliament in the riding, will be made much more difficult by these new ridings.

I am not going to complain. My riding disappears. I have already announced that I will be seeking re-election in a new riding for Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan and part of Edmonton. I will do my very level best to continue the tradition that we have in this party, and which I have personally, which is to represent the people of the riding to the best of my ability and show them here the capability of having a government which is honest, shows integrity and is fiscally responsible, accountable and transparent.

It is atrocious that the commission in Alberta rejected every representation that was made to it. I sat the whole day at the commission hearings in Edmonton. I sat and listened to every one of the presentations. Every presentation, with the exception of one, said that what was being done was not acceptable and that it was not the way to realign the boundaries.

Even the City of Edmonton itself said in its presentation that it would rather have six members of Parliament with undivided interests in representing its cause than eight with divided interests.

Government Orders

The commission said that it would not listen and it would do it anyway, and it did. It went ahead and totally messed up the organization of the ridings. It is now going to be mandatory for members of Parliament to serve these combination constituencies with the result that many more hours will be spent driving. There will be a huge increase in costs to the taxpayer to pay for the mileage for the trips of members of Parliament as they travel throughout their ridings.

It is a matter which deserves the attention of Parliament. I do not know how we could get together with the Liberals in a non-partisan way but we ought to do that with all of the parties in the House. We must look at how the process can be revised so that members of Parliament who actually do the work can somehow have a real and meaningful influence on the way the boundaries are created.

I will simply conclude by saying that I will be supporting Bill C-49 because I do want to have the next election under the new boundaries. I also want to have the certainty as we plan for the next election that we can plan for the new boundaries. It is better to have that than to have two simultaneous organizations going without knowing with certainty what is going to happen at the next election.

• (1510)

Although this should increase it, we know that in our archaic system in Canada the Prime Minister can still call an election whenever he wants. Presuming it is the member in waiting, who everybody recognizes, he could, anytime after he becomes the leader of the party, call an election and he may in fact still do that. Maybe the ridings will still remain the same. If that is the case, so be it, but the fact is that it is good to have the certainty of knowing what the riding boundaries will be at the next election.

I should also add that I am happy to be part of a party that has always had, since its beginning here, when I was first elected in 1993 as a member of the Reform Party and later on as the Canadian Alliance, the policy that we should have fixed dates for elections, fixed intervals so people can plan. There are many ramifications to that. Returning officers need to rent office space sometimes months before it is needed because they have to be ready even though they do not know when an election will be called. It is a weak part of our democracy to allow the sitting prime minister or the leader of the party that has the most seats in the House, for one individual, without being required to tell anybody else in advance, to call an election on the day it starts happening. That is very inadequate and I wish we would find that kind of parliamentary reform. If the new prime minister believes there is a democratic deficit in this country, that is one of the aspects of it.

Even though I will be voting for the bill, it increases the certainty that the next election will be held under the new boundaries. At least we will know what we are working under. There still is no 100% certainty because anything could happen. We have the Liberals opposite who have shown us on more than one occasion that they are ready to call an election way in advance of any technical necessity of doing so, just simply for the case of increasing the probability of them winning. I sometimes fear, out loud, that the new prime minister may call a quick election because he will think that our party is still not organized. I assure members that we are doing our very best to be ready for whenever that election is called.

I will be supporting the bill on that account only and not because I am eagerly looking forward to serving the constituents in my area under the new boundaries and under the new conditions which are being spelled out for us. However, we will do our very best.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my Canadian Alliance colleague, who says that he believes in democracy and disagrees with the bill on which we will soon be voting. However, he says that he will vote in favour of this bill.

I do not know exactly what his real democratic values are. Indeed, if there is something that calls for democracy in this country, it is the electoral process, the exercise of the right to vote.

How can he vote in favour of a bill in which he does not believe, that he believes is fundamentally bad and undemocratic? He says that, indeed, this will force him to travel more by car to represent his constituents.

As a matter of fact, the change being imposed with the new redistribution represents more than kilometres by car. There are people who are left out. There are people who have the right to be heard. There are taxpayers who are increasingly further from the centre of decisions, from our Parliament, who have less and less access to a member of Parliament. I believe that, in this bill, the real democratic values are being violated.

How can he vote, how can he say that he is a democrat, that he believes in democracy and disagrees with a bill such as this and, at the same time, say that he will vote for it? I have a lot of problems with this interpretation.

• (1515)

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good point. I, in fact, said that there were parts of the bill with which I disagreed. I disagree with the way the boundaries are being rewritten. I do not care whether they are enacted on August 25 or on April 1. Inevitably, they will be in place and I disagree with that profoundly. That is not the purpose of Bill C-49.

Bill C-49 does not in any way change the boundaries. What it does say is that Alberta, which now has 26 seats, would have 28 seats if the next election were held under the new boundaries. I feel that having those additional members of Parliament in our province outweighs the disadvantages that affect me personally in the annihilation of the riding of Elk Island. Therefore, even though I am personally affected, I am putting my own personal preferences aside for the benefit of the larger good.

As I mentioned, I will be supporting the bill because, hopefully, as we plan for the next election, it will increase the certainty of knowing what the actual ridings will be. Otherwise, there will be uncertainty. I also will be supporting it because of the additional seats that will be provided in British Columbia and in Alberta, as well as in Ontario, to reflect the change in our demographic distribution in the country.

Government Orders

I have adequate reasons to vote in favour of the bill. However, the redistribution itself, which is not the issue of Bill C-49, which only has to do with the date of implementation, causes me a lot of problems, and I object to that, but that is not the object of this vote, so I am not being inconsistent.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made an interesting point and I would be interested in his comments. It had to do with his current situation whereby, with the boundaries expanding, the geographic size of the riding would expand enough that travel within the riding would be a little more difficult. Quite frankly, I think the member was basically saying that it would be a lot more difficult to provide the same level of service to constituents.

I am sure that fact concerns a lot of members but I suspect very few members in this place would make the argument that every time the population goes up by 100,000 people we should add another member of Parliament in perpetuity. It really is problematic. Eventually we have to get there.

To the extent that a riding may not be an urban centre but a more rural or remote riding, there comes a point in time when travel within the riding becomes significantly greater than the average travel time of a member of Parliament. Does the member not think that consideration should be given to that riding so it is not based totally on population targets but on a combination of population and geographic space?

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important point. However I should clarify something. My own personal travel time will decrease greatly because my riding will shrink geographically. Fantastically, it will now include part of the city of Edmonton. Elk Island will disappear and the new riding, which will replace it, will be part of Edmonton and it will be smaller. What I am talking about is the loss of constituents, who I have served for 10 years, because they will be cut out of the riding and put into other ridings. As an educator, how I wish I could use a white board or an overhead projector. I just feel so inhibited not have visual aids.

Instead of having ridings as compact as possible so members of Parliament can travel efficiently, those ridings will be long and narrow ridings. Members of Parliament will now have to travel from one area to an area much farther away in order to see his or her roughly 100,000 people in the riding. The riding next to it has the same organization.

I told the commission that this was mathematically very inefficient. We might as well have 301 ridings right across Canada and slice them up one mile wide right across the country and call those the ridings. Would that not be stupid? That of course is the extreme, but it illustrates what I am talking about.

The fact is that, yes, where we have a sparse population, as we do in rural parts of the prairies, it necessitates much more travel time. However it is not necessary to put everybody into that situation. It could be done with a bit of care so that at least travel time costs and other related things would be minimized.

The riding of Peace River, which is held by one of my colleagues, is about one-fourth of the whole province of Alberta and has well over the 100,000 average number of constituents in the country. That is wrong. The fact that such a large area should be compensated for

by having a greater level of representation is wrong. Even under the present rules a variation is permitted but I think it should be utilized. There again, the commission in Alberta totally failed to take that into account.

I should also add that the commission could have done much better if it had done a little more work. It heard very clearly from the witnesses during its investigation, at least during the Edmonton one that I attended. All the commission had to do was go back to the drawing board and it could have done a much better job, but for some reason it decided not to.

The submissions that were made by members of Parliament to the parliamentary committee, with the recommendations going back to the Alberta commission, were, in every instance, rejected even though the commission heard the arguments and concurred with a number of them.

Now that it is set in stone and cannot be changed, I now feel the freedom to roundly criticize the commissioner and the commission in Alberta for having done what I believe to be a totally inadequate job.

• (1520)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-49 is a very short bill. Effectively it would change the boundaries as established by the Chief Electoral Officer through the process that is prescribed under legislation and will be effective on the first dissolution of Parliament that occurs on or after April 1, 2004.

Under the current legislation, the boundaries would ordinarily have been required to be exposed to the public for a full year, which means up until, I believe, August 24. This bill is compacting the exposure period of the new boundaries for a variety of reasons, depending on who is speaking.

I wanted to speak on this because a few points have been made by some speakers on which I would like to comment. I disagree with a couple of them and I want to point out why.

First, one Alliance member talked about a particular riding having some 120,000 people, whereas P.E.I. in its four ridings only had an average of 34,000 people. The Alliance member went on to say that was awful and that was why the process had to be fixed. It is not exactly a good comparison because the distribution of the ridings available in P.E.I. have been established by Constitution and it is entitled to have four seats regardless of the population.

I do not think the discrepancies are as bizarre as the member presented, but in history we have known in urban areas of high growth, particularly in Ontario, some ridings could have 100,000 people. I think one riding, York North, turned out to have population of 187,000. This means the volume of activity for a particular member of Parliament could be substantially different from someone else, depending on the riding.

The population does change. In urban areas it can change very dramatically when we consider the high density of population growth in certain major urban centres. Therefore there are some discrepancies.

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However under the laws of Canada, a census is taken that provides the Chief Electoral Officer with the data necessary to reconfigure the boundaries, to take into account the authorization for new seats as well as to redistribute the boundaries to meet, as close as reasonably possible, a target population so there is general equivalency in terms of the size of ridings, with the exception such as P.E.I. that have special constitutional provisions.

Many of the members, including the member for Elk Island, talked about democracy and about the absence of democracy in this process and that notwithstanding members might agree among themselves that the boundaries should be this, that or the other and they are all rejected, that this is not a reflection of democracy. The fact is the process of reviewing and adjusting electoral boundaries is part of the laws of Canada. It is not there to be a democratic reflection of the will of the consensus of people in Canada as to what they would like to see for a riding. Imagine trying to find a consensus even in one's own community about where a boundary might be.

Members will know when their ridings are established, the returning officers of the ridings take the maps and carve them into polls so polling districts have voting stations associated with them. It has nothing to do with whether I am in poll one or two. It has to do with how can we efficiently run an election so people who report, directly or indirectly, to the Chief Electoral Officer can do their jobs efficiently.

• (1525)

Poll boundaries have absolutely nothing to do with democracy or whether it makes the job easier for candidates to run an election. Similarly, the boundaries of ridings again have nothing to do with partisan interests, notwithstanding that an after the fact analysis, maybe, by the Bloc Quebecois would show that in the area of Lac St. Jean for instance, instead of having four ridings as it does now, under the new distribution it would only have three and theoretically, based on current polls, it would lose one member of Parliament as a result of that redistribution.

I understand and I know members on all sides who have difficulties with this because it will impact their situation. It is not their preference, but their preference is based on a partisan, a political and to some extent a selfish requirement. It is not based on what makes it good for an efficient operation of an election and an equitable distribution of the population among all the members of Parliament of Canada.

Democracy is a fine thing, but we just cannot have democracy when the objectives of that democracy, as defined by certain members of Parliament, is to do it their way and that is democratic. Obviously, there will not be agreement.

Maybe some people who are watching should know that every 10 years, when the results of the census comes out, an analysis is done. There was an agreement based on the projections that seven seats would be added to the House of Commons for the next election. That includes two seats in B.C., two in Alberta and I believe three in Ontario.

Based on that and with the exception of constitutional overrides, ridings such as in Ontario will have an average population of about

116,000 people. This means the commission which was set up for that province had to come up with boundaries that were generally reflective and close enough to the target population of approximately 116,000. Each and every province did this. Every commission had to take into account how they could make the boundaries efficient in terms of meeting the objective of being able to run an efficient election. They also had to take into account communities of interest, such as cities and city boundaries, such as rivers and other natural barriers and historical relationships. They wanted to, wherever possible, keep those together.

That is an objective, but not an overriding objective because there are cases where we cannot possibly provide all the things that all the people want at all times. The commission's override is to get the boundaries into a situation that makes sense and also takes into account the fact that they should be roughly around the target population plus or minus a small factor of population. That is exactly what happened.

However, those boundaries were the first effort. The first draft of boundaries are actually made by the electoral commission. Those boundaries are then published and exposed to the public at large. The members know, because we went through this process, that there was an extensive consultation process with the public. There were public hearings at which members could themselves make representations. I certainly did because a new riding was to be added to the city of Mississauga, from where I come. It meant that it would affect all the ridings in Mississauga and that we would have some significant changes to the historic boundaries under which we had been operating since the last census in 1993, when many of the members here today were elected.

There was this extensive process. This is where the democratic element comes in. However there was no undertaking or no requirement of the provincial commissions to somehow survey or determine whether there was a consensus of the people in a particular area for a particular change. The idea was that they would take representations just in case something was missed.

• (1530)

From time to time there are some things missed and there are some pieces of information that the representatives of the Chief Electoral Officer do not have. For instance, in the city of Mississauga city councillors also spent a great deal of time analyzing the distribution of the population based on the national census and were redesigning their ward boundaries for their own municipal purposes. They had all the analysis and it was clearly shown in all the tables when the work was done so even a member of a provincial legislature or a member of the federal Parliament could see very clearly where the pockets of growth were and where the natural boundaries were. It made a great deal of sense. In some cases the commission was not aware and did not have access to that when it made its first draft. As a consequence, I believe some significant changes were made.

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In the first draft my own riding in was to be cut in half and both halves were to be joined with other pieces of the city. As it ultimately turned out, my riding now is the same riding I have had for almost 10 years, but I will also be adding on a significant portion of another member's riding, which has experienced growth and which will physically become smaller but will have a population within the target range.

It would be nice to say I want my riding to be exactly the way it is and I really do not care that I only have 100,000 when I should have 116,000 and that I will let somebody else take care of it. It is even worse than that. The commission cannot take into account known areas of significant growth since the last census. We know the areas of significant growth. We have seen them develop.

Urban centres are working on the whole question of urban sprawl and are trying to increase the densities. The whole urban planning concept is having a significant impact on the density of populations in urban centres. As the population of Canada grows, the ability of the rural and remote areas becomes less and less significant in terms of the population base as a per cent of the overall population. We are becoming urbanized. That means that some of the rural ridings and some remote ridings have become so small in population that they now have to take up expansive territories of space just to get their numbers up to some reasonable level relative to the target.

The member for Elk Island made an interesting observation about ridings where members may have to hop on an airplane and fly for half an hour to get from one end of the riding to the other. In my riding I can hop in my car and go from one end to the other in 15 minutes. It is different. I know a member of Parliament whose riding I think is eight square blocks. The density is very high because it is mostly apartment buildings and there is no travel involved. I suspect there are probably no parking spaces either.

It shows that we have a tremendous diversity. As we have this debate, and members have gone through this process, we have to try to look for ways that we can make suggestions on how this process can be refined further as time goes on.

Seven new members will be in this place after the next election. However I think it is fairly clear that this place is not going to continue to grow in terms of members of Parliament every time the population of Canada increases by 120,000 people. We just cannot have it. There will have to be a shift in the way in which members of Parliament service their constituents.

We may not be able to give that same direct level of service to each and every one of our constituents as needed. All of a sudden we will have to rely on other modes of communication and service because the geography for many will be so expansive that it will not be practical to have that direct contact as often as one would want.

In other areas there are just so many people that members of Parliament can not possibly service them on the same level of service as we provide today. If there are 20% or 30% more constituents to service, there is not 20% to 30% more time to do it. I think all members would agree that it is very difficult now to deal directly with all the concerns of our constituents. It is an evolutionary process and we have to make these recommendations.

● (1535)

I would suggest that we take into account the geographic expanse in determining the budgets that a member of Parliament would have to service that riding, but I am wondering whether or not there should be an amendment to the Canada Elections Act which in fact would take into account some sort of a discount in population requirement relative to the expanse of the geography that a riding covers.

Ultimately, that part of the Canada Elections Act has been established to run an efficient and effective election campaign. As we keep moving down this road, we will have some ridings that are going to be so geographically expansive that we will have to look to other techniques even in voting, such as mobile ballot boxes and maybe even balloting by Internet. I am not sure, but maybe we have to start looking at the reality of this country, that is, we are a very attractive country in the world and our economic growth has brought about a significant improvement in the quality of life of Canadians. I suspect that is going to continue, but we also have to continue to provide levels of service which are appropriate for our constituents and we have to educate them about other ways in which they can get the help they need.

Some members like to treat their offices like social service agencies and receive everybody for every problem regardless of the jurisdiction. I suppose that is a very noble thing to do, but when there are others who have jobs and are supposed to provide those services, I think we have to make sure that our constituents are getting services from the areas that are geared up to do the work properly.

As for members of Parliament as a whole, when we consider the difference between Canada and the U.S. and the average number of electors or size of population that a congressman represents, for instance, we see that it is significantly higher than what we have in Canada. We are moving in that direction. Now is a good time for members to make some of those recommendations as to how we see it down the road. We are not going to have 400 members of Parliament in this place; it is not going to happen. We will have 308, I believe. That is the number we will have and we are going to have to change how we do our work with that change in our population.

Members have raised another issue. After the initial phase was completed by the provincial commissions and they reported on their next to final draft of the boundaries, Parliament then had its own committee to deal with a final opportunity for members of Parliament to assess where the boundaries are now and to make recommendations. The important thing, though, is that notwithstanding this special committee to which we could go to make these suggestions, the electoral commission and the provincial commissions were not or are not bound under law to accept those recommendations. We can submit them. In fact, in many cases, as the member for Elk Island said, none of them were accepted even though the members in his area all agreed.

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The point of my intervention is that this is not totally a matter of whether we have a democratic process. Democracy, in the context in which it has been talked about here, really has to do with partisanship. It has to do with politics. It has to do with individual members getting the support or consensus of people to do things. That is not the intent of the Chief Electoral Officer's mandate or of the Canada Elections Act; it is how we design a system that takes into account the geography and population realities of Canada so that we can run efficient, effective general elections as we elect members of Parliament. That is the difference.

I would suggest to members that the process is still a valid process, but I would think that if members of Parliament can come up with a better way, now is the time to make recommendations on how to amend the Canada Elections Act. Maybe now is not the time to move in other directions or off the topic. I think this is an important opportunity. We are bringing to a close a very important process, which in fact is an integral part of the democratic form of representation that we have in Canada.

• (1540)

Mr. Murray Calder (Dufferin—Peel—Wellington—Grey, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with interest to the member for Mississauga South, who raises a lot of really valid points.

I would like him to comment on the process. We as members of Parliament know best what is going on within our ridings. The two issues I would like him to comment on are the issues of community of interest and community of identity.

I am a rural member of Parliament and in fact the past chair of rural caucus. I was very happy that the commission listened to my concerns and in fact acted on them, but the point is that the reality within Canada right now is this: 80% of the population lives on 20% of the land and 20% of the population lives on 80% of the land. From that aspect, we can see that when the ridings are being put together we have an urban core, and the commission is cutting and pasting rural parts of the riding onto that urban core.

It is difficult for urban members of Parliament to deal with rural issues like agriculture if they have never ever had to deal with them before in their lives. The flip side for rural members coming in is that we can come up to speed when dealing with urban issues because, quite frankly, we have those same issues in rural municipalities. They are just not quite as large or as intense as they are in larger urban centres.

The commission, I believe, has to involve the member of Parliament more on the issues of community of identity and community of interest before it draws up these boundaries instead of just using boundaries and population numbers.

• (1545)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I am totally in agreement. The member's figures are in fact quite right. We do have this urbanization of Canada, which means that the rural issues and the representation of the rural community of Canada are being eroded. This is probably not helpful to Canada in terms of balancing the interests.

The House might be interested to know that today we have less farms than we have ever had in our history, but we produce far more food than ever before because the technological advances have been

enormous. That community of interest has grown in importance relative to Canada's needs when in fact the population has declined. So how do we protect the importance of that identity, that uniqueness it brings?

I would agree and would certainly look for an opportunity to make representation for consideration of amendments to the Canada Elections Act that would deal with both issues, one being geography beyond a threshold which is extreme. There comes a point when a member just cannot possibly effectively represent a geographic expanse that takes a half an hour to fly across.

The other part, though, is to take special recognition of the fact that as we move forward and this urbanization of Canada continues and the population of the rural side perhaps shrinks, the rural side must not be penalized for the shrinkage of population. Because its importance of issues actually has grown relative to national interest. Maybe we need to have a proviso that, notwithstanding the target population, if it qualifies in terms of that community of interest, particularly rural Canada, as an example, there would be adjustments made so that communities of interest could continue to have effective representation for the important contribution they make.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will try to exercise restraint this time, so that you do not have to call me to order.

Earlier, I questioned a colleague from the Canadian Alliance about the new redistribution and his answer was that my question was off topic, the topic being making the legislation take effect earlier, on April 1 instead of August 25. I understand the difference. We are not necessarily dealing with the substance of the bill, just making it effective five or six months earlier.

In addressing this bill, it is difficult to dissociate the purpose of the act from its application, which should normally take effect in August instead as April, as proposed.

In my opinion, this legislation is the very basis of democracy. We know that democracy allows us, every five years at the outside, to go before the public to report on our mandate and determine whether the public will re-elect us or elect someone else.

It was decided that every five years, we should go back to the people. It strikes me as somewhat excessive, however, to be going back consistently every three years or three years and a few months. If the government was overly democratic, I would applaud, but it is far from that. It is using this legislation to abuse a power a person wants to give himself.

I remember the time when I was working with René Lévesque in Quebec City. I mention him often because he was my political mentor. He is the figure who has inspired me—me and others—the most. You or people you know may have known René Lévesque or heard about him. Still today, even his opponents describe him as a great democrat. One of the first things he told us when we got elected in 1976 was that we were in office for five years and that it cost a fortune to elect a government. A government is a machine that must operate for a maximum of five years and he intended to work his full term.

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On average, our two mandates under Mr. Lévesque, in Quebec, lasted four years and a half. We squeezed all we could out of these two mandates. We worked hard the whole time. I remember once, during an economic crisis, he decided to adjourn for two months and asked us to go back to our ridings and talk to our constituents to find out how they thought we could come out of the crisis. That was in 1981. My hon. colleague who worked closely with a minister at the time knows exactly what I am talking about.

I was truly impressed by the importance that the man attached to the people. He often reminded us that, when we start questioning what we are doing and debating among ourselves, it is time to go back to the grassroots and ask the people what they think. After all, we work for the people.

I was impressed by this man and struck with the passion of his arguments. The opposition also had a great leader, Gérard D. Lévesque. He was not a member of the Parti Québécois. He was leader of the opposition for a while. Although an opponent of mine and a Liberal member, he really respected democracy like no one else. Under the leadership of Mr. Lévesque, I think we all learned in Quebec what democracy is all about.

The bill that is now before the House is outrageous. I heard an Alliance member say earlier that it does not matter if we do not agree, since there will be a vote.

● (1550)

The member for Acadie—Bathurst said earlier that in his riding, some French-speaking people were not happy with the changes being made. This will put them in even more of a minority situation. They have asked the courts to force the government to go back to the drawing board so that these Acadian francophones do not lose too many powers, so that they can keep those powers. They do not have too many as it is.

By moving up the coming into force of the new electoral boundaries from August to April 1, all the representations already made by this French-speaking community from Acadie—Bathurst will have been in vain. If we believe in democracy, we have to stop talking about it and to start doing something about it. If it was felt that the distribution of the electoral map had to be reviewed every ten years, following the census, and that the implementation of the new map should occur one year after the redistribution made by the commission, it is because people knew that the whole process would take a year. We need a year to organize ourselves and to challenge the decisions made, a year to go to court if necessary. However, when democracy has been abused to the point of even preventing us from doing those kinds of things, I think this is shameful for a country like ours that is considered a model of democracy. This is something that really bothers me.

And why are they doing this? We know that the now invisible member for LaSalle—Émard used to be an extremely important person. He was finance minister until the PM let him go for doing things behind his back. That member is going to become the leader of the Liberal Party, and thus the Prime Minister of this country. When he was Minister of Finance, he did some things we have a duty to question him about.

When he is Prime Minister, we would like to ask him some questions, but we know he is a poor weak scared creature, and he is right to be scared. We know he is afraid to answer our questions. For example, we know he is the one who pilfered the employment insurance fund, grabbing \$45 billion that did not belong to him, did not belong to the government. Those \$45 billion belong to the workers and employers. Those \$45 billion belong to the workers who have lost jobs in the softwood lumber sector. Those \$45 billion belong to those experiencing difficulties, for instance because of mad cow. Those \$45 billion belong to the fishers, who are having problems because of the way the fisheries are being managed. Those \$45 billion represent money they are refusing to return to the workers. The one who needs to answer these questions is the former finance minister and future prime minister.

I have worked on one issue concerning seniors. They are my concern, so the leader of my party did me the great favour of asking me to act as critic for policies for seniors. The Bloc discovered that the Minister of Finance of the day had helped himself to \$3 billion belonging to the least well off members of our society. Three billion taken out of the nearly empty pocketbooks of those who already have the most trouble making ends meet.

I and the member for Sherbrooke attended a meeting in his riding. We heard about an elderly lady, since deceased, who had had a miserable old age, barely getting by on just the old age pension, while the finance minister had \$90,000 that belonged to her.

● (1555)

She had never received the guaranteed income supplement to which she was entitled. In front of her family, along with the hon. member for Sherbrooke, we did the calculation. We figured out that the government has \$90,000 in its treasury belonging to this woman in Sherbrooke who should have had a more comfortable old age than she had.

Last week, I was in the Gaspé with a colleague from my party. In the meeting, someone got up to say I was right. I discovered later, thanks to my colleague's research, that there was one woman who was owed \$4,000 per year. But she had only been reimbursed for one year's income, that is, 11 months plus the current month. The rest went to the former finance minister who is going to be prime minister.

I would like to talk to him and ask him some questions on behalf of workers and seniors.

Why does he refuse to grant a normal amount of retroactivity to the senior who, because she did not receive enough information, or any information at all, has been deprived of her due? Why is it that when someone owes money to the government it goes back for at least 5 years, imposing fines and charging interest?

But in this case it is the government that owes money to a person, who is often ill, who is old, who lives alone. And she has to struggle and make a great effort. She was not given the information and we find out, 5, 6 or 7 years later, that she is owed \$3,000, \$4,000, or \$5,000 per year. Moreover, they refuse to give her all she is owed, only a retroactive payment to cover 11 months.

Government Orders

I would like to see that man, the new leader of the Liberal Party. I would like to see him in the House so that we can ask him questions about this and so that the country can find out for whom it is voting when it votes for this prime minister, who is currently the member for LaSalle—Émard.

I think that would be a simple, honest and logical exercise in democracy. When we hear him talk about the democratic deficit—I am not going to repeat the things you called me to order for; I have written down the things I must not say—we have said that at the least he lacks courage and frankness. At the least, the biggest democratic deficit is his. He talks about it, and yet he is the one creating it.

In a democracy and in a country such as Canada, if he believes in democracy with the wealth that he has—I am not mad at him, I congratulate him—he should at least have the courage to pay taxes to the country that sustains us. He should at least have the courage to have his ships built in the country that employs us.

This man, president or co-owner of many companies, is one of those who has benefited from tax havens the most. In the name of democracy and on behalf of future voters, we are entitled to ask him questions to find out whether he was in conflict of interest at any given time. For example, when he denied seniors their due, instead of contributing to the fund and paying his taxes here, why did agree to have his companies pay taxes to tax havens?

Why have ships built elsewhere than in the big shipyards in Quebec and Canada? In Lévis, we have an extraordinary shipyard. We know that Canada Steamship Lines builds ships abroad. As Minister of Finance, and owner of a company like that, he knew full well that he was paying taxes and having ships built abroad.

● (1600)

I would like us to stand up to this man without pressuring him too much. In the name of democracy and on behalf of all Quebecers and Canadians, I would like to tell him this, “Account for those things, so that we can know you better, have a better idea of the direction you will take as the Prime Minister, of whether or not you will show the same respect for us as you have in the past and what your commitment for the future will be”.

It would also be interesting to know if he actually transferred these assets to his children. Why is he hiding when we have not only good questions to ask but also important legislation to pass?

I made a calculation. Between today's date and the same date in 2004, we are likely to sit a maximum of three months. There is talk about adjourning in two or three weeks. We would then be coming back in February, probably to a new budget, and by April, we could have an election.

If an election were held in late April or early May, this House would sit very little, if at all, before the summer. Come summer, there will be a recess. We will resume sitting in September, while this is October. The member for LaSalle—Émard is crowing about democracy and the democratic deficit here in this place. This is place to debate and ask questions on behalf of the people, even if we never get any answers. Just think, over the next 12 months, we will sit a maximum of three months.

During nine months, this country will be run by orders in council. During nine months, it will be possible to do just about anything, and we will never know exactly what was done. We will see what comes of it.

There is no doubt that we oppose Bill C-49. We cannot support a bill that moves up by six months the date when the new electoral map will become effective. Earlier, I heard an hon. member talk about the power of the commission and say to we could not do anything about it. Come on, this commission reports to someone, in this instance, to Parliament.

If we really wanted to better apply democratic principles, if we wanted democracy to be more accessible to people, more real and truthful, should we not review the standards on which this commission is basing this new electoral map? People in Wemotaci, Obedjiwan and Parent also pay taxes and are entitled to representation. If I want to go to Obedjiwan and Parent, I have to plan a month in advance, and I still would not reach the end of my riding.

In addition to dividing Quebec into 75 ridings, it is essential to consider the distances members must travel. People on the very edge of my riding, like those in all the really large ridings, have the right to be consulted, to know and meet their member of Parliament and to take part in the democracy of this country, Quebec, that we are defending.

Madam Speaker, I see my time has run out. I said what I could, although I have changed nothing. That is unfortunately too often the case in this House. We just had oral question period, during which many important questions were asked, but the minister who should have answered let someone else do so. When we asked that individual a question on another subject, the minister who should have answered the first question answered the second. That is how things are here.

Nothing has changed, but at least the people in my riding and my region will know what I think of this system and will adopt positions that might help to improve things.

● (1605)

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to my hon. colleague who has spoken from the heart. As he said, he was in my riding last week and we met a group of seniors who are golden age club presidents and represent some 5,000 people.

Perhaps my hon. colleague is not aware of this, but when we ask people at such meetings if they know their electoral boundaries, in Matapédia—Matane as an example, I must admit that usually there is no one who can answer the question. That is related to the fact that every 10 years, with each census, the electoral boundaries are redrawn. Since my riding's population is shrinking, the electoral boundaries are constantly changing. Thus, when constituents are asked to describe the boundaries of Matapédia—Matane, they cannot answer.

Government Orders

I would like to know whether, in his corner of the country—and I know that his riding has been modified considerably—he asks people the same question. It is not just senior citizens who are unaware of federal riding boundaries. Most people are not aware of them, and after the new electoral boundaries take effect, people will be even less aware of them.

I would like to know if my colleague agrees with my statement that in terms of democracy, we have a lot of work to do before this democracy can function as it should.

• (1610)

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I understand my colleague and thank him for his question.

Indeed, at a meeting last night or the day before yesterday, people asked me whether the Notre-Dame-des-Anges, Notre-Dame-de-Montauban, Lac-aux-Sables, Parent, Lac-Édouard, and Wemotaci parishes were in my riding. They wanted to know the exact distance from where we were. Did you know that it takes 1 hour and 45 minutes by plane to go from Trois-Rivières to Wemotaci in my riding? A member was saying earlier that it takes him half a day to cover his riding by car. In my riding, after 1 hour and 45 minutes in a plane I have not even reached the midpoint.

Most people have no idea of the immensity of the area. I am not complaining, because it is one of the most beautiful areas in Quebec. But in addition to serving a great population and a beautiful area, I have to consider that these people have rights within these boundaries. We have to speak on their behalf and be able to consult them. It is important that they know exactly what riding they live in. Unfortunately, there are people who do not really know what riding they are in.

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to congratulate my colleague from Champlain for his speech and ask him what connection he sees with the boundary adjustment that would, as we know, come into effect early than planned, which is the purpose of this bill. The effective date is being moved a little more than four months closer, from August to April, so that the future prime minister will not have to be accountable.

This is a very important aspect, because the new PM, the member for LaSalle—Émard, is so close-mouthed, to put it mildly, about how he sees things, the way he intends to lead Canada, the relationship he plans to have with Quebec, his concept of what the Canada of tomorrow will be. Does he see Canada as two nations, or as one Canadian nation which will encompass, and overshadow, the nation of Quebec?

This is the aspect I would like my colleague to address. When the Bloc Québécois came to Parliament in 1993, there were, if I remember correctly, 294 seats. From that 294, we went to 301 in 2000, and there will be 308 in 2004. So there are some 15 more, but not a single new riding in Quebec. This illustrates the demographic changes and the evolution of Quebec's political clout within the wonderful Canada of tomorrow.

I would like to hear what he has to say on this. Is it reassuring? Is this not a fundamental reason for Quebecers in particular to be aware of the dangers that threaten the very existence of the Quebec nation, particularly when Canada is going to be led by people so

mean-spirited, so petty that they conceal their vision of the Canada of tomorrow and its relationship with others, Quebec in particular?

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Trois-Rivières is touching on a point I unfortunately did not have the time to address, but he is absolutely right. This frightens me. I am an independentist. I often say so. I sit in this House and, God willing, I will work in politics until such time as Quebec has become the country I dream about. That is pretty clear.

Today, in question period, we had glaring evidence once again that the government is shamelessly provincializing and shrinking Quebec. What is being done to the St. Lawrence River—and the question has not been answered—is outrageous to all Quebecers. The river is our treasure, our wealth.

Once a study is underway, the government gets caught up in the system and refuses to answer questions. It refuses to consult the public. We are weaker at the national level, with the total number of seats having grown from 294 to 308. In the region of the hon. member for Trois-Rivières and mine, one seat was lost. Not only does the government not answer our questions, but it is taking steps to reduce the number of members who can ask questions in this place, taking steps to reduce the number of members who can defend the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region, because we have one less seat, while there are more in the rest of Canada, since the total number has risen from 294 to 308.

I think that Quebec is in jeopardy. Personally, with the time and health I have left—because I got better and still have some time ahead of me—I will be working hard to make Quebec the country I dream about.

• (1615)

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my question of the hon. member for Champlain. The Liberal government has decided to amend the legislation, because we all know that this legislation was supposed to be neutral and protect the chief electoral officer from the actions of politicians, so that they cannot interfere in his work. Then, with this legislation, they have decided to change the effective date of the new electoral boundaries. Thus, the new electoral map was to have come into force one year after it was published in the *Canada Gazette*, but that is not the case.

We are told that one major criterion was population. In fact, the carefully calculated average for Quebec is 96,250 people. Why has no one realized that in order to represent the people, we must consider not only the number of inhabitants but also the size of the territory?

In this respect, I would like my hon. colleague to use his riding as an example to demonstrate that population is not the only way to measure an area, but that the extent of the land it occupies also plays a role.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Champlain has two minutes remaining.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, it will be difficult to describe my riding in two minutes. I will barely have time to get started. Indeed, when I talk about democracy in action, it would be so easy to do that.

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The member for Trois-Rivières represents the neighbouring riding. For example, he can very easily go around his riding in half a day and come back home for lunch. In my case, going around my riding requires a week of travel if I want to have time to stop in different places. Indeed, my riding covers 38,000 square kilometres. I think that it is the seventh largest riding in Canada. And I am not complaining when I say this.

However, when I meet people from Lac-Édouard, from Weymontachie or from Parent, they have every right to say to me, "Well, it seems that you do not come to see us very often. You should have consulted us on this or that. It seems that we do not carry much weight". Indeed, when I explain to them that it takes me four hours to get there and four hours to go back home and that I sit here four and a half days a week, of course they understand that I do not have time to go and visit them. I agree with the question that I was just asked.

Why, in defining new electoral boundaries—and we could ask the commission to do things differently, it is up to us—is the size of the riding not taken into account, so that not only members would represent more or less the same number of voters, but each voter would be able to expect more or less the same services from his or her federal MP?

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity on behalf of the New Democratic Party to add our voice to the debate on Bill C-49. I want to express some of the concerns we have which I noticed are shared by virtually all the parties in the House of Commons, other than the ruling party. I noticed the Canadian Alliance has not raised these same concerns, the very valid points that my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois have been citing for the last 15 minutes in their speeches.

I want to point out how profoundly concerned the New Democratic Party caucus is regarding this bill and these particular boundary changes in the context of what has happened to my colleague, the member for Acadie—Bathurst. His riding is in the province of New Brunswick.

By way of introduction, I should say first that my own riding of Winnipeg Centre is affected only marginally by the proposed boundary changes. I gain a little at one end of my riding and I lose a little at the other end of my riding. I did not file an appeal to the changes.

In direct contrast to the relatively satisfactory operation that went on in my own riding, I point out that the boundary commissions struck by the federal government to review the boundary changes in some provinces clearly have been politicized and interfered with. The changes are not based on reason, logic and population differences. The changes are clearly partisan and political in nature.

Nowhere is there a more glaring example, possibly the most egregious example, of political gerrymandering in recent history than in the riding of my colleague, the whip for the New Democratic Party, the member for Acadie—Bathurst.

I come from the west, where we are pleased to see greater representation as a result of the 2001 census. We are genuinely pleased that there will be more members of Parliament from at least

two of the western provinces. We believe this is a positive thing for the democratic process and we do not want to say anything that would be critical of the fact that there will be greater representation.

Being from the west, the only other comparable example of this kind of overtly partisan gerrymandering is something called Gracie's finger. This occurred in downtown Vancouver in and around the riding of the former prime minister, the right hon. John Turner. Grace McCarthy, a Socred cabinet minister, had her boundary commission conveniently redraw her riding to include one projection which they called Gracie's finger. It conveniently deviated wildly out of her conventional boundary and took in one particular neighbourhood that had polls that were particularly favourable to Gracie. That became known as Gracie's finger and it went down throughout the west.

I live in Manitoba and Gracie's finger was in B.C., but it became legendary. It was such an abuse of the democratic process that there has not been another example as egregious in recent memory, except for what happened to my colleague in the riding of Acadie—Bathurst.

When they formed these boundary commissions from province to province, we were always worried that there was political interference, even in the composition of the panel that comprises the commission. When complaints were made, or in fact inquiries were made to the Speaker as to how these appointments were made, it was divulged that it was up to the lead cabinet minister in each province to recommend names of people, who would then be appointed by the Speaker.

We are off to a bad start if that is the system, for the process is politicized from the very beginning.

In the case of the member for Acadie—Bathurst, the senior cabinet minister for the province of New Brunswick selected the people who would form the commission. The chair of the commission is the father-in-law of the member for Beauséjour—Petitcodiac; what a happy coincidence, a well-known, established Liberal judge, in fact the father-in-law of the newlywed member for Beauséjour—Petitcodiac. It is so glaringly clear that one will not get a fair shake in this.

● (1620)

In this example, the member for Acadie—Bathurst is Acadian, francophone, proud of his culture and proud of his heritage. Most of the communities in his riding are French speaking, francophone, Acadian communities. These boundary changes for no good reason other than pure partisan politics hive off three or four of these Acadian francophone communities and give them to the neighbouring riding which is represented by an anglophone and which is predominantly anglophone.

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That in and of itself, were there other good rationale, I suppose could be seen as just an oversight. It should still be corrected, but it could have been seen as an honest oversight. In this case there is no good compelling reason other than to weaken the position of this particular member and only NDP representative in the province of New Brunswick, to make weaker this position and to give those communities to an already safe Liberal seat where the inclusion of those francophone NDP voters would not in any way diminish the strength of that particular seat. It is a glaring partisan interference.

The hue and cry came up immediately. Even the various mayors of those francophone communities objected strongly at the appeal process to appeal the commissioner's ruling. They made compelling arguments that they had no community of interest with the other people in this new riding where they will be lumped in. They have very little exchange. The language is the single most obvious factor. This is strictly an arbitrary line which deviates away from the conventional boundaries of the existing ridings to encompass these francophone communities. They appealed to every level and it is still before the courts. Were there any interest in providing a fair process across the country, this entire timeframe would be relaxed to allow the conclusion of those court challenges, to allow at least one province to appeal.

It would be odd to change the boundaries in each province except for one. To leave the province of New Brunswick out of these electoral boundary changes would be ridiculous. The only logical thing to do would be to postpone the entire process. That in and of itself would only bring us back to being in compliance with the current boundary redistribution act.

It would be helpful for people who might just be tuning in and have not followed the debate throughout the day to explain to Canadians why we are debating Bill C-49 and what the nature is of Bill C-49. We should begin by saying that every 10 years there is a full census in this country. The results of the census are reported in the *Canada Gazette*, outlining what population changes have taken place in various provinces and thereby allocating new seats in a province, outlined by a very specific and very complicated formula.

The census took place in 2001. The timeframe was that the census was officially reported on March 12, 2002. The commissions were set out in the various provinces as of April 2002. The various provincial commissions' initial proposals were made and publicized during June, July and August of 2002. Hearings were held in all provinces between August and December 2002. The final reports for all the provinces were made public by March 28, 2003. Stemming from the research done in the 2001 census, by March 28, 2003 all the final reports for all the provinces were made public.

MPs were then invited to file any objections they might have until April 28. There was a one month window wherein MPs could make known any objections they might have to the findings of the commission. Hearings were held until July 16 to hear the various objections.

•(1625)

It has been a very rare thing in previous boundary changes or boundary redistributions to actually win an appeal. For a member of Parliament to go forward and object to a boundary change, it is a very rare thing that he or she can make a compelling enough

argument to actually succeed in that argument. Usually it takes the cooperation of the member of Parliament in the neighbouring riding. If both affected members go to the commission and say that they disagree with the changes, there is some opportunity for reversal. Otherwise it is very rare.

In this case with the last commission, the Ontario and Quebec responses to the objections of MPs were released on August 19, 2003. The cabinet proclamation, called a representation order, was issued on August 25, 2003 and published in a special edition of the *Canada Gazette*. That means under the current redistribution act, August 25, 2004 would be the first available date to hold an election under the new boundary changes. It is supposed to be one year later.

That would satisfy the concerns of those ridings that still find themselves in the appeal stage by going to court. Even though the appeal of these individual communities in the riding of Acadie—Bathurst failed at the commission stage, they went to court. They felt strongly compelled that they wanted to retain their original boundaries, or at least have some deference shown to the very obvious language issue at play in that particular situation. They felt that strongly that they went to court.

The courts have not finished ruling on that situation. Rather than go ahead with the election at an earlier date, we suggest that the right thing to do would be to let nature unfold as it should and follow through with what the act originally contemplates. Then an election could in fact be held after August 25.

It puts us in a very uncomfortable situation. I do not want to stand up and advocate that we should not pass Bill C-49. We welcome the extra seats in western Canada. However, we condemn in the strongest possible terms what happened to my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst, the unfairness of it.

There is a way to satisfy both concerns, which is to have an election based on the new boundaries at the time that was contemplated by the act, after August 25. Have the election in September. We would be happy. We are eager to go to the polls. We are eager to show Canadians the shortcomings of the Liberal government and give them an opportunity to vote against the ruling party, but we should not do it at the expense of basic fairness and basic natural justice. I argue that natural justice would be denied to the people of Acadie—Bathurst to go ahead without their having finished the due process of the law and the appeal process.

The question then remains, as we explain to Canadians what is going on here, why is there this rush to go to the polls in April or May, in the spring? Bill C-49 seeks to change the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act so that the changes come into effect before August 25, 2004. In fact, they would come into effect April 1, 2004.

If we ask ourselves why, there is only one simple reason and it is pure partisan politics on the part of the Liberal Party. It is internal political machinations of the Liberal Party that is forcing us to the polls before the issues of boundary redistribution can be resolved. It is as plain and as simple as that.

The Liberals have an embarrassing situation of two leaders. A newly elected leader will be chosen in November. The Liberals do not want the new leader to be exposed to the pressures that the House of Commons will surely bring upon him without going to the polls and going into a new mandate early rather than in the normal course of time.

If people were jaded and cynical about the political process before Bill C-49, they will certainly be more cynical after. We have chucked basic fairness and we have chucked reason and logic out the window in order to change the system to suit the member for LaSalle—Énard, to suit one individual, one albeit very powerful individual, the soon to be prime minister of Canada.

● (1630)

What does that say to the small francophone communities in the riding of Acadie—Bathurst? Apparently it says their issues do not matter and are of very little consequence because the political system is going to be changed in spite of their very legitimate and real concerns. It is in spite of what should be an embarrassing amount of interference, gerrymandering and manipulation of the boundary redistribution process by the Liberals who are seeking only to gain political advantage by this process.

This process is supposed to work on behalf of Canadians, on behalf of ordinary people, to allow them better representation. It is not supposed to be an opportunity for the ruling party to further feather its own nest and take an unfair competitive advantage by manipulating the boundaries. Even in ridings where the Liberals already have an advantage, they will manipulate the boundaries to make those ridings stronger. In areas where they seek to gain seats they will deliberately take steps to undermine the strength of an opposition member of Parliament, as we have seen in the case of the whip for the New Democratic Party.

I am torn in a way. We welcome having more representation for the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia because I predict that none of those seats will be Liberal seats. They will all be opposition seats. Some may even be NDP seats, so we welcome that opportunity.

We celebrate with the people of the province of Ontario that they will be better represented. We understand that there are ridings in the greater Toronto area where the population has grown to such an extent that one member of Parliament represents 130,000 people in some ridings whereas the national average is supposed to be in the 90,000 range. Those people deserve more and better representation. Therefore we welcome the redistribution and the addition of extra seats. However, we do not support the idea of moving forward unless we all move forward with everyone satisfied that fairness prevails as the operative word in this whole exercise.

It may be viewed as extreme to compare what happened in the largely francophone riding of Acadie—Bathurst in New Brunswick and Gracie's finger, what is seen as the most jaded and cynical manipulation of boundary changes in living memory in British Columbia, but it was in fact that bad.

I raise those concerns with my colleagues in the House of Commons. I ask that fairness prevail. I ask for us to revisit the whole idea of the appointment of boundary commissions to eliminate the

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clearly partisan biases that are built into the system when we allow senior Liberal cabinet ministers in each province to provide the names of people who shall sit on the commission. The ruling party will dominate every time. It is no longer an exercise that can be seen as fair in any way, shape or form. We see examples like that of my colleague from the riding of Acadie—Bathurst where they deliberately undermined the strength and jeopardized the integrity of one community by hiving out three or four communities from the south end of the riding and handing them over to another riding for no reason other than the political advantage of the ruling party.

* * *

● (1635)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think you would find consent in the House for the following motion:

That if a division is requested on any substantive motion during Government Orders on Thursday, October 23, 2003, Friday, October 24, 2003 and Monday, October 27, 2003, the said division shall be deferred until the conclusion of the time provided for Government Orders on Tuesday, October 28, 2003.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the chief government whip have the consent of the House for this proposal?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-49, an act respecting the effective date of the representation order of 2003, be read the third time and passed, and of the motion that the question be now put.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the member who just spoke is from Manitoba and I would like to know if he is happy with the boundaries for Manitoba.

I missed part of his speech but I did hear him mention the process of appeal. We had some outlandish ridings in Saskatchewan which we appealed and were very fortunate to save our ridings as they were. They were excellently done by the prior commission and we were happy with them. Our process of appeal worked.

I just wondered if Manitoba was pleased with its boundaries.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I did begin my remarks by saying that in my own particular riding we did not feel the need to file an appeal. What we lost at one end of the riding we gained at another and the changes were quite neutral and benign.

I am aware though that in the province of Saskatchewan the changes were outrageous. They were so outrageous and so glaringly partisan and poisoned by the political partisanship of the whole commission that appeals were filed en masse by virtually all members of Parliament from all parties, other than the ruling party. The entire commission was struck down and the next election will be held on the old boundaries. The process was so tainted and so poisoned in that province that it had no choice but to simply chuck the whole works.

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It is not just the riding of Acadie—Bathurst in the province of New Brunswick where this partisan tampering, manipulation and interference took place. Surely the province of Saskatchewan serves as a glaring example as well. Thankfully, the protestations of members of parliament there led to where reason prevailed in the end.

● (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to what my hon. colleague had to say. I would like to ask him what I believe to be quite a relevant question since the government is trying to amend what should normally be the least partisan legislation of all. The Elections Act governs both Parliament and the election process. It sets out the process to be followed and the way elections should be carried out. It provides for an adequate distribution of seats.

The government is rife with scandal. We are waiting for all of it to be made public. The report of the Auditor General is usually tabled in November. Under the circumstances, is the government not relying on a two-prong strategy? First, it is tinkering with the Elections Act to meet the requirements of the heir apparent, the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard, and to give him a free hand to call an election as soon as possible. But we now realize that the government has a second goal in mind. It wants to avoid debating some fundamental issues. With an early election in 2004, the problems will be blamed on the previous government and we will not be able to go to the bottom of some serious matters.

Do members agree with me that the current government has put together quite a Machiavellian scheme?

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the Bloc Québécois has put my sentiments into words even better than I myself could have. I appreciate the point he made that the political manipulation of this electoral boundaries redistribution process stems from the internal problems that the Liberal Party, the ruling party, is having, and a desire to avoid the pressure that will come as scandals unfold as facts are revealed, especially from the Auditor General's report.

It is plain for all the world to see, and the Canadian public should be well aware, that the only reason we are being forced to the polls after only three and a half years is so the Liberal Party will not be embarrassed by facts and details that are about to be revealed in the Auditor General's November report. If the House of Commons is not sitting, the details of that report cannot be made public prior to the next election. This is the travesty here. We deserve to know the contents of that report but if the government prorogues Parliament the Auditor General can have a completely finished report with valuable information that Canadians deserve to know and it will never be made public until after another election is held in the spring of next year.

The substance of our objections to this bill is the added expense of going to the polls when there is no need. It is only between the four and five year mark that governments should go to the polls. It is only in the government's self-interest that it calls an election earlier. This

would be twice in a row that the government has gone to the polls after what will be only three and a half years. It is running scared because it is afraid of us shining the spotlight on more and more incidents of maladministration of funds and even further abuses of the financial accounting of the country.

● (1645)

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, I first want to comment on the last speaker's comments and on the question raised by the member from the Bloc. I want to add similar sentiments to those raised by the two members.

The legislation that we are presently debating should not even be here. We already have legislation that sets out quite clearly the process for implementing new boundaries once changes have been made.

Every 10 years we have revisions, sometimes done fairly and sometimes done with prejudice, undoubtedly. We saw that happen this time in a number of areas. I would think all of us could probably size up the changes within our own regions and say that they probably had a tinge of favouritism inflicted by the governing party. However we live through that because people cannot be manipulated, even though the government sometimes thinks it can.

Under the existing legislation, the Chief Electoral Office is given one year to implement the boundary changes so that the voters lists, the boundary maps and everything else is set out. The mechanisms are put in place in the new ridings and different parties are given the chance to establish their own political identity within those ridings.

A year in politics is not a long time. We have a very large country with a shifting population. No one knows that better than I do. In the last 10 years Newfoundland has lost about one-tenth of its population. Where has everyone gone? They have gone all over the place, many of them to western Canada, to Alberta in particular, and to British Columbia and Ontario. In those areas, and even within the urban centres of our own provinces, we have seen a major political change in population.

As I say, the boundaries in Newfoundland have changed tremendously simply because of the growth of the urban centres, particularly in St. John's. My own district of St. John's West is made up of a small part of St. John's, all of the city of Mount Pearl, plus 250 miles of a rural area encompassing many communities spread all along the coastline of the southern shore, St. Mary's and Placentia Bays. All of that geographic area is now being chopped up because of the population shift to the urban centres.

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This creates two problems. First, it creates the necessity to change boundaries drastically, which is something that concerns me. Undoubtedly, some people are sitting in some office in the centre of Ottawa, the same type of people who make decisions about the fishery in northern Quebec, in British Columbia and on the Atlantic coast without ever having seen the ocean, making boundary changes from the centre of the most urban region in the country without having any idea of the reality of rural life in this country. When we draw circles around 90,000 people and say that this is equality, it does not work that way. We know all about equality.

We have to make sure that members in the House can properly represent their constituents. The argument made by those who do not know the difference is that 90,000 people are 90,000 people whether it they are in rural Saskatchewan, rural Newfoundland or in the middle of Toronto. Members who are here in Ottawa sit in their seats, stand up and talk about the concerns of their communities, and they vote on legislation that affects their people.

● (1650)

What difference does it make where they live? That is the mentality of many people when they look at the political framework of this country.

That is not the way it works.

A representative, regardless of party, has to represent the constituents. That means being available to them. That means meeting with groups and organizations. That means dealing with individual concerns and sometimes being the only political contact available to these people because of the geography of the country.

In the middle of Toronto or the middle of Ottawa or the middle of St. John's, if someone has a problem usually it has to do with the city involved. The person can walk the five minutes to city hall, speak to someone involved and get the problem resolved. If it is a provincial problem, then quite often the provincial house of assembly or provincial government building is there in that major city. If not, if it is another urban area, there is probably some kind of an office of each department or at least many departments, so the person can go directly to the government office and have his or her problem dealt with.

But if we live in rural areas, that is not the case. There is not a government office to be seen. People cannot go to government offices. The only government office that we had was the post office, and the way this government is moving to take away these buildings from rural Canada, we are not even going to have a post office.

The other side of it is that if a member represents an urban area, that member is dealing with one town or city council, one recreation commission and one chamber of commerce. There are no rural organizations and there probably are no fishing committees. In rural Newfoundland, and I am sure the same is true throughout rural areas of the other provinces, I probably have, counting the two cities, another 40 to 45 communities or more. Each one has a municipality. Each one has a recreation commission. I have four major rural development groups. I have two major zoning boards. I have at least 20 local fishermen's committees. All of them have individual concerns because they are so separated in the rural area of the country.

That means the member has to deal with all these individual institutions. And for each individual living in these areas, having no contact with government, the only person he or she knows about is the member who represents them. In these areas they do not concern themselves about whether the problem is of a municipal, provincial or federal nature; they will call whoever happens to be available.

Therefore, the workload for somebody representing a rural area is many times that of somebody in an urban area when it comes to dealing with so many groups. Representing them here is not a problem. I have no more work in this very building than anyone else, but the work that flows through my offices and the work put upon me to try to represent my constituents is entirely different.

When circles are being drawn on maps, we should take into consideration the difficulty of trying to represent people properly in different parts of our country. Having said that, because we cannot do much about it now that the boundaries have been changed, and in some cases changed conveniently, as I say, one of the major concerns we have is that there are always many difficulties with the enumeration. When the election comes, we will find out. In this case, I think we are going to have even more problems than before because of the rush that the electoral officer and office are being put through.

● (1655)

We have to try to make sure that everyone who is eligible to vote is enumerated, that everyone can be contacted and encouraged to participate in this democratic exercise. When we hear that only 25% of the people under 30 voted in the last election, that is scary. What is our country going to be like if we turn off the young people?

Why did they not vote? Maybe part of it is that they watch us and ask why they should. However, I do not think that is the reason. One of the reasons is that they really do not know what is going on in the process. Many of them, because our young people have to move so far from home to find employment in this country, do not know when or where to vote or anything about the members because nobody tells them. They are not even on the list. If one is not on the list chances are one does not know where to go or how to go about getting one's name on there.

These things could be settled if we had some time. Why is it that suddenly we have taken a process that has existed for years and years and changed it? The member from the NDP and the member from the Bloc, as well as others today, have spelled it out quite clearly: because we have a situation now where we have a prime minister in waiting. He has been in waiting for 10 years. I wonder why, if he has waited so long, he cannot wait a little longer.

When he takes over he is going to inherit quite a mess, Mr. Speaker, and you know that as well as I do. How is he going to get out of the dilemma of having to deal with two factions, two parties within the party? If he had two parties outside the party, there is a process, and I would be glad to talk to him about that process. It is a bit different, though, when one has two parties within the party and is trying to bring them together.

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The only way he will be able to carry out his work, sleep at night and not have to be constantly looking over his shoulder is to get rid of the faction that does not support him. How does he do that? He cannot take them all out of cabinet and put them on the backbench because that would upset them even more. If he leaves them where they are and does not put his own people in the frontbench, those people are going to be very upset. There is only one way to do it and that is to call an election, and hopefully then we will take care of his problem and he will not have to worry about it himself.

If under the present legislation he cannot call an election until after August 25 next year, he has a real dilemma. However, the laws are quite clear. It has worked that way. He has a choice. He can wait until after August 25 or he can call an election now under the old boundaries. People in Alberta will not be happy, nor should they be. The people in Ontario will not be happy and the people in British Columbia will not be happy.

The incoming prime minister has a major dilemma, so what does he do? He does something that no leader ever should talk about. We in the House have been talking about parliamentary reform, in the last two or three years in particular. It is unanimous here that we have to make changes. We have seen the government whittle away the power of the individual member in the House. We have seen the government whittle away the power of Parliament. It has to change.

Even the House leader of the governing party heads up a committee that is talking about modernizing Parliament. He has put a lot of time and effort into it. He has brought forth, through his modernization committee, some wonderful ideas. While this is happening, around him another scenario has developed, which shoves the power of Parliament back into the dark ages, where the leader, for his own selfish reasons, manipulates the rules that have governed this place for years.

Maybe we should sit back and have a second look at this. When the time comes to add seats we do not have to worry, in fact, as the extra seats are there. Nobody is stopping that. It is a fait accompli. It is done.

• (1700)

This process, this piece of legislation, has nothing to do with opposing extra seats for Alberta, British Columbia or Ontario. It has nothing at all to do with that. These are in place. They are going to get that. However, there is a legislative timeframe in which an election can be called before these changes can be implemented. As I say, the incoming prime minister and the government have two options. They can call an election any time they want. The Prime Minister of today, if he wishes, can call an election tonight. I wish he would.

But the government can also wait until the changes are timely and are properly implemented so that the people who have work to do can make sure that every Canadian gets the best possible chance of being on the voters list and the political organizations have a chance to encourage and promote the necessity to vote. Then we will see fairness and equality.

That is what this exercise is all about, not slowing down the process. That is done. That is over with. It is a matter of ensuring fairness and trying to stop a powerful government, a government that

has whittled away at the powers of Parliament and lately has been beating its breast in an act of contrition saying it is going to change things and modernize Parliament, just to see the farce it has made of the whole issue. Perhaps we will ask the incoming prime minister to have a second look.

In Newfoundland we have a Liberal government also. During the campaign that has recently taken place, its slogan was "Take a closer look". Its posters were in small print so one had to really look closely at them. Fortunately it backfired, because the people of Newfoundland took a closer look at what that government has been doing. Tonight will be a very interesting night. In fact, in about an hour and a half from now, the polls will close in Newfoundland. If members watch national CBC, and I do not want to do a plug here for the media, on Newsworld tonight I believe we are going to get a couple of hours of coverage. It is going to be an extremely interesting night. There is a sort of blue haze hanging over Newfoundland, growing and growing, and by 8:30 tonight it will be solidly in place.

That is simply because, again, a government forgot that people make a difference. It is too late for that government to take a closer look, but it is not too late for the incoming prime minister to take a closer look at what is happening here. If he is going to set a new direction, which he talks about, people listen because they think of the new kid on the block. Suddenly the old memory kicks in and they say, "Oh, no. He has been here for 10 years, has he not?" Everything that has happened in this country in the last 10 years basically has been done with his blessing. People are taking a closer look at that too.

He has the opportunity to really set an example. He should not go fooling around with legislation. It is there for a purpose. It is there because it is right, proper and fair. Let us make sure that this process continues. He will get his election when the time comes and maybe he will be sorry he called it.

Having said that, let us make sure the right thing is done and the government has a chance to do it. Perhaps it should withdraw this legislation completely.

The Deputy Speaker: If I might make mention of this, on the issue of the Newfoundland election this evening I also understand that a couple of former colleagues of those of us in the House of Commons will be offering their comments on the election, none other than Mr. George Baker and Mr. John Crosbie, of course. So not only will it be informative, but it could also be very entertaining.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's speech with interest, especially when he talked about the particular nature of the rural ridings. I completely agree with his comments in this regard.

My question deals rather with one thing he talked about, that is the fact that young people are less inclined to vote than the rest of the population. Is the Electoral Act not made in such a way that, from the moment the new electoral map is known, we have a whole year to make it known to the population and to allow electoral organizations to be created and to organize? So much so that we are forced to amend the current bill to help people do their work properly.

Government Orders

Is that not a clear demonstration of the fact that the member for LaSalle—Émard, who claims to be in favour of democracy and to want to address the democratic deficit, is contributing to the worsening of this democratic deficit? He is actually asking the House of Commons to pass a bill that says that the whole non-partisan process previously set up will now be scrapped. All this is being done to help the future prime minister call an election sooner to avoid being held accountable by the House. Sitting in Parliament is a direct consequence of an election.

The member for LaSalle—Émard has convinced the government to allow him to do something that reduces the quality of democracy in Canada instead of increasing it. Is that not also a good way to escape having to answer on behalf of this government, one he was part of for many years, particularly as finance minister?

• (1705)

[*English*]

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is right, dead on, as we would say. Young people in the country are being forgotten. I have said that several times here while speaking on different topics.

We overlook two groups in this country: the young and the elderly. We have just forgotten them. We do not take care of our elderly and we have completely ignored our youth.

We have not invested in our youth. Many of them cannot become well educated and contributing members of society. We have failed to recognize the fact that everybody is not like the member for LaSalle—Émard, who could afford to go through university and pay all the costs. They have to make do with what they have. We have made it very difficult for them to achieve a solid education.

As I mentioned, during his journeys across the country, the member for LaSalle—Émard by the way talked about all he would do for youth. He is the very individual who went out of his way to defeat a motion here in this very House brought forth by the member for Fundy—Royal to allow students who are saddled with a debt load claim some of that debt load on their income tax, 10% of the debt load each year for 10 years. All the opposition members supported it and many of the Liberals, but with a push from the then minister of finance, the member for LaSalle—Émard, the motion was defeated. What he says and what he does are two different things.

The member is dead on when he talks about the lack of regard for youth by the member for LaSalle—Émard. He talks with one voice and then he acts differently. His record speaks for itself. I think that is the best way to answer the question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak on Bill C-49. My hon. colleague from Saint-Jean made an excellent speech earlier, as did my hon. colleague from Champlain. I have no doubt that my hon. colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel will also be able to make a strong case with regard to the effective date of this bill, especially since it will have a direct impact on him.

The bill before us seeks to move up the effective date of the new electoral map by six months. The fundamental question behind this bill concerns democracy. It is the very heart of democracy.

Our democracy is what I would call sick. With each passing election, fewer and fewer voters exercise their right to vote, so fundamental to a democracy, and to elect members to represent them in this Parliament or any other parliament in this country.

With this bill, the government is once again making a mockery of democracy. This should be a normal process. It should not be meddled with; it should be apolitical. The electoral boundaries readjustment follows the creation of travelling commissions that go to each region to hear what people have to say. Then, every ten years, after each census, the electoral map is redrawn in an effort to ensure the ridings correspond to the real interests of the people. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

In Quebec, during the last electoral boundaries readjustment, the commission did the best job it could based on the criteria it had to respect. However, with all the conditions imposed on it, its job was almost impossible.

My area is a good example. My hon. colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel came to visit during a storm. He experienced the terrible weather in the Gaspé and the Lower St. Lawrence. He arrived during a snow storm.

I would just like to point out that the two centres in my region where the commission met, that is Gaspé and Rivière-du-Loup, are 600 kilometres apart. This gives some idea of what was being asked of the people who wanted to be heard by it. People had to travel 300 kilometres each way. In other words, a trip of 600 kilometres in order to be heard in a democracy like ours. In this supposedly rich country, people are being made to travel 600 kilometres in order to be heard by a commission on electoral boundaries, a commission whose job it is to apply the most fundamental of the laws of this country: the legislation governing representation.

As far as the process or the commission itself is concerned, I do not really have any comments to make. The only thing I would like to say is that in actual fact people were deprived of their right to come before the commission and express their views. They could do so, of course, but if it had sat at various places instead of two places 600 kilometres apart, perhaps more people could have been able and happy to have their views heard.

Looking at my colleague from Champlain, who spoke a while ago, he too was in my region last week and saw what it is like. This summer he visited the Îles de la Madeleine, and saw the distances involved. The riding is huge.

Government Orders

I think that if we really wanted to bring about changes in our democracy, we would change the underlying principle of electoral district boundaries. More consideration should be given to the distances involved. More consideration should be given to MPs' ability to represent their constituents properly, that is to be more accessible to them, by having electoral districts that made more sense, in my opinion.

We also need to remember what has already happened in our region. The initial proposal was to do away with one more riding, as was done in 1993 in the Lower St. Lawrence and Gaspé, when boundaries were being revised.

• (1710)

At the time, we lost the federal riding of Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine. There was talk of eliminating another riding and creating an absolutely immense area. It would have been inhuman for an MP to try to properly represent the people, given their interests and given that the communities involved had practically no economic or cultural link.

With respect to Gaspésie and the Lower St. Lawrence, there is a major difference in terms of economy, culture, consumer habits and climate. The difference is tremendous.

Again, there was talk of eliminating a riding. However, through their participation and determination, people were able to persuade the commission to change its mind and keep the ridings that we had, or at least the same number of ridings. Unfortunately, the legislation did not allow us to keep the ridings and make an exception by having smaller ridings in terms of population, but larger in terms of area.

The result was that a regional county municipality was added to the riding of Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok, making it bigger. Add in the Îles-de-la-Madeleine and you get an idea of the work that lies ahead for the Bloc Québécois MPs who represent this riding after the next election.

An hon. member: It will be yours.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: No, it will not be mine. My colleague says that it will be mine, but this is not the case. My new riding will be called Haute-Gaspésie—La-Mitis—Matapédia—Matane. However, I am talking about the next riding, which is now represented, unfortunately, by a member of the government party. I think that, in the next election, it should be represented by a member of the Bloc Québécois if people want to have real representation.

Let us go back to the bill at hand. There is something else about the electoral boundaries readjustment that I cannot agree with. It is that the number of members of Parliament is constantly being increased. As one of my colleagues mentioned earlier, we went from 294 members in 1993 to 301 members and we will now have 308.

Unfortunately, Quebec only has 75 ridings. This means that the demographic weight, that is the number of members in the House of Commons who will represent Quebec, will constantly decrease. I think this is totally dangerous for democracy.

Let us remember our history. Quebec is the place where Canada was born, with Acadia, among others. At the time of the Constitution, Quebec was perhaps the most important province.

Of course, I am a sovereigntist and I want to see Quebec become a country. Unfortunately, as long as the people of Quebec do not make the final decision, we will have to continue to represent them in the House of Commons. I say unfortunately, because, like any good sovereigntist, we are anxious to get out, to go back home and to build a real country.

Once again, we will find ourselves increasingly in a minority position in this country. We realize, as we sit here, that this Parliament is less and less democratic and that it exercises democracy in a hidden manner. We see what is happening in the Liberal Party now, with the arrival of a new leader. He maintained that more powers had to be given to Parliament and members. However, the government is giving him *carte blanche* to call an election as soon as possible.

I remind the House that, in this country, elections are normally called every five years, and this is how it should always be. Since 1993, there have been elections every three and a half years.

• (1715)

Why have we had elections every three and a half years? We have had an election every three and a half years because those who have the power are using it for themselves and not for the public. With this bill, we can see that someone wants to give the future prime minister an opportunity to call an early election. I think that is unacceptable, because, in the end, it is a political game that negates democracy.

We should only have elections every five years, which would be normal in a democracy. A difference of five or six months is not a problem for me. But there have been differences of a year and a half and nearly two years since 1993, and that is completely unacceptable, since it is the people who pay for these elections, through their taxes. Obviously, it does not necessarily correspond with the wishes of the public. It corresponds with the desire of one individual who wants to leave himself an opening to move toward what he thinks is the possible reelection of the Liberal Party. On that score, I have my doubts about his reelection and whether or not he can win the next election.

We believe that the bill before us is anti-democratic and shows no respect at all for this process, which should be entirely open and in which no political party should have the right to interfere. In my opinion, only Parliament has the right to change the law, and it should be done without political interference. Once a bill is presented, of course, Parliament can have its say. Parliament is having its say right now, but of course, we know that the fix is in, since this government has been governing in secrecy for a good many years.

Therefore, we support the electoral redistribution process. We agree that there should be commissions that are truly independent. Several hon. members have told us about incidents in their ridings. They have doubts about the independence of the commissions, but that is another issue. It seems that the appointment process could be called into question in some cases.

Nevertheless, the commissions are independent bodies and they do manage to make some proposals that reflect the wishes of the population, but obviously this is not the case in Quebec. Seeing what has happened all the way from the Atlantic coast to the Ontario border, nearly all electoral districts in Quebec have been disturbed, changed. As my colleague from Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques has just pointed out, people no longer know what the boundaries of their federal riding are.

As I said to my colleague from Champlain, if one asks people what the present boundaries of the electoral district of Matapédia—Matane are, for example, and what they will be for the next election campaign, few of them will be able to say. Apart from their MP and his staff, not many will know the answer.

I was talking recently with the mayor of Mont-Joli about the new name of Matapédia—Matane. The regional municipality of La Mitis was included in it, and the Haute-Gaspésie region, of course, but he did not know—and this is a person who has been in municipal politics for years and knows what is going on—that the regional municipality of Haute-Gaspésie was part of the riding of Matapédia—Matane. This is in fact such a huge riding that people have trouble imagining how much territory it covers.

As I have already said, I am sure that if my colleagues did a poll tomorrow morning to find out if people knew the boundaries of their riding, very few could give the answer. Maybe 4% or 5%, if that. This shows the democratic deficit.

As for the matter of moving the effective date of the bill up six months, that is moving it from August 2004 to April 2004, I feel that this is not allowing people enough time to become familiar with their riding boundaries. They are also not being given enough time to prepare for the next election campaign. They are being bulldozed, being told “This is the area you are going to have to deal with. What the outcome will be is no big deal, because in the end democracy has no importance. It is not important whether you know what riding you belong to or not.” This is a totally abnormal way of doing things.

• (1720)

Another aspect that I want to discuss is the number of people who actually go to the polls to exercise their right to vote, particularly in a federal election. Indeed, the number of voters is constantly dwindling. First, there is a fundamental problem with the list of electors, and it should be corrected. The government and all the political parties should deal with this issue.

Since we have stopped conducting a census of electors when an election is called, we have lost a large number of voters. There used to be a census when an election was called. Today, people can register on the list of electors on their tax return, if they wish to do so. Those who are not registered when the election is called must do so, but they have much less time to do so than before.

Government Orders

Members will remember that, a few years ago, the election period was 50 days or more. Today, it is 33 days or less. That does not leave much time for a voter to register. Those who are not on the list must consult and phone. The last time, at the beginning of the election campaign, the 1-800 number was always busy. It was extremely difficult for people to get on the list of electors. I think that this is food for thought. A census at the beginning of an election campaign had the advantage of enabling us to make people aware that an election had been called and that they should exercise their right to vote.

That system, which raised awareness about the election campaign in a non-partisan way, no longer exists. This was done in a totally non-partisan way since the census was conducted by two people, one from the governing party and the other from the party that had received the second largest number of votes in the riding. It was an effective way to motivate people, to go to see them in their homes, to tell them that an election was going to take place and that they should exercise their right to vote. It was done in a non-partisan way since the census was conducted by two people.

We ought to ask ourselves some questions because they have put an end to this way of doing things, supposedly to save money. However, is it not fundamental in a democracy that people should be able to exercise their right to vote and that we should invest a little more in the system to make people more aware and ready for an election?

Last week, my colleague, the member for Champlain, and I met with older people from my riding of Matapédia—Matane. This was an exceptionally good meeting, and I would like to thank him for that. We have asked these people if they were having their names put on the voters list when they filed their income tax return. There is a question on the first page of the form that says, “Elections Canada: Do you wish to have your name added to the National Register of Electors?”

Very few people take the time to complete this section and register, because they think that it is when an election is called that people have to have their name put on the voters' list.

I therefore think that we created a democratic deficit when we stopped the practice of conducting a census at the beginning of an election campaign, giving a list to the political parties instead. During an election campaign, each returning officer has to give a list to all political parties.

Incomplete lists were given out and today political parties are asked to revise the lists and to make sure that every voter is on it. Of course each political party is trying to register the people that it thinks will be voting for it. This is really not very acceptable in a democracy.

This process should therefore be revised and the bill amended. Otherwise, we should revert to the census taken just before the election to make people more aware and to allow them to truly participate in the election campaign.

Government Orders

• (1725)

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Madam Speaker, I would like to put a question to my hon. colleague from Matapédia—Matane.

Does he not agree that April 1 is quite appropriate, since it is April Fools' Day and the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard is trying to fool the people of Canada?

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for St. John's West for his question, which I just love.

Indeed, I feel it is quite appropriate for a number of reasons, but it will also have a significant impact on democracy.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: The hon. member for LaSalle—Émard is playing an April Fools' Day prank.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: My colleague is right about the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard. I may agree with him, but I will let the Canadian people be the judge of that.

It is however a very serious prank on democracy. When the government started to change the rules of democracy for political reasons, I thought that was very serious indeed.

I wholeheartedly agree with my colleague from St. John's West and I do hope for him, as he mentioned to the person who was previously in the chair, that there is a blue haze hanging over St. John's tonight.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): There are only 30 seconds left. The hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, I only want to ask my colleague if he thinks it would be better if the bill were not passed and if we were to start instead to abide by the non-partisan Elections Act. Why does the current government keep tinkering with the Elections Act, which should be a non-partisan piece of legislation?

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I am sorry, but time has run out. The House will now proceed to the taking of the recorded divisions.

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

The House resumed from October 9, 2003, consideration of the motion that Bill C-48, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (natural resources), be read a third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading stage of Bill C-48.

Call in the members.

• (1805)

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

*(Division No. 246)***YEAS**

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Allard	Anders
Anderson (Victoria)	Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
Assadourian	Augustine
Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska)	Bagnell
Bailey	Bakopanos
Barnes (London West)	Barrette
Beaumier	Bélair
Bellemare	Bennett
Benoit	Bertrand
Binet	Blondin-Andrew
Bonin	Bonwick
Boudria	Bradshaw
Breitkreuz	Brison
Brown	Bryden
Bulte	Burton
Byrne	Calder
Cannis	Caplan
Casey	Casson
Catterall	Chamberlain
Chatters	Coderre
Collenette	Comuzzi
Cullen	Cummins
Cuzner	Dhaliwal
Dion	Discepola
Doyle	Duncan
Easter	Elley
Epp	Finlay
Fitzpatrick	Fontana
Forsyth	Frulla
Fry	Gallant
Galloway	Goldring
Goodale	Gouk
Graham	Grey
Grose	Harper
Harvey	Hearn
Herron	Hill (MacLeod)
Hubbard	Jackson
Jaffer	Jennings
Jobin	Johnston
Karetak-Lindell	Karygiannis
Keddy (South Shore)	Keyes
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)	Knutson
Lastewka	LeBlanc
Lee	Leung
Longfield	Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)	MacAulay
MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)	Macklin
Malhi	Manley
Mark	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McGuire	McTeague
Meredith	Merrifield
Mills (Red Deer)	Mitchell
Moore	Murphy
Myers	Nault
Neville	Normand
O'Reilly	Owen
Pacetti	Pagtakhan
Paradis	Peric
Peterson	Phinney
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)	Pratt
Price	Proulx
Provenzano	Rajotte
Redman	Reed (Halton)
Regan	Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
Reynolds	Ritz
Robillard	Rock
Saada	Savoy
Schellenberger	Scott
Sgro	Shepherd
Simard	Skelton
Solberg	Sorenson
Speller	Spencer
St-Julien	St. Denis
Steckle	Stewart
Stinson	Szabo
Telegdi	Thibault (West Nova)
Thibault (Saint-Lambert)	Thompson (Wild Rose)

Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Toews
Tonks	Torsney
Ur	Valeri
Vanclief	Vellacott
Venne	Volpe
Wappel	Wayne
Whelan	White (Langley—Abbotsford)
White (North Vancouver)	Wilfert
Yelich — 173	

NAYS

Members

Adams	Assad
Bachand (Saint-Jean)	Bigras
Blaikie	Bourgeois
Caccia	Cardin
Charbonneau	Comartin
Crête	Dalphond-Guiral
Davies	Desrochers
Duceppe	Fournier
Gagnon (Champlain)	Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)
Gagnon (Québec)	Gauthier
Girard-Bujold	Godin
Guay	Jordan
Kraft Sloan	Laframboise
Lancôt	Lill
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Masse
McDonough	Ménard
Nystrom	Paquette
Parrish	Perron
Picard (Drummond)	Plamondon
Proctor	Rocheleau
Roy	Sauvageau
Scherrer	St-Hilaire
Stoffer	Tremblay
Wasylycia-Leis — 47	

PAIRED

Members

Alcock	Asselin
Bergeron	Cauchon
Eggleton	Gaudet
Guarnieri	Guimond
Harvard	Lalonde
Loubier	Marceau
McCallum	McLellan — 14

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Bill read the third time and passed)

[English]

Mr. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think you would find that in a moment of distraction the clerk did not see me stand up to vote in favour of the motion. My colleague to my left is larger than life and so I was probably missed when I stood up.

* * *

CONTRAVENTIONS ACT

The House resumed from October 10 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to refer Bill C-38 to a committee before second reading.

• (1815)

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

Government Orders

(Division No. 247)

YEAS

Members

Adams	Allard
Anderson (Victoria)	Assad
Assadourian	Augustine
Bachand (Saint-Jean)	Bagnell
Bakopanos	Barnes (London West)
Barrette	Beaumier
Bélair	Bélangier
Bellemare	Bennett
Bertrand	Bigras
Binet	Blaikie
Blondin-Andrew	Bonin
Bonwick	Boudria
Bourgeois	Bradshaw
Brown	Bryden
Bulte	Byrne
Caccia	Calder
Caplan	Cardin
Castonguay	Catterall
Charbonneau	Coderre
Collenette	Comartin
Crête	Cullen
Cuzner	Dalphond-Guiral
Davies	Desrochers
Dhaliwal	Dion
Discepolo	Dromisky
Duceppe	Easter
Farrah	Finlay
Fontana	Fournier
Frulla	Fry
Gagnon (Champlain)	Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)
Gagnon (Québec)	Gauthier
Girard-Bujold	Godin
Goodale	Graham
Grose	Guay
Harvey	Jackson
Jennings	Jobin
Jordan	Karetak-Lindell
Karygiannis	Keyes
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)	Knutson
Kraft Sloan	Laframboise
Lancôt	LeBlanc
Lee	Lill
MacAulay	Macklin
Malhi	Manley
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse	McDonough
McGuire	Ménard
Mitchell	Murphy
Myers	Nault
Neville	Normand
Nystrom	O'Reilly
Owen	Pacetti
Pagtakhan	Paquette
Paradis	Parrish
Peric	Perron
Peterson	Phinney
Picard (Drummond)	Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Plamondon	Pratt
Price	Proctor
Proulx	Redman
Reed (Halton)	Regan
Robillard	Rocheleau
Rock	Roy
Saada	Sauvageau
Scherrer	Scott
Shepherd	Simard
Speller	St-Hilaire
St-Julien	St. Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Telegdi	Thibault (West Nova)
Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)	Tonks
Torsney	Tremblay
Valeri	Vanclief
Venne	Volpe
Wappel	Wasylycia-Leis
Whelan — 151	

Private Members' Business

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Anders	Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska)	Bailey
Benoit	Breitkreuz
Brisson	Burton
Cannis	Casey
Casson	Chamberlain
Chatters	Comuzzi
Cummins	Doyle
Duncan	Elley
Epp	Fitzpatrick
Forseth	Gallant
Goldring	Gouk
Grey	Harper
Hearn	Herron
Hill (Macleod)	Jaffer
Johnston	Keddy (South Shore)
Lastewka	Leung
Longfield	Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)	MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)
Mark	McCormick
McTeague	Meredith
Merrifield	Mills (Red Deer)
Moore	Provenzano
Rajotte	Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
Reynolds	Ritz
Savoy	Schellenberger
Skelton	Solberg
Sorenson	Spencer
Steckle	Stinson
Strahl	Szabo
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews	Ur
Vellacott	Wayne
White (North Vancouver)	White (Langley—Abbotsford)
Yelich— 71	

PAIRED

Members

Alcock	Asselin
Bergeron	Cauchon
Eggleton	Gaudet
Guarnieri	Guimond
Harvard	Lalonde
Loubier	Marceau
McCallum	McLellan— 14

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill referred to a committee)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:18 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed from April 29 consideration of the motion that Bill C-328, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code, be now read a second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise today in the House, because of the great work that was done by my colleague, the member for Laurentides. Indeed, I accompanied her on a tour throughout Quebec. This tour proved to be a very important democratic

exercise; we met workers and thus received some input throughout this exercise.

At the end of my speech, I will bring some arguments that will speak to the experience of these workers, those who are mainly concerned, not only in Quebec, but also throughout Canada. I remind

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will resume. Talking about these exercises, it is important to note that a tour of Quebec was organized. There was also a demonstration on May 1 and another one on October 17. Today, my colleague, the member for Laurentides, presented a petition containing some 46,000 signatures that demonstrates the will of Canadians and Quebecers.

As I was saying, it was an extraordinary tour during which we felt a general sense of unanimity. At the end of this all, there will be a vote tomorrow in the House. All members should be aware of the problem and should participate in this vote.

Allow me to provide some background. The Canada Labour Code has to be amended to be more in line with the Quebec Labour Code. Since 1977, there is such a procedure in the Quebec Labour Code, which allows for harmonization, or standardization of relations between workers and organizations, but above all which makes the relationships between the different parties more human.

Why do we need anti-scab measures? Because they foster and maintain civilized negotiations during labour disputes and promote industrial peace between the two parties. They are the cornerstone that ensures a level playing field for employers and employees. These provisions will also put an end to the existence of two separate categories of workers in Quebec, those who are covered by the Canada Labour Code and those who are covered by the Quebec Labour Code.

To resume briefly, similar legislation exists in Quebec since 1977. It was passed by René Levesque's government. Labour relations have been modernized in Quebec and the members of this House are asked to harmonize labour relations for all Canadians. Other provinces have also passed similar legislation.

Members on the government side will tell us that the Canada Labour Code does contain a prohibition relating to replacement workers, but only if an employer uses them for the purpose of undermining a trade union's representational capacity. In other words, if an employer refuses to negotiate and then uses scabs, the Canada Industrial Relations Board can forbid their use. All that is necessary, however, is for an employer to negotiate, or pretend to negotiate, with the union for it to get around this prohibition and continue to use scabs. It can be seen, therefore, that this measure is ridiculous and opens the door to the use of scabs.

When I talk about a consensus, it comes from unions and workers. Again, employers in Quebec do not think about using scabs because their use is legislated.

What are the negative consequences of the use of scabs? It causes a decrease in local or global economic productivity. It also lowers the revenues of businesses and governments. There is a drop in earnings, and, consequently, a drop in the purchasing power of workers directly or indirectly affected. In some cases, this can even lead to social problems, force affected households into debt and cause stress-related psychological problems.

Beyond the procedures and the disputes, we have to look at the human side of this issue. We had the opportunity to go to Baie-Comeau, among other places, where Cargill workers went through a three-year labour dispute. For three years, they were without any income, spending their time on the picket line watching friends, neighbours and other employees go to work instead of them. It has far-reaching consequences.

I learned a lot about these labour disputes. For example, frustrated workers pointed the finger at persons identified as grandchildren of scabs, people in the community, neighbours. It was a source of conflict in the community.

• (1820)

Later, I was made aware of the existence of a silent majority. I value this majority greatly. I think of the worker who proudly performs his work every day for 20 or 30 years. When he goes out with friends or colleagues, he is proud of belonging to this industry. But suddenly, after 20 or 25 years of service, he is told that his friend was hired because of a labour dispute.

Respect and dignity must be preserved. It is difficult to predict the impact this will have on these individuals. Even after the dispute is resolved, deep scars remain. The sense of belonging this worker may have had in the beginning is compromised, and it will remain so until he retires. Why? Because he lost his dignity and his trust in his employer, who failed to negotiate with him on an equal footing.

Here are some figures to think about concerning this bill. As I indicated, there has been anti-scab legislation in Quebec since 1977. There are statistics and figures, and these are tangible figures. In 1976, the average number of working days lost was 39.4. In 1979, it fell to 32.8 and, in 2001, it was 27.4 days. One can see the difference such legislation makes.

British Columbia has had anti-scab legislation since 1993. Since 1993, the amount of time lost to strikes dropped by 50%. I have more figures that speak for themselves. From 1992 to 2002, the average number of days of work lost under the Quebec Labour Code was 15.9. Under the Canada Labour Code, the figure is 31.1 days. That is twice as many.

The dispute at Vidéotron alone, which lasted 10 months, resulted in 355,340 days of work lost in Quebec in 2002. That is one third of all days of work lost because of a strike or lock-out in Quebec in 2002. Productivity is tangible stuff.

At Sécur, 43,400 days of work were lost. These figures do not tell the whole story, but they are troubling enough to force the government to seriously consider this important issue.

Coming back to Vidéotron, we have heard testimony from workers who were affected by the dispute. Once the dispute was over, workers went back to work and told me it was not over in their

hearts; they told me they would never be able to regain their former productivity because they had lost this feeling of pride.

There was another dispute at Secur. As I said earlier, the dispute at Cargill lasted three years. Workers at Radio-Nord Communications also went on strike. All of these disputes lasted a long time and had a negative impact on Quebec society, but also on the personal lives of the workers.

Members will remember that the minister tried to find arguments to demonstrate that the employers did not want anti-scab legislation. She even said that the unions were also against such legislation.

We met with the president of the FTQ, Mr. Massé, and told him what the minister had said. He sent a letter to the minister in which he asked for an apology, but I guess she forgot all about that.

As we can tell by all the work that was done, the tour and the 46,000 signatures that were gathered, people in Quebec really want anti-scab legislation. We also have the support of the Canadian Labour Congress and all of the unions in Canada. They are all unanimous.

Lastly, I want to say that the people in my riding of Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay are hard workers. Solidarity is a big issue for them.

I also want to remind everyone that the member opposite voted against the proposal and the workers will not soon forget it.

• (1825)

[English]

Mr. Stan Dromisky (Thunder Bay—Atikokan, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to join the debate on this bill.

The issue of replacement workers is a controversial one and one that can be guaranteed to generate debate wherever it is introduced. However, anyone who knows the labour policy file, knows that it is virtually impossible to achieve consensus on this issue. Typically, employers and their representatives have one point of view and just as typically, employees and the unions have an opposing point of view. That is only natural.

Bill C-328 represents only one of these points of view, and that is the union side. However, I feel the government has to bring a balanced perspective to this issue, such as it did when it made the changes to the Canada Labour Code in 1999. At that time, the government consulted widely with representatives of employees and employers as well as many professional consultants who were familiar with labour policy issues. It was clear then that there were two opposing points of view on the question of prohibiting the use of replacement workers under the Canada Labour Code.

It is clear that no consensus position or compromise looks likely today. Therefore, the balanced approach to a legislative solution, which the government introduced in 1999, is still the right approach to deal with this issue today.

Private Members' Business

The current provisions of part I of the Canada Labour Code mean that the employers in the federal jurisdiction are not strictly prohibited from using replacement workers during times of work stoppage, but rather that their use of such workers is subject to clear constraints. For example, replacement workers cannot be used to thwart the legitimate bargaining objectives of a union during a legal strike or lockout. Thus, employers are provided with some flexibility to use replacement workers to continue operating, but they cannot engage in unfair labour practices.

This balanced approach to the issue of replacement worker legislation was debated actively, with great vim and vitality, and agreed to finally by this House in 1999. Since then it has been accepted as a practical reality by most parties governed by the Canada Labour Code, not everyone but most.

By advocating for a prohibition on the use of replacement workers during work stoppages, Bill C-328 would upset this balanced approach. It would reopen a divisive debate that took place during the time leading up to amendments in the Canada Labour Code in 1999. We do not think that is the way to go.

As it is now, well over 90% of the workplace disputes under the Canada Labour Code are settled without a strike or lockout. Therefore, in the overwhelming majority of cases the question of replacement workers is not even an issue because there is no work stoppage and no need to replace striking or locked out workers. As well, most employers that fall under federal jurisdiction would not use outside replacement workers during strikes or lockouts, in any case, because they would use members from the non-bargaining units or management.

Thus, for the over 700,000 workers under the jurisdiction of the Canada Labour Code, the question of replacement workers is not likely to be a major concern. Of course, there are many other employees in Canada who are not subject to the Canada Labour Code.

I think it is important to remind members of the House that jurisdiction for labour legislation in Canada is shared between the federal and provincial governments.

This is extremely important. Close to 90% of Canadian workers, for example, are governed by provincial labour legislation and some provinces do have a legislated ban on the use of replacement workers. For instance, we know Quebec has had such legislation in place since the 1970s and British Columbia since 1993. Ontario brought in replacement worker legislation in 1993, but it was repealed in 1995.

● (1830)

Even though the Canadian way is to share jurisdiction for labour legislation between federal and provincial governments, we all share a common vision. That shared vision is to promote fair, safe, healthy, stable, cooperative and productive work environments, work environments that contribute to the social and economic well-being of all.

On a personal note I must say that I know the value of unions. Through the negotiating process they have played a major role in uplifting the quality of life and enhancing the lifestyles of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. I have had the experience. I have been

on the picket line. I know what it means to be in a position to fight for one's rights.

A study on the impact of the ban on replacement workers in these provincial jurisdictions was performed in 1999. It provides us with some interesting findings to consider in the context of this debate.

The researchers found that legislation prohibiting the use of replacement workers could actually prolong work shortages. In the study for example, they show the effect of a ban on replacement workers was to prolong strikes by 31.6 days. They also found that prohibition on replacement workers correlated to an increase in the incidence of strikes. Let me say that a different way. This study found that a ban on the use of replacement workers meant not only longer strikes, but also more of them.

Findings like these raise challenging questions for those who hold the view that a ban on the use of replacement workers will improve the labour management relations climate. In fact, this study on replacement worker legislation suggests the opposite might be true. By the way, the study was done for the September 1999 issue of the "Labour Law Journal" and is entitled "The impacts of strike and replacement bans in Canada".

The point is that there are different opinions on this question. That is why the compromise approach that we currently have in place under part I of the Canada Labour Code is the right one. It does not support one side or the other as Bill C-328 does. It works to balance the rights of workers to protect their interests during legal work stoppages. At the same time, it allows employers some flexibility to continue to operate.

This is an issue that the government has considered very carefully on a number of occasions. It is one that remains of ongoing interest. It is not a matter that the government believes requires specific new legislative action at this time. Therefore, we do not support Bill C-328.

● (1835)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this bill, which is a bill to ban the use of replacement workers. I will not support the bill because it deals with only one very small problem area to do with the much broader workplace disruption problem. We have to look at the whole issue. I will do that in my presentation.

I heard the passionate speech from the Bloc MP. The use of replacement workers is a very emotional issue. I can understand why that kind of emotion is there. However, we should look at and deal with the broader problem.

The member of the Liberal government who just spoke talked about the balanced approach. The balanced approach that he talked about has not solved any problems. In fact that so-called balanced approach is only tinkering with a system that simply does not work.

Private Members' Business

I would like the House to take a look at the whole system of strikes and lockouts. That system itself is flawed. The system of work stoppages quite frankly causes too much pain and human suffering. That pain and human suffering was talked about by the Bloc member who spoke about the use of replacement workers, so-called scab workers, and what it can do to a community. That is very real. That is why the system has to be replaced with something that does work much better and which leads to much less pain and human suffering.

A strike, a lockout or a labour disruption of any kind is extremely hard on workers. I have been very fortunate in my life in that I have never been out of work for a very long time at all. I have known people who have been and I know how difficult it is to live through a time of unemployment. It is extremely difficult. The families of the workers suffer immeasurably in some cases, particularly if it is a strike of the length mentioned by the Bloc member of Parliament, three years. I have seen strikes go on for that long as well. It can lead to deep divisions and untold suffering within a family.

I have also seen strikes that have led to the destruction of whole communities. In some cases they have actually led to whole communities being closed down. They never are revived. It is the end of those communities. That has happened on many occasions across the country when it is a one industry small community. It is extremely unfortunate.

There are also the unintended consequences of strikes and lockouts. I come from a grain farm background. When I grew up on the farm we had cattle and various other types of livestock as well. After university I bought a grain farm. I still have the grain farm but someone else is farming it obviously. It is done on a crop share basis, so I still pay very close attention to the industry.

Coming from that background I saw time after time where farmers paid a dear price as a result of a strike or a lockout involving 20 to 30 workers. Most often those 20 to 30 workers were at the terminal where the ships were loaded. Time after time farmers had no say at the bargaining table. They were completely left out. They were truly captive shippers. They suffered. Many of them lost their farms as a result of a strike or a lockout of those 20 to 30 people. A system like that quite frankly is not working.

There is a better system. Over the years the Canadian Alliance has proposed a system of final offer selection arbitration. Under that system there would never be a work stoppage. The collective bargaining process would truly be allowed to go on to a successful conclusion in every case without having a strike or a lockout. Labour certainly would not lose any power under that system. The companies would not lose any power under that system. Everybody would win under the system. I will try to explain the system in the couple of minutes I have.

● (1840)

When it is approaching a year or six months before the end of a contract, labour and management each present their offers. Negotiation goes on in these offers. The negotiations may have been taking place all along, since the time of the last agreement. When it comes down to the crunch time, the last year to six months before the deadline when the agreement will no longer be in place, the arbiter would become involved.

The arbiter would ask for a final best offer from each group. Labour would put forth its final offer and management, the company, would put forth its final offer. The job of the arbiter is not to mix and match. It has caused a lot of problems when an arbiter or a mediator gets involved and tries to mix and match. Often no one ends up with a very acceptable solution.

When a final offer is given by each group, they know that the whole thing will either be accepted or rejected. Labour on the one hand and management on the other hand know that their offers will be either completely accepted or rejected. Offers usually will be very close together. The arbiter's job is to choose all of one or all of the other.

Under that system there is never a strike or a lockout. There is never the pain that goes along with a work stoppage, with a three year strike. There would never be the destruction of a community coming from a work stoppage which allows that kind of devastation and really forces a company to close down or forces labour to give up and go somewhere else.

This system truly respects the concept and the process of collective bargaining. At the same time issues, like the use of scab workers, are no longer issues. The kind of pain that has been talked about tonight by the Bloc member and before by other members resulting from the use of scab workers is eliminated. It simply is not an issue. That is a much better and much more sensible way of dealing with the problem.

I encourage the member who produced the bill to present another bill to the House of Commons proposing the use of final offer selection arbitration. I know that bill would be supported by this party because we proposed it in the past. It is something that many people in the unions, and even union leaders who hesitate, say that in reality it would make good sense. Many even in the labour union leadership say that it is a much more practical way of dealing with these very difficult situations.

I will not be supporting the bill, but if the member is serious about wanting to end the serious and unacceptable situations that arise from work stoppages, I encourage the member to bring forth a bill outlining a proposal for final offer selection arbitration. I along with many in my caucus certainly would be willing to work with the member if there are modifications needed. We could come up with a solution that would put to bed forever the kind of ugly strikes and lockouts that have occurred so often across the country.

● (1845)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska, PC): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate the Bloc member for Laurentides on her work. She has made us aware of the need for balanced labour relations, not only in Quebec but in Canada. This balance must be achieved.

Quebec's experience should serve as an example. Once again, Quebec is a model for labour relations in Canada.

Private Members' Business

My Progressive Conservative colleague, the hon. member for St. John's East and our party's critic on the Canada Labour Code, made a speech in the House in support of the Bloc member's efforts. I support this, and the Progressive Conservative Party supports this interesting, constructive and positive bill.

Perhaps I am not objective when it comes to this bill; my hon. colleague from Newfoundland and Labrador was more objective than I. I am from Asbestos. Those who know their history, particularly Quebec history, will remember that 1949 was the asbestos strike in Asbestos. A lot of things happened during that strike.

The Jean Marchands and the Pierre Trudeaus of this world intervened, particularly the latter; he started to be visible because it could be good publicity. He did not do much, unlike Mr. Marchand, but in any case, he came to tour Asbestos.

The scabs were the main problem during the strike of 1949 in Asbestos. I am not going to call them "strikebreakers" or "replacement workers"; they were scabs. There were fights, and the provincial police were there. People suffered. It took years to strike a balance between the workers and the employers. Several laws were adopted in Quebec, but in 1977, a balance was achieved.

Things evolved on the federal scene, as my hon. Liberal colleague said too, but not enough. The principle behind labour relations is bargaining power. The employer and the worker both have to participate. Any interference between these two powers is illegitimate in my view.

The possibility of using replacement workers or scabs creates interference between the partners. The worst thing I heard this evening was from my Alliance colleague. He said that, ultimately, there is no need for unions or even employers, since an adjudicator will decide. Where is the bargaining power?

It would be like an election campaign, but without an election. We have a list of candidates from the left, from the right, from the centre, from above and from below, and an arbitrator will decide who will be the member of Parliament. There must be bargaining power, there must be a way to prove that workers are being had. Even the employer must prove to these workers that he is in a difficult situation and that there needs to be compromise.

This bill has been introduced several times in the House. Perhaps we should ensure that any interference is removed in the Canada Labour Code. I know that there would be concerns about the reaction if there was a debate on the Labour Code. My Liberal colleague said so. I understand that, when there is a debate on an issue, everything is open for discussion. I understand that.

However, a scab interferes with labour relations. This leads to absolutely nothing except animosity. Some will say that the company maintains production elements that are necessary to its revival and competitiveness. I am sorry, but I did not read the report that my Liberal colleague talked about. I will read it quickly, but if I look at the Quebec experience, this is absolutely not the case.

Some will say that, in the cities, plants have closed because of strikes. I would presume that they would still have closed, but to the detriment of workers.

The other important element when we remove the interference is that we ensure that things function well.

• (1850)

Take the example of the essential services council. It makes sure that the employer and workers provide basic services to the public and clients. It is not a perfect system, but it keeps labour relations clean, while at the same time protecting collective interests during negotiations. It works well.

Of course there are consequences for the company's clients and for the public. That is bargaining power; without it, what is the point? Consequently, the bill before us gives us an opportunity to refine the Canada Labour Code and to send a message to the provinces that there is no room for scabs in Canada.

I would like to digress a little. In Asbestos, the strike took place in 1949. The only people who got married during the asbestos strike in Asbestos were scabs, because everyone else was starving.

In mining towns like mine, we celebrate what we call jubilees. When someone has worked at the mine for 25 years they receive a watch. There is a party with all their friends and the company, which is often American, picks up the beer tab. In Asbestos, as elsewhere, we celebrate 25 years of marriage. Vows are renewed and there is a big party at the church. It is a big celebration. Twenty five years after the strike of 1949, there were no celebrations because they were all scabs.

Still today, when a scab passes away, the only people at the funeral home are the priest and a few members of the Knights of Columbus to pray for the scab's soul. This shows that the wounds run deep. There was also interference at the time. There was also Maurice Duplessis, but that is another issue.

The bill states that we will be cleaning up, but at the same time, if we want to introduce other elements relating to essential services, we can do so. There is no problem. However, the ultimate objective is really to clean up labour relations and to maintain the existing bargaining power, the lock-outs and the strikes. No advantage will be given to one side over the other. We will rather remove an advantage from the employer by prohibiting scabs. I agree with that. Labour relations will improve. Quebec's experience is there to prove it.

I come from a unionized city. I am a member of the Progressive Conservative Party. There is a good balance. I applaud the work that has been done and I congratulate my caucus. We all know that this is not easy to do. In our caucus, people say "Yes, but we have to pay attention to how things are perceived." The idea is simply to standardize labour relations that come under federal jurisdiction. I do not see why we would hesitate to review legislation if there are elements in it that need to be improved.

I had a small discussion with the minister of Labour. I certainly do not want to make her feel uncomfortable, but her colleague from the government party was also repeating the same arguments. I believe that we should not be afraid of a confrontation or an discussion between the various stakeholders concerning the Canada Labour Code. We still have to challenge some ideas to be able to choose the best ones. As for the bill being debated today, I urge all members to support it. This will send a very clear message to those who need it and who work in companies under federal jurisdiction. It will also reassure the companies under federal jurisdiction, by letting them know that this bill will ensure the balance so sought after by the government.

• (1855)

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, on behalf of working people everywhere I wish to extend our sincere gratitude and thanks to the member for Laurentides for the work that she has done in bringing this issue to the floor of the House of Commons today. Let me also recognize the member for Richmond—Arthabaska for his very sensitive remarks and for his keen understanding of this complex issue.

It may come as no surprise that I, as a member of the NDP caucus, fully support anti-scab legislation and fully support the work that the member for Laurentides has done over the years to bring this issue forward. In my own personal background, I too worked in the asbestos mines as a young man and went on to become the leader of the carpenters union for the Province of Manitoba. I have negotiated dozens of collective agreements over the years and I know something about the issues of collective bargaining, work stoppages and the right to strike.

My colleague with me today, the member for Acadie—Bathurst, is a former business manager for the United Steelworkers of America, representing the largest mine in his region of New Brunswick. The two of us understand this issue thoroughly, passionately, and we understand the need for this legislation because we have witnessed the result of not having anti-scab legislation.

There are some fundamental issues regarding working people that we can all hopefully agree on. Workers have the right to organize into unions. I do not think there is any disagreement there.

Workers have the right to free collective bargaining as the only way to elevate their working and living conditions. Workers have the right to withhold their services when that collective bargaining process reaches an impasse. It is the most civilized, non-violent way to exert some economic pressure on the employer in order to benefit the employees.

I would like to add a fourth issue, which is that workers have the right to withhold their services and not have to worry about some other scabs eating their lunch while they are exercising their right to withhold their services. That is the fundamental issue that the member from the Bloc is bringing to our attention today.

There are good and compelling reasons why there should be anti-scab legislation. First, empirical evidence shows that there are fewer days lost to strikes and lockouts when there is anti-scab legislation because employees can apply economic pressure on the employer.

Private Members' Business

Strikes go on and on when scabs do the work and keep the plant running, even running at half speed.

Second, there is less and almost no likelihood of violence breaking out in the case of a work stoppage. Violence occurs in a strike or lockout when people cross the picket line to take the lunch away from the workers who have undertaken a work stoppage, to take their jobs away, and to take food off their families' tables. That is when tempers burst out.

As my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst and I have both witnessed and been in the middle of, that is when fists start flying and violence breaks out. That does not happen with anti-scab legislation. It turns a picket line into an information picket line because there is no risk of scabs or non-union workers taking the jobs of employees during the middle of a work stoppage.

There are good moral and ethical reasons why we should pass laws to prohibit strikebreakers, non-union workers and scabs from taking the jobs of workers when they are out on strike.

There are also good economic reasons. It reduces the number of days lost to work stoppages and reduces the incidents of violence during those work stoppages. Those are two good compelling reasons.

The only argument I heard from the Liberal side is that we do not want to reopen the Canada Labour Code again because we just went through that exercise with Bill C-19 in 1999. I agree, but we did not finish the job during that process.

• (1900)

All the players involved in amending the Canada Labour Code in 1999 are fully aware that we left the anti-scab provisions only partially finished. Yes, we introduced the concept of anti-scab legislation into the Canada Labour Code in 1999, but it is painfully weak. It puts the onus on the employees to prove that the company is using scabs to undermine their union and their bargaining rights. The onus, the burden of proof, is on the employees. That is 180 degrees wrong. This bill seeks to remedy that.

I do not accept those fears as an argument. The arguments from the Canadian Alliance are entirely specious and indicate that its members simply do not understand modern industrial labour relations.

We have had a grain farmer lecture us on industrial labour relations in regard to final offer selection. I have lived in a jurisdiction where final offer selection was the law. As a union leader, I have used final offer selection a number of times.

FOS exists as an option. It is a form of third party binding arbitration that the two parties can enter into at any time they want. They do not need legislative changes to do that. But it is riddled with flaws. It is fundamentally useless when it comes to dealing with work rules and non-monetary issues. How would we ever get a day care centre in a workplace as a negotiated benefit using FOS? It is not a practical solution to the complex work rules that exist in most workplaces today and it tells me that somebody on that side has never really seen a collective bargaining process in action.

Private Members' Business

Madam Speaker, I know I only have a few minutes. Let me just close by saying I fully appreciate the sincere work that the member from the Bloc, the member for Laurentides, has done. She has done hard work for many years. It is to our benefit to have her fighting on behalf of working people in this country.

What works in Quebec will work in the rest of Canada. There is no good reason why the people in the federal jurisdiction of Quebec should not have the same benefits as people working in the federal jurisdiction elsewhere. We should share those same standards of fairness and we should all have modern anti-scab legislation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ghislain Fournier (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this bill. It is a subject that is very dear to my heart, both as a member of Parliament as an activist in an area where major strikes have disrupted the social and economic life of an entire region.

In a technologically and socially advanced society like ours, an anti-scab law is a necessity. It is not a luxury. The bill before us concerning labour relations in conflict situations is of the utmost importance not only to many workers in my riding, of course, but also to all workers in Quebec and in Canada.

Work is the foundation of society. Thus, workers deserve our full respect. In the minds of everyone, the right to strike is very important. It is their last resort in order to achieve better working conditions, job security and improved living conditions. When workers have got to the point where they go on strike and voluntarily deprive themselves of income, there is a serious problem in labour relations. Because it has been admitted that employers are often the cause of these problems, the right to strike has been recognized and the rights involved must protect the employee, not just the employer.

Having been a union president for close to ten years—of the labour council—I have seen all manner of labour disputes. Ordinary hard-working citizens fought a tough battle for the right to strike, but common sense finally prevailed and that right is now one of the advantages of the democracy we have heard so much about in recent months.

The labour code recognizes that right, as does the Public Service Staff Relations Act. Who then has the right to do away with it? Do we parliamentarians have the right to do away with something so precious, the only weapon workers have to ensure they can work in dignity? Yet this is something that happens frequently, because there is a legal void in the law. Provisions are needed to prevent employers from making use of replacement workers, who are essentially outlaws as far as I am concerned. The only way to remedy this shortcoming, in my opinion, is to have anti-scab legislation.

It is not a matter of holding a gun to employers' heads, far from it. It is a tool to ensure compliance with the law. Nor is it a luxury in a society such as ours. Once again, it is a necessity. Labour cannot be held up as valuable with the one hand, and then hampered in its progress by the other. History has proven this, in a number of Canadian provinces as well as in Quebec. Shocking things have happened because of this void. My colleagues have made reference to such events throughout this debate. Many examples have been given, including the recent situation with Vidéotron. How many such

problems could have been avoided with anti-scab legislation? How much worry, suffering, and financial loss could have been avoided?

When I think of my own region, I think of something my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay has already mentioned: the pointless strike at Cargill which lasted 36 months. Imagine. Replacement workers are not a solution, they are a calamity. It is unrealistic to see them as any protection for employers.

A strike that is gotten around by the use of replacement workers is a strike that drags on for a very long time. It is a situation that takes a heavy toll on both parties, when they ought to be concentrating on making peace, not war.

● (1905)

I believe that it causes a lot of trouble. In my region, I have seen brothers who stopped talking to each other. I have seen families on the verge of collapsing and I have seen a society go from harmony to chaos because of this legal vacuum that should have been filled a long time ago.

In my riding, I have the case of the Quebec North Shore and Labrador, QNS & L railway, and the Iron Ore company. Iron Ore employees are protected by the Quebec code; I believe they are very well protected. Workers of the Quebec North Shore and Labrador are protected by the Canada Labour Code. Thus, there is a huge legal vacuum.

I will try to conclude quickly in the three minutes I have left.

I will thus recommend the Quebec legislation, which has a good track record; there is also the Ontario or the British Columbia legislation. I think that my colleagues mentioned them. The legislation in effect in these three provinces has proven, beyond any doubt, that the tendency to incorporate the principle of banning the use of replacement workers to do the job of people on strike is gaining ground, both at the management and the union level. Where this principle is in effect, it is well accepted and well integrated.

I must insist and draw the attention of the House to the fact that, tomorrow, we will be called to vote, and show dignity and respect for and recognition of the workers.

Will the members of this House be able to leave with their heads held high, if they violate this right of workers. Tomorrow will be a historic day, not only for Quebec, but for all workers in this country. It is a very important day for society, and I thank my colleague, the hon. member for Laurentides, for having done such a great job.

I want to ask all the members to vote in favour of this bill tomorrow, because not doing so would be a slap in the face of the workers and an indication that they come second.

I trust that tomorrow the members will vote in favour of this anti-scab legislation.

● (1910)

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will take the five minutes available to me because I still have a lot of things to say about this bill.

Private Members' Business

First, I must thank all those who will be supporting this bill and have said so in the House today. I want to thank them and tell them how happy I am that they have understood the need and usefulness of anti-scab legislation.

I heard comments tonight that made my ears turn red, as we would say in Quebec. I heard people say that it is an emotional debate. Of course it is an emotional debate, but there is more to it than that. When people lose their jobs for ten months and are without income, it certainly becomes an emotional debate. But it is also a debate about fairness and logic.

What my bill is trying to achieve is to give employees an opportunity to negotiate fairly with their employers. There must be a balance between the two sides, one that currently does not exist. Everyone knows that there are no real anti-scab provisions in the Canada Labour Code.

It is not strictly an emotional debate, therefore, but a debate on fairness and economics. Imagine being one of 1,000 employees at a major company to lose your job. Most companies under federal jurisdiction are large companies. These people do not help the economy, because they are unable to spend. They end up in poverty and, at the end of the day, the government has to support them when they are penniless. They go on welfare, end up in poverty and their health declines. These are immeasurable social costs and that is important. There are economic problems and problems of fairness.

I would like to point out that I have been the labour critic for my party since 1999. This is the third time I have opened this debate. This time, we will vote on the bill and we will do so tomorrow. Tomorrow we will see who has compassion and respect for workers. Tomorrow we will see which members have the courage to vote in favour of anti-scab legislation.

We are not talking about the economic costs. I know the labour minister has written to all Liberal members asking them not to support this anti-scab bill. She said that part I of the Canada Labour Code has already been reviewed in 1999 and that the unions were pleased with the outcome.

The President of the FTQ wrote personally to the minister to ask her to withdraw her remarks and apologize. It is not true that we do not want an anti-scab legislation, on the contrary.

It is not because part I of the Canada Labour Code was reviewed in 1999 that we should say the matter is closed, and we should not talk about it any more. Come on. We are here to change things. Our role as parliamentarians is to improve legislation, improve the Canada Labour Code, improve the lot of Canadians, Quebeckers, and workers. They are the ones who support the government, and they should benefit from their government. I feel the current situation is unfair.

Earlier, my Liberal colleague said something that upset me again. He said this is not that important, because not too many people are under the Canada Labour Code. He should be ashamed to say such a thing.

The issue is much bigger than this. It is a matter of respect, and the time has come for that. In Quebec, the issue was settled 25 years ago. We respect our workers. What I am striving to do, as a Quebecker, is to allow people in Quebec and the rest of Canada who work for businesses under federal jurisdiction to get this respect and to negotiate fairly with their employers. It is that simple. The government will not have to spend a single penny. All that is needed from it is a strong political desire to do this.

• (1915)

I hope that when we vote tomorrow, we will find out that the hon. members do have the political desire to do so and support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakapanos): It being 7:17 p.m., the time reserved for this debate has expired. Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakapanos): All those in favour of the motion. Will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakapanos): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakapanos): In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakapanos): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division on the motion stands deferred until Wednesday, October 22, 2003, at the end of government orders.

[English]

It being 7:17 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:17 p.m.)

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