



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 139 • NUMBER 011 • 3rd SESSION • 37th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, February 16, 2004

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 16, 2004

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

• (1100)

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 81(14), to inform the House that the motion to be considered tomorrow during consideration of the business of supply is as follows:

That, in the opinion of this House, the Liberal government has and continues to nurture a culture of corruption through the abuse of its influence and the use of public funds for personal benefit and to benefit friends, family and the Liberal Party of Canada.

The motion, standing in the name of the hon. member for Macleod, is votable.

Copies of the motion are available at the table.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

FINAL OFFER ARBITRATION IN RESPECT OF WEST COAST PORTS OPERATIONS ACT

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, CPC) moved that Bill C-312, an act to provide for the settlement of labour disputes affecting west coast ports by final offer arbitration, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, first let me congratulate you on your appointment as Acting Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole. I believe you will do a great job.

Work disruptions at west coast ports have become economically devastating to Canada's economy over the last 30 years. I would like to point out that agriculture has just come through two years of drought and seven months of BSE. Agriculture is absolutely devastated. If agriculture continues to suffer losses unnecessarily and people cannot get their goods to market, there will be a tremendous impact on the entire Canadian economy through a virtual collapse of the western Canadian agricultural economy.

From time to time we have disruptions at west coast ports. The way Parliament deals with this inevitably is through back to work legislation. Of course, back to work legislation does nothing to improve labour management relations or to resolve the outstanding issues. This is a tool that I think can be used equally by both parties, management and labour unions, to settle disagreements.

Some of the critics of the bill have said that it unduly harms labour in that it takes away their right to strike. I would like to point out to them that it takes away the need to strike. There is no need to strike if people can arrive at a negotiated settlement. It also takes away the ability of management to lockouts. It is a fair tool to be used in both situations.

It is something that agriculture needs. It is like a right of spring. Every year we can count on some kind of labour disruption happening at the west coast ports that tie up farmers' grain and other things that are especially significant to Canada's economy.

Part I of the Canada Labour Code does allow for the continuation of grain shipments from the port during a strike or lockout but that only applies to grain that is actually in the port. It has no effect on grain that is arriving at the port or even just a couple of miles away from the port on the train. That is really what the bill would resolve. It would empty the terminal. That is all it would do. There might be enough grain to load part of a ship but there will certainly not be enough grain to have an impact on farmers' livelihoods.

What we are trying to do is come up with a resolution, something that will resolve the dispute that will encourage both sides to bargain in earnest. If final offer selection is used to its ultimate conclusion, the result will be that there will be no need for a strike, that work can continue on and that both sides can continue to negotiate. If they come to an impasse, then they list all the things they agree on, all the things they do not agree on and they agree on an arbiter who takes the final offer and the things that are not agreed upon.

This looks to me like a fairly reasonable compromise. It seems in Canada one of the things we do is compromise. The whole idea behind this is to force a settlement to prevent being locked out or having to strike. I cannot for the life of me believe that anyone would enjoy going on strike or being locked out, or being an employer in a position where it feels that its only alternative is to lock out its employees. I do not think that is anybody's first choice.

Private Members' Business

•(1110)

Final offer selection puts the onus on both parties to bargain earnestly and honestly and to arrive at a solution.

I think it is interesting to point out that the Canadian government has imposed final offer selection arbitration while it has settled a dispute. It settles a dispute and says we will come back to Parliament. Parliament has even been recalled in order to pass back to work legislation. Part of the back to work legislation, from time to time, has been final offer selection. Workers are ordered back to work and have no choice but to go back to work and put the final offer on the table; matters were settled that way. I would not think that anyone in the government would have any problem supporting this measure today, because it is something it has used in the past.

We are certainly not trying to take anything away from the unions' right to negotiate or to arrive at a good deal, a deal that will satisfy everybody. We are not trying to short-circuit the method here. What we are encouraging is sincere negotiations and negotiations that come to a conclusion. If they do not come to a conclusion, there will be a mechanism put in place to make sure that an agreement is eventually reached.

A big beneficiary of this is the economy of the country, and certainly agriculture, in that the west coast port continues to operate while negotiations go on.

The last time we had a work disruption at the west coast port, it cost us in the neighbourhood of \$90 million a day. It is always hard to nail down exactly what these sorts of things cost us in the long run as far as future sales are concerned or customer confidence or any of that. Just in direct costs it was estimated that it cost the Canadian economy \$90 million a day. At a time when western farmers have gone through two serious years of drought and have had to sell off their herds at bargain basement prices because of BSE problems, I would suggest that this is a timely piece of legislation which we should consider and pass so that farmers have one less thing to worry about.

I have presented the bill in the House before. I am pleased to see that under the new rules the bill will now be votable. I have not been successful in the past in making my case to have the bill votable. Now it is going to be, so I encourage all members of the House to support this initiative to make sure that the grain movement at the west coast ports has an opportunity to flow and that the people who produce that grain have an opportunity to sell their goods.

Western Canadian grain farmers have been hit time and time again with strikes. Usually it is at a time of the year when they are trying to empty their bins to get ready for seeding that there is some kind of work disruption. Either the employer locks out the employees or the workers decide to, as they say, wobble the job. The result is that workers have to go on strike pay, the employer has to try to get by using managerial staff to load the ships, and the person who really gets hit in the neck over all of this is the producer.

•(1115)

This is a bill that is fair. It gives everyone an opportunity to negotiate. They can even negotiate while the work is carrying on. There would be no work disruption, no loss of revenue to those people who are employed there, no loss of revenue to the port

authority, no demurrage charged unnecessarily against the producers, and the producers would have an opportunity to get their grain to market, get it onto the ship and onto the high seas.

In a hungry world, I think it is important that we consider this bill. Also, I point out that the farmers in western Canada are getting a bit hungry these days as well in the way that things have shaped up against them from December until now. Cattle prices in Alberta have declined by almost 50%. There are many people who are hurting very badly over this. We do not need to compound the problem as a result of not taking some responsible action in the west coast ports.

I look forward to hearing what my colleagues have to say in this regard. Again, I encourage them to support western Canadian agriculture and to support the bill to resolve west coast ports disputes.

Mrs. Judi Longfield (Whitby—Ajax, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to join in this debate on Bill C-312. The bill proposes that the Minister of Labour be given the power to impose severe constraints on the use of the collective bargaining process in Canada's west coast ports. The impact of this bill's passage would be to take away the right to strike, as well as the employer's right to lock out employees, and then to impose a winner takes all settlement process from the outside.

I do not support this bill. Its provisions are contrary to the principles of the Canada Labour Code and it fails to provide the flexibility needed to deal with the kind of complex labour negotiations that are typical in Canada's west coast ports. For example, clause 4 of the bill states that:

Notwithstanding the provisions of the Canada Labour Code, where the Minister is of the opinion that a strike or lockout in a west coast port poses an immediate and substantial threat to the economy of Canada, or to the national interest, the Minister may, by order,

- (a) suspend the right to strike or lockout in that port; and
- (b) when a strike or lockout has occurred, direct the employer to resume operations and the employees to return to work, as the case may be.

Clause 5 of the bill provides that when such an order is issued, the minister shall also give notice that "the dispute is to be settled" by a process known as "final offer arbitration", or what is also called final offer selection. These are strong powers and they are not consistent with the spirit of the Canada Labour Code or the tradition of labour negotiations that has evolved in Canada over the years.

The Minister of Labour has said on many occasions that the best way to settle workplace disputes is to encourage the parties to find the solution that best meets their particular needs. The minister can facilitate this approach by providing a conciliator or a mediator, for example, but the objective aims to help the parties toward a shared solution, not to impose one from the outside. Experience shows that this approach works. In recent years, 95% of workplace disputes under the Canada Labour Code have been resolved without a work stoppage. It is not always easy to keep operations going while working toward a negotiated settlement, but clearly it is possible.

Our position maintains that the role of the Minister of Labour should not be to impose solutions in cases of labour disputes, and especially not to impose a process that would pick one side or the other in a dispute such as this bill proposes to do.

Private Members' Business

Instead, the minister's role should be to provide the kind of support that will move the parties toward a negotiated solution, such as the Minister of Labour provided in a recent case in west coast ports.

In the case of the Waterfront Foremen Employers Association of British Columbia and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, Local 514, for example, a mediator appointed by the Minister of Labour was able to help the two sides come to a settlement in a long-standing dispute late last year.

Earlier in 2003, the B.C. Maritime Employers Association and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union resolved the renewal of their collective agreement in direct negotiations.

Complex negotiations like these call for flexibility in arriving at solutions that meet the needs of both employers and employees.

The final offer selection approach proposed in Bill C-312 would remove that flexibility and instead impose an arbitrary solution that would favour one side over the other. We do not believe the final offer selection approach is the right one for complex labour negotiations such as those involving the west coast ports.

Now let us examine more closely the final offer selection process. Typically, final offer selection requires one party to prepare a final offer for resolution of all outstanding issues in a dispute. The two sides then submit their final offer to an arbitrator or selector. The selector is then required to choose the complete package from one side or the other, either the union's final offer or the employer's.

There could be variations in the process, but the model is based on the selector being obliged to choose the final proposed solution of one party or another. This approach might have some merit in cases where there is only a single economic issue, such as wages, for example.

However, most labour negotiations involve more than a single issue. The issues involved usually go well beyond wages and can include a broad range of matters such as work rules, vacation entitlements, pensions and so on. Negotiating a settlement in situations like this can be tricky. There is usually a lot of back and forth negotiation involved. Flexibility remains a very important aspect of the process.

● (1120)

In the recent cases involving west coast ports, for example, agreements were achieved because a federal employment mediator was able to go in and work with the parties to find common ground and then build from there to find an eventual solution. In cases like this wages may be only one of the issues that come up, but wages are not the most important in some cases.

Final offer selection by definition must pick one side over the other, and it does not allow for negotiations and compromise between parties. In other words, it sets up a process that prevents the trade-off between parties that can be key to achieving overall agreement. In addition, by setting up a process whereby one side in a dispute puts forth its final bargaining position and an arbitrator picks one over the other, the final offer selection approach creates a scenario where there is a clear winner and a clear loser. That is not

usually a good recipe for harmonious workplace relations in a post-settlement period.

I understand the frustration that comes when workplace disputes threaten the economic lives of others, but I do not believe that final offer selection is the way to resolve these situations. In recent workplace experience, Canada's west coast ports achieved a mediation by working together, by one party working with the other to resolve their disputes. Adopting the final offer selection approach would divert us from this tried and true method to dispute labour resolution. This is at the very heart of the Canada Labour Code.

Does it mean that we would deny employers and employees the right to choose final offer selection if they believe it is right for them? No. In fact that option is available to them now. However, as a matter of practical experience, it is rarely used. The fact that parties themselves choose to settle the terms and conditions of work through some process other than final offer selection, when it is an option available to them to choose freely, suggests to us that there is something wrong about the final offer selection that does not meet the needs in terms of an acceptable bargaining process.

The House has considered the issue of mandatory final offer selection before. It seems that these ideas are often brought forward with regard to a particular workplace dispute, but these ideas do not usually develop any momentum in the long run, especially if a negotiated settlement is achieved through using our existing bargaining system.

On the issue of final offer selection, the government's position has been consistent. We do not deny any employer or employee group the right to choose final offer selection if it feels it meets its needs, but I do not see an approach that should be mandated under the Canada Labour Code as desirable. Therefore, I do not support the bill.

● (1125)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment as Assistant Deputy Chair. I remember a trip we took together to Saskatoon, in your riding. I was able to appreciate how much you were recognized by your peers for your work as a member of Parliament. I know that you come from the West and that you have been a member of the Standing Committee on Health. Perhaps your riding does not include Saskatoon, but I remember that we travelled together and that we were in Saskatoon. I have happy memories of that trip.

Private Members' Business

Unfortunately, we cannot support the bill introduced by the Conservative Party's labour critic. It looks to us like a bill that would downplay the role of collective bargaining so necessary in a labour dispute. I think that, if there is any urgent concern before this House with respect to labour relations, it is not to take the right to strike away from the workers. In fact, if the bill were adopted, it could have consequences as extreme as denying the right to strike to workers in west coast ports, and going straight to arbitration, in a nearly mandatory way. I will come back to this point.

With respect to arbitration, we must be extremely careful, because it may induce a bias toward one party or the other. Perhaps mandatory arbitration is, in the final analysis, something desirable, and can be useful if there are only one or two matters at issue, for example, salaries or such things. Still, systematically resorting to it and depriving west coast port workers of the right to free negotiation of their working conditions is not a step the Bloc Québécois is ready to take.

I represent a riding in Montreal, which lies along the river, and the port of Montreal is in my riding. It is clear that very significant economic activity takes place in the port of Montreal, as in all ports. Today we recognize one of the major factors in competitive advantage is the concept of just in time. In the transportation sector, the hon. member is correct in saying that there is a particular sensitivity for the whole sector of ports, railways and trucking. Obviously, since Canada is a continental country, the axes of communication are very important.

However, does this mean that we should sacrifice a principle that has basically produced good results? We must let the two sides negotiate. Sometimes, when negotiations break down, a group must be allowed to exercise its right to strike. What is important is that the whole process be defined.

When I talk about the right to strike, I cannot help but think about Quebec's model. Madam Speaker, I do not know whether you have had opportunities to come to Quebec. Allow me to reiterate my invitation to come to Montreal, in the riding of Hochelaga—Maisonnette. There is no doubt that your presence would not go unnoticed. You are always welcome, and I know how enjoyable your company can be.

The fact is that, in Quebec, limits have been set regarding labour relations. In 1977, the excellent government of the Parti Québécois took significant steps in the area of labour relations. Unless I am mistaken, it was former premier Pierre-Marc Johnson, who was the Minister of Labour at the time. The Quebec government passed anti-scab legislation because, at some point in time, going on strike may become a necessity for an organization. It is always an ultimate recourse. No one wishes to go on strike. This is why the first part of the Labour Code includes mediation, conciliation and arbitration as alternatives. Ultimately, when advance notice is given and the two sides come to the conclusion that, unfortunately, they will not be able to settle their differences, then the right to strike can be exercised.

Exercising that right is an ultimate recourse that carries consequences. These consequences affect primarily the workers, who are not getting paid, their families of course, the employer and, in some cases, the consumers.

● (1130)

However, we are not prepared to sacrifice the right to strike, which is a democratic recourse. The battle that all parliamentarians in this House should wage is the one for anti-scab legislation. That is what the hon. member for Laurentides asked us to do in October, with her bill, which provided a litmus test when parliamentarians voted on it.

Imagine how different things would be in labour relations if the Canada Labour Code included provisions regulating the right to strike and, more importantly, prohibiting the use of scabs. I remember that, shortly after we were elected in 1993, we had to vote on back to work legislation. When ports are affected by a strike and scabs are called in, it is very detrimental to labour relations and it leads to violence.

In this regard, our NDP colleagues righted a historic wrong. In the 1990s, when the hon. member for Richelieu had introduced a bill asking the government to include anti-scab provisions in the code, our NDP colleagues were not there to support the Bloc Québécois. And because they were not there, we have been deprived of anti-scab provisions for a decade, longer in fact since there are still no such provisions.

The NDP righted its wrong, but this is proof of the essential role of the Bloc Québécois in this House. If there is any battle that parliamentarians should fight, it is not that of depriving workers on the west coast of their democratic rights, such as the right to strike under specific conditions, but rather that of implementing anti-scab provisions to provide a framework of civility and a benchmark for the exercise of a democratic right which, without a framework, can result in abuses that no one wants.

For all these reasons, unfortunately, we will not be able to support our colleague's bill. He is a sensitive man. He has often shown his sensitivity here in the House, and it adds to his charm. However, I invite him to consider the consequences of mandatory final offer arbitration, which means supporting the claims of one party or the other. That is what the bill says. It says that, should arbitration be necessary, the arbitrator will select the offer of one party or the other. Consequently, it is not a matter of negotiations or balance or compromise, but favouring one party at the expense of the other.

Unfortunately, this bill does not provide balance. For these reasons, the Bloc Québécois, which is a balanced party that has always had a favourable bias toward the workers, cannot support a bill that, in many respects, threatens industrial and harbour peace in Canada.

Private Members' Business

•(1135)

[English]

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak on private member's Bill C-312, an act to provide for the settlement of labour disputes affecting west coast ports by offering final offer arbitration. The bill has been put before the House this morning by the member for Wetaskiwin.

The legislation says that the Minister of Labour would have the authority, without coming back to the House of Commons for any debate, to suspend the right to strike or lockout in the west coast ports or, where a strike or lockout has occurred to direct the parties back to work. Then, any outstanding settlement differences would be settled by final offer arbitration. The findings of the arbitrator would be binding without recourse to appeal.

I thought the member for Whitby—Ajax explained the shortcomings of the legislation quite well. She pointed out quite clearly that with this kind of a process there is a winner and loser environment that is inevitably created.

I am pleased to speak against Bill C-312 on behalf of the NDP caucus and indeed on behalf of working people across the country.

If there were 100 things that farmers in Canada would be worried about today, final offer arbitration would be 101 on their list of priorities. They have drought, low commodity prices, grasshoppers, mad cow, the fear of genetically modified wheat affecting their ability to export and they have incredibly high input costs. Final offer arbitration is not even on the Richter scale.

The NDP caucus contacted the president of the International Longshoremen's Association when Bill C-312 was coming back for discussion to see if there was something that we had missed in the process, some activity at the west coast ports that would lead to a labour disruption. We found out that, not only is there no strike or lockout being contemplated at the port, but for the first time since 1967, almost 40 years, all agreements between the longshore workers on the west coast and the employers have been negotiated without either a strike or a lockout. This is truly a case of trying to fix something that is not broken.

We are opposed to the bill. We continue to strongly believe that the right to withhold services is a legitimate and peaceful means of protest and has been for centuries. It is one of the most important democratic rights and freedoms of all working people. We are firmly opposed to any legislation that would erode any of these fundamental rights, as the bill certainly would do.

Nowhere in the bill are the parties encouraged to continue meeting to resolve their differences after the final offer arbitration process has begun. It does, as other members have noted, set up a winner and loser situation.

I say to the member who moved Bill C-312 that final offer arbitration may work for hockey and baseball stars who are negotiating whether their contract should be \$8 million or \$10 million. However, it will not work for ordinary people who have a whole lot of other concerns besides the size of the pay packet that they will receive.

I want to remind the mover of the bill that negotiators already have the options, if they so choose jointly, to move to final offer arbitration in any round of bargaining that they see fit. It is another arrow in their quiver. By introducing something like that, the other arrows are being taken out and it is saying that this is the way that the negotiations will continue henceforth.

It has been pointed out many times in the House, including last spring by the Minister of Labour, that almost all negotiations under the jurisdiction of the Canada Labour Code are resolved with no time lost, no strike, no lockout, and no labour unrest whatsoever. About 95% of all collective bargaining agreements are settled peacefully and amicably with both parties getting what they need out of the collective bargaining process.

•(1140)

It is a myth that the country loses significant productivity due to strikes and lockouts. There have been confrontations in the past. Changes sought by producers to address the needs of farmers were made to the Canada Labour Code. Section 87.7 of the Canada Labour Code prohibits secondary picketing at west coast ports.

As members have heard from other members of our caucus in the past, we think that far more time is lost on the job due to workplace accidents, injuries, and illness, than as a result of work stoppages.

We in the NDP are opposed to Bill C-312 for all of the reasons that I outlined. We think it is an imposition on the parties. They need to have more opportunities at their disposal and more arrows in their quiver than this straightjacket of final offer arbitration.

For all of those reasons, the New Democratic Party caucus will oppose Bill C-312.

Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay—Boundary—Okanagan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I get 10 minutes to speak to this bill. I would like to take 10 minutes to speak about the positive attributes of this bill. Unfortunately, it would take 30 minutes just to cover some of the incorrect statements, myths and errors the last three speakers have put forward. I would like to deal with a couple of those. The Liberal member that final offer arbitration is not appropriate for west coast ports.

It is strange. It is her government that actually imposed final offer arbitration as a settlement when it legislated a group back to work, and then attempted to pervert that. The government imposed final offer arbitration but did not allow the two parties to go back to negotiate and develop final offer arbitration or final positions.

It took the previous positions of the two parties which was done under a completely different system and said that is what would go to final offer arbitration. There was no allowance for any further negotiation, and that was fundamentally wrong.

The NDP stated that strikes and lockouts were the methods that have been used for centuries. That is absolutely correct. Is it not time that maybe we grew up a little? This was something that might have been appropriate back in the 1800s when a strike or a lockout was basically an economic tug-of-war between the employer and the employee. It was a battle between them.

Private Members' Business

It was a question of who could afford to go without work or go without work being done the longest? There was little collateral damage to families and maybe some people in the town, but generally it was centralized on the workers in the company.

We are in the 21st century and the impact is so global that now when a relative handful of people on the west coast of Vancouver go on strike, a farmer in Manitoba may lose his farm as a direct result of that strike. We must consider that a lot of other people are affected by this, not just the people involved directly between the employer and the employee.

I have an interesting anecdote for the member of the Bloc Québécois who spoke. I was on transport committee meetings in Halifax several years ago. A member of the Bloc Québécois was there. There was a strike at the port of Montreal during that time, and there was a push to have legislation to have them go back to work. I think there was also a problem with the rail system. But the Halifax people were just beaming.

They said that this was the greatest thing that ever happened to them, because all those ships that used to go down to Montreal were now coming into Halifax. They were just booming. The people were working full scale and the facilities were full. This was economically the greatest thing that ever happened to them. And beyond that, it gave them an opportunity to prove how good a job they could do in handling these shipments.

When the Bloc Québécois member heard this, he disappeared. We never saw him again during the rest of the hearings. He went back and started getting ready to support the motion to get the people in the Montreal port back to work because he suddenly woke up and realized the harm that it was actually doing in his own province.

Sometimes members must open their eyes as well as their ears and realize there is much more to this than taking a partisan type approach to this, from a very stated view, and realize there are much more global problems to be dealt with.

It should be understood that collective bargaining does not involve strikes and lockouts. That is not part of collective bargaining. Collective bargaining involves negotiation, conciliation and mediation. We have no intention to interfere with that whatsoever.

It is interesting that the most recent speaker talked about how final arbitration is already an arrow in the quiver. Well, all those other arrows will still be there as well. They can still settle their negotiations in a variety of different ways. They just cannot have work disruption that would harm not only themselves but a lot of other people as well.

Finally, strikes and lockouts are not part of collective bargaining. They are a dispute settlement mechanism. Actually taking a coin out of a pocket and flipping it, heads it goes one way, tails it goes the other, is a dispute settlement mechanism. It is probably not very appropriate for settling a complex labour negotiation, but that is a dispute settlement mechanism.

We are saying that we need to come up with a 21st century dispute settlement mechanism instead of staying with the 19th century one, as suggested by the NDP.

There are many problems created right now, in terms of the damage it does to workers who have to go without wages and to employers who not only lose revenue during that time but perhaps lose contracts. It has a longstanding impact on the workers as well. Some of them may find, after they return to work, that they are laid off because there are no longer the same amount of contracts being handled.

• (1145)

One of the things that happens with final offer arbitration is parties do still negotiate. What often happens is that it is not a matter of picking one side or the other, it is a matter of seeing how close the two can get together.

I will use wages as one example. If a reasonable increase were \$1.50 an hour, the union wanted \$5 an hour and the company offers \$1, invariably the \$1 would be accepted. That means the union left 50¢ on the table that it rightly should have received. However, if it asks for \$2 and the company is suggesting a new contract with no increase whatsoever, then the union will likely prevail and it will get 50¢ an hour more than it was reasonably entitled to. Both sides know this. Consequently, they tend to move as close to the line as possible and usually they get so close together they manage to settle.

We have heard that there is a 95% settlement without a strike or a lockout. Then the same 95% should be settled without resorting to final offer arbitration.

All we are doing is trying to find a 21st century solution for those few times when the dispute cannot be settled and has to go to some kind of dispute settlement mechanism. It should then go to one that does not harm all the collateral of the people involved as well as the employers and employees.

All the members who have spoken are right, the government has imposed settlement and has forced people back to work through legislation at various times. That suggests that strikes and lockouts do not really work that well, that there is a problem already existing.

What is interesting is that usually it is a strike. However two years ago when grain shipments were low and there was a big drought on the Prairies, negotiations were going on with the west coast grain handler and the employer locked the employees out. What happened? The union came to Parliament and asked to be legislated back to work.

We have to recognize that there is kind of a pendulum effect. When the pendulum is over here, one side says that they do not want to do anything different because the pendulum is on their side. Then it swings to the other side and suddenly this side that was clamouring for change says that they do not want it now, but the other side is now the one that is looking for it.

It is time Parliament took responsibility and recognized that it creates an overall problem in the system when we allow a dispute settlement mechanism that causes great harm to the economy of the country, to people, sometimes thousands of miles away from where the dispute is actually centred, this is a way of doing it.

If someone were to come to me and ask if this is a perfect solution, no it is not. If the NDP, the Bloc or even the Liberals have a better solution, we are wide open to listening to it. We just happen to believe that final offer arbitration, as a dispute settlement mechanism, when all else has failed, is a better system than the one we have right now.

If the government is really interested in democracy and in helping the workers and the employers of the country, the reality is that it should seriously consider this unless it has something better to offer.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Serge Marcell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Madam Speaker, since I do not have much time, I will try to summarize my thoughts in order to make it clear that those of us on this side will be voting against this bill. It does, in fact, have no place whatsoever. It is as if the intention was to give the government the power to impose working conditions on one of the two parties.

This cannot be. In fact, I cannot even imagine a political party in this House proposing such a bill. I regret to say that I cannot see the progressives, the Progressive Conservatives, anywhere in this party.

What we see is the Alliance element, a party that is very much to the right, and now wants to impose working conditions on just about everything that moves in Canada.

What the hon. member across the way ought to know is that the Canada Labour Code contains a clause about going before an arbitrator at the request of both parties. Both parties must, however, accept conciliation after that mediation.

There are many tools to allow the two parties to reach agreement. The bottom line is that they can decide together, by mutual agreement, to call upon an arbitrator, who will then determine the working conditions.

Bill C-312 before us today would require amendment to the Canada Labour Code. The code would have to state that, after a certain number of days with no progress, the government would impose working conditions on one of the two parties. This is a totally unacceptable approach.

Arbitration does exist in certain areas. Take the National Hockey League for example. A system of arbitration has been agreed upon, negotiated by player representatives or the players' association, and representatives of the owners. It is part of their contracts.

There is a reason why this is in place, and why both parties have accepted it. It is because negotiations are taking place between one individual and a team. The individual is totally alone to defend his cause, so a clause has been included in the collective agreement to protect the individual. An average player, or a third string player, can therefore go before the arbitrator.

However, a big NHL star does not need arbitration because he draws crowds and the owners will give him what he wants. Look at Jagr, who is asking for \$10 million a year. When his contract expires, he will have the upper hand in negotiations and the team's owner will give him what he wants.

Private Members' Business

Yet the average player or the third string player needs protection. That is why an agreement was signed between the player's association and the owner's association, which is part of the collective agreement.

In this case, nothing would be part of the collective agreement any more. If we accept it, this type of legislation would determine at which point negotiations would end or when the government would use legislation to impose working conditions on one of the parties.

It is hard to imagine that, in Canada—our country where we talk about freedom to negotiate, freedom to associate as workers in a union to defend workers' rights and working conditions, and where we have a Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms—legislation could be introduced which would give the government the power to determine the working conditions in a company for the employees.

It is hard to imagine a political party in this House proposing something like that, but it happens. The former Alliance Party members may be hiding behind the name Conservatives, but they are not Progressive Conservatives. They want to give the government all the power to intervene.

Earlier, I listened to the member who is putting this bill forward. He said that, if the union wants \$5 an hour and the company offers \$1, at some point, they will have to meet somewhere in the middle. I do not know of any union in Canada that sets out to put a company out of business. I simply do not know of any.

• (1155)

A union, by definition, is made up of workers who get together, who elect an executive and give it the mandate to negotiate working conditions. They do not give a mandate to shut down the business. Therefore, there is no union that would make exaggerated demands that would eventually lead to the business shutting down.

In Canada, we have responsible unions and they have become business unions. So, when unions say to management that the company is making millions and hundreds of millions of dollars in profits and that the workers in other equivalent companies are earning 20 to 25% more than they are, and that the other companies are also making profits, obviously, in the next collective bargaining session, the workers will seek to negotiate financial advantages, and better working conditions, whether in pension plans or hourly wages.

The Canadian way of negotiation involves some give and take. The workers tell the employer that if the employer is making money, they will also negotiate for salary increases and better working conditions. If the employer is not making money, they will not ask for the moon. This is the attitude and the culture that have developed in Canada with respect to labour negotiations.

Private Members' Business

I was listening to my hon. colleague from the Bloc Québécois who said that, in Quebec, they have a way of negotiating. It is true; they have a fine way of negotiating. Earlier, it was said that in Quebec they used back to work legislation. Still, there are two things to understand. In the private sector, the government does not intervene. The government may intervene in the public sector when services are involved, when people have no choice and no longer have access to public services. When the public has no access to health services, for instance, the government will say that that is enough and that since the parties are not able to agree, it will bring in back to work legislation. However, there are stages before that.

In Quebec, when public service unions decide to strike in order to negotiate, legislation requires that they implement and respect essential public services. Hospitals, CLSCs and schools cannot be closed just like that. The public must have access to essential services. When these services are not provided, then the government has the statutory right to intervene and say that, under the agreement, the other party must provide these essential services to the public, and since the latter is not respecting the legislation, the former will take statutory action to force workers back to work before bargaining can continue.

However, in the private sector, this legislation does not apply. There is a power relationship that absolutely must be established between the workers and the employer. That is the beauty of our system. Common sense will prevail during negotiations. Workers do not necessarily want to lose their jobs and the employer is not necessarily interested in shutting down. A middle ground will be found. There will be a conciliation officer and a mediator and, ultimately, there is a section in the Canada Labour Code under which the services of an arbitrator can be hired if the workers, the union and the employers all want one, while here, it is a statutory requirement. This is totally inappropriate. This means giving the government the legal power to intervene in private business and labour relations where it has no business doing so.

We will vote against this bill because, currently, the Canada Labour Code provides all the tools needed to enable both parties to negotiate fairly and equitably. If they so desire, and give their consent, they have the power to appoint an arbitrator. On behalf of the Minister of Labour, we will be opposing this bill.

• (1200)

[English]

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to my colleagues talk about the bill. It is too bad they did not read it through and listen to what I and my colleague from Kootenay—Boundary—Okanagan had to say about it.

The fact of the matter is the bill is very specific to the west coast ports, and in my opinion it is something that would expedite the settlement of disputes. It is a dispute settlement mechanism, just like collective bargaining is. When used to its utmost and finality, the final offer selection actually causes both parties to put their final offer on the table, which may in some cases even overlap. They may discover that they can arrive at a settlement, and the job of the arbitrator is very simple. The arbitrator simply looks at it and awards both positions.

It has been alleged that this creates winners and losers. I do not think so. A strike situation is far more likely to create a win or lose situation than final offer selection. As well, a lockout is a traumatic thing for all people involved. Not only does it lock the workers out and they have to go on minimal pay and worry about how they will make their payments and so forth, but it also shuts down the industry's ability to do business. Besides all of that, the person who is left out of this whole equation, or seems to be forgotten in the debate today, is the western Canadian farmer.

I disagree with my friend from Palliser who says that this would be a very low priority for western Canadian farmers. A lot of areas of the prairies did not dry out. Large areas in central Alberta and Saskatchewan certainly dried out, but other areas had pretty reasonable crops, the Peace River country being one of them. Southern Alberta had half decent crops as well. Now it is necessary to get that grain to market.

Cattle prices are also affecting the movement of grain. It is not profitable to feed cattle now, so farmers and feedlot owners are finding different methods to feed cattle other than giving them barley. Barley is a little more expensive so we would like to see it shipped to the west coast ports.

With what I have heard today, I am afraid that the House will vote against the bill, and in my opinion that is a vote against the western Canadian grain farmer. At a time when they already have all kinds of problems with the weather and with their markets, they do not need any more interference by the House of Commons.

I think we are passing up a great opportunity to put in place another bargaining tool that is going to reach an amicable settlement without the need for stopping the work or services.

I am pleased to present the bill to the House today and I would urge all members to consider supporting it. Even though I have heard from all parties that they do not intend to support this, I do hope, since this is a free vote, that there will be individuals in the parties who will support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): In my opinion the nays have it.

The Address

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 18, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

• (1205)

[English]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from February 12 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session.

Hon. David Collette (Don Valley East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a great pleasure to take part in the debate on the throne speech.

This is one of many throne speeches in my long career. The first one for which I was present was after the general election of 1974. In those 30 years a lot has happened, for the better I might add. When we ran in the 1974 election, the then prime minister, Mr. Trudeau, campaigned on capital assistance to cities, specifically urban transit, regional transit and help with all the infrastructure in our great cities. In Toronto, where I am from, that was particularly well received. However, the moment we got into office, the financial realities being what they were, we had to renege on all of those commitments.

For 30 years the federal government has taken a back seat to helping municipalities across the country. One thing I am most proud of in the last number of years is being able to work from the inside of government to try to change attitudes in Ottawa, attitudes, not just in the cabinet, but in the bureaucracy. There is an attitude in this town that says that somehow the municipalities out there, the great cities and their infrastructure problems, are not really the responsibility of the federal government. Time and time again at cabinet committee meetings I heard the argument "We do not want to own the problem". That is an unacceptable phrase to use at any time.

I can remember that when we talked about helping the homeless some years ago there was incredible resistance within the bureaucracy, within government and within the prime minister's office to somehow deal with the problem. We had meetings and we found that each department was operating in a silo, that there was no one department that could look across government and really zero in on how we could help deal with one of the tragedies of our time.

No one in the House can be proud that in the year 2004, when we have a very prosperous economy, a well educated economy, we can leave Parliament Hill or go to Toronto, Halifax, Vancouver or smaller communities across the country and trip over people sleeping in the streets. That is not the mark of a great society and that is one of our great failures. When I say ours, I mean collectively, because the responsibility is not just in Ottawa, it is also at the municipal and provincial levels.

Our municipalities cannot deal with problems like the homeless unless they have funding. We fought in cabinet, in caucus, the Toronto caucus in particular, to get funding for the homeless. It has

helped to some degree, but what has happened in the last year or so in our cities, particularly in Toronto, is we see an increase in the homeless despite the fact that we have put more money toward the entire problem.

My colleague from Peterborough just reminded me that I am splitting my time with him. I would not want to do Peterborough out. It is a smaller municipality and is a very important municipality which also needs the help which was signalled in the throne speech.

We made a start with the homeless, but it is not nearly good enough. There is something radically wrong with this society in this part of our history when we have such wealth and when we reduced income taxes by \$100 billion over five years, yet we have potholes in the streets of Ottawa and Toronto. We have buses that do not operate in Toronto. We have subways and streetcars breaking down. We have people sleeping in the streets. We have waiting lists of people trying to get into our hospitals. If we bundle people up in an ambulance and try to get them to the hospital in Toronto, they will be turned away from hospital after hospital and they end up kilometres away from where they live. That is not the mark of a mature or prosperous society. We have our priorities wrong.

We could argue that perhaps we cut too hard and too fast in the mid-1990s. I do not want to get into that debate. We had that debate in cabinet. The fact is we are in a surplus position and we have to use our money wisely. We have to deal with some of these issues which are very salient, particularly to the large municipalities, but also right across the country in terms of hospital waiting lists, in terms of the homeless and in terms of the municipal infrastructure.

I was really happy to see the Prime Minister campaigning, when he was minister of finance, off and on. He rapped me on the knuckles a few times when I talked about the gas tax as minister of transport, but then he adopted that and I was very pleased. I went one further at the same meeting and said "Why stop there? Why not do something about the GST?"

• (1210)

Guess what? In the throne speech the Prime Minister actually has delivered. The government will work with the provinces to share with municipalities a portion of the gas tax revenues and determine other fiscal mechanisms to achieve these goals. Also, as of February 1, we will turn over the GST that the municipalities pay. That is a really good down payment. When we combine that with the infrastructure money we have made available in previous budgets, that is a good start, but it is not good enough. It should not get us off the hook.

Mr. Vic Toews: It won't.

Hon. David Collette: It should not get us off the hook.

The Address

I grew up in Toronto. It is a wonderful city yet I see the infrastructure crumbling. I see holes in the streets and crevices in the sidewalks. I see the homeless sleeping in the streets. I see parks unattended. I see garbage not being picked up. Municipalities are really taking it on the chin. It is up to the senior governments to ensure that money flows through and flows through properly.

I was happy when I was the regional minister for the greater Toronto area to work with my caucus colleagues to ensure that we made significant investments. We have seen a renaissance of the arts in Toronto with the construction of a new opera house, the construction of a new addition to the Ontario Art Gallery, the Royal Conservatory of Music, the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art, Roy Thomson Hall and of course the new National Ballet School on Jarvis Street, which not only is a cultural necessity for the entire nation, but is a big part of our urban renewal in that part of town. I have been supported by my colleague, the member for York South—Weston, on these ventures, and the former chairman of metropolitan Toronto has been a great tower of strength in all those deliberations.

We also put a billion dollars among us, the province and the municipalities into GO Transit. For those who unfortunately do not have commuter rail in their communities, GO Transit is perhaps one of the great resources we have in the greater Toronto area. It transports thousands of people everyday to and from their jobs using conventional rail, using CN and CP infrastructure. We are putting a billion dollars worth of infrastructure into GO Transit.

Part of that money will also help to build Canada's first dedicated rail link from the downtown core to the airport. Those people who go through Pearson International Airport will see one of the world's great airports when it opens this April. It is a magnificent piece of construction and it will be a gateway not just to the greater Toronto area and southern Ontario but to all of Canada. That will be linked with a 15 minute rail service to Union Station with a connection to the subway on the way down. That means people will be able to get to the airport. As the airport is built for 50 million people, it must have rapid transit. Canada cannot allow our car mentality society, our highway driven society to suck the lifeblood out of our ability to commute from downtown to the airport.

I am getting close to the end, but one thing that is not in here, when we talk about the new agenda for the municipalities, are ways in which we can use the tax system to encourage brownfield building. We have to stop, certainly in the greater Toronto area, the building of prime farmland and urban sprawl which is creating gridlock. It is unproductive and I think it is creating social division within the great Toronto area. We have to work as a federal government to ensure that we have measures in place to stop urban sprawl. We have to work with the province of Ontario and the other provinces across the country.

The throne speech was a good start, but a lot more work has to be done. I know the Prime Minister's heart is in the right place and I will ensure that I support him with further measures to deal with all these issues that I have raised today.

•(1215)

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was pleased to hear my colleague mention the city and county of Peterborough in his remarks. This is something, Madam Speaker,

that you can relate to and which may be of interest to you: Toronto is somewhere to the southwest of Peterborough just in the same way, I understand, that Vancouver is somewhere to the west of Kamloops.

I believe that the downloading of responsibilities, as it is called, which has occurred in recent years generally has been appropriate. My colleague mentioned homelessness in particular. My riding is partly rural and partly urban, and I believe that the only way to deal with homelessness in my community is at the local level. What we have not done, until now with regard to the GST, as he mentioned, is also download the resources to deal with those local problems.

I would like to ask my colleague to comment on that, because I know that with respect to transit, my colleague supported VIA Rail to Peterborough. I would like his comments on that from the point of view of smaller communities in Canada.

Hon. David Collenette: Madam Speaker, I am glad my colleague raised this matter because it is very important. In the throne speech, the politically correct title was used, "Great Places To Live—A New Deal for Communities", and that was to keep smaller communities happy. I want to keep them happy; they do have legitimate needs.

But unless we have been born and raised in or have lived in one of Canada's large cities, I do not think we can fully appreciate the unique nature of that experience. The daily trade-offs that an individual has to make in a big urban area are not like those that would have to be made in Peterborough or other smaller communities across the country. I wish we could all live in those smaller communities, but larger communities have unique problems and that is why I put so much emphasis on the Toronto area and the other big cities in the country.

One of the issues we have to deal with is that in our desire to deal with the deficit, five to ten years ago we downloaded not only the responsibility but the financial obligations to those communities; I know that the City of Toronto is almost broke. We cannot have the big cities in this country on their knees. The last time that kind of thing happened was in the Depression and the federal government had to bail them out. What I am saying is that now is the time for the federal government to bail out our municipalities.

Smaller cities like Peterborough have unique needs, and that is why the GST rebate will help everybody, but let us not be so politically correct that we lump large cities in with everyone else. It is the large cities that are receiving thousands of new people every day, immigrants from around the world, and they are being stretched to the limit. They do not have the resources to deal with the problems being created.

The Address

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a short question for my colleague in relation to the gas tax. The Liberal government has been in office for 10 years and all it had to do was to work with the provinces to share with municipalities a portion of its gas tax revenue.

As the former minister of transport, my colleague had the opportunity to share with municipalities a portion of that gas tax, a portion of the \$4.7 billion that the government raised through the 10¢ excise tax on gasoline, to address the potholes that he was talking about. Why has the government failed to act in the 10 year period it has been in power to truly address those infrastructure needs of our municipalities?

Hon. David Collette: Madam Speaker, I am not bound by cabinet solidarity anymore and the fact is that I agree with the hon. member. For the last 10 years I have been pounding away about this issue, but in fairness to the ministers of finance at the time, there were a lot of other priorities.

We know what it is like in government, though I am not sure the hon. member will ever know what it is like to be in government. If a party gets in government, it has to make compromises. We have to keep hammering away. We did receive money for the homeless and money for infrastructure and we put the whole gas tax issue on the map, but the former prime minister did not want to look at that. It was a source of disagreement between us. I am glad that the present Prime Minister is at least going down that road and has at least done this with the GST.

The Liberal Party is a very dynamic, creative group of people who enjoy the thrust and parry of debate. There is intellectual ferment. We give and we take, all for the betterment of the country. At least we are getting somewhere now.

• (1220)

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to join in this debate on the Speech from the Throne. It is very special because it is the first speech of a new Prime Minister and a first speech for a new cabinet. Although all speeches from the throne are important, this one will be particularly important because it will be carried through to an election.

I want to speak particularly on the parts of the Speech from the Throne that deal with post-secondary education and research. In my remarks, I am going to be referring to the open letter that was published, long before the speech, by the government caucus on post-secondary education and research and circulated very widely in the country. It can be found on my website at www.peteradams.org.

Before dealing with the speech itself, I want to comment on the new cabinet and the way that it has been structured from the point of view of post-secondary education and research and the federal government's involvement in those things.

First, we greatly appreciate the division of the former department of HRDC into two departments, including the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development. We believe and we hope, when we look at the vision statement of that new department, that it will become the depository for information and resources to do with lifelong learning as we know it today. It is not, by the way, that this department will take over everything the federal government does in

lifelong learning, but it will become knowledgeable about what is going on and as a result make the federal programs, whichever departments they are coming from, even more effective.

We realize that post-secondary education in particular, as well as research, is a shared jurisdiction with the provinces. We are very conscious of that. We want the federal government to be much more proactive in dealing with the provinces and so we hope that the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development will in the future become the permanently designated representative for the federal government with the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada.

In the past, senior federal cabinet ministers have attended that particular council, which is the nationwide group dealing with education. I think they have been well received but they have been different ministers representing different departments. We think now that this one minister should be briefed on all those matters by all the federal departments and should be our representative on that council.

Second, we were delighted that the parliamentary secretary to the new minister that I have just mentioned has particular responsibility for the Canada student loan program and for student loans in general. We think this is particularly important. We have supported the development of the Canada student loan program to where it is and we would support further development of the program, but we, like many others, are concerned about student debt.

The time has come for us to wean ourselves away from heavy dependence on loans. We were delighted to see in the Speech from the Throne that there will now be grants for lower income students to cover their expenses in the first year of university or college. These will be grants and those grants will be added to grants that go with the RESP program. We are glad that there is now a parliamentary secretary doing nothing else but looking after student loans.

We know that in the new structure of cabinet there is also a parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister who is responsible for science and small business. From the point of view of research, this is extremely important. Having this person, one of our colleagues, reporting directly to the Prime Minister is very important for science, that is to say, science in the universities and colleges and other schools in Canada and science in the private sector.

For example, the R and D tax environment has greatly improved in recent years for small business and larger business. It needs to be even further strengthened so that the private sector is encouraged to participate in real research.

The Address

•(1225)

It also includes responsibility for in-house federal science. Groups like the National Research Council, which work with small business and maintain vital government labs, deserve support. Groups like the Geological Survey of Canada and researchers in Environment Canada and other federal departments need a voice to deal directly with the Prime Minister. This parliamentary secretary has been named and we hope that he—and perhaps in the future it might be a she—will deal with this.

I referred to our open letter. There were various sections in it. One dealt with the north. We do notice that the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs now has a parliamentary secretary dealing specifically with northern economic development and other matters related to the north. In research and development, we believe that the federal obligation in the north, both in the territories and in the near northern parts of the provinces, is particularly important. We hope that this new position will help with that.

Also mentioned in the Speech from the Throne but existing before then is the appointment of a science adviser to the Prime Minister. This is the first time in Canadian history that such a person has been appointed. The actual individual involved is currently the President of the National Research Council, a very distinguished scientist. He will be reporting directly to the Prime Minister on science in general. My understanding is that he will start in April.

For those of us who are interested in research, whether it is within the federal system or whether it is within the colleges and universities or in the private sector, this appointment of a permanent person who will report directly to the Prime Minister and future prime ministers is going to be a major step forward.

As is known, our objective is that by 2010 Canada will be in the top five countries in the world as far as research and development are concerned. We believe that is quite feasible, but only if we coordinate better. By the way, there are many things we still need to do, but if we could coordinate better what we are already doing, it would be a major help toward achieving that objective.

In the open letters I mentioned, which we have had for a number of years now, we have always mentioned international studies and internationalization on the campuses of colleges, universities, high schools and so on across the country. We believe the federal government has a very special role in research and development in the international sphere.

We hear about the Canada corps that the Prime Minister is proposing. My understanding of it is that it will be as we have had in the past: a youth corps doing volunteer work and so on overseas. I think this is admirable and I look forward to that happening very actively again to reinforce Canada's roles overseas.

We also hope that this Canada corps will become a sort of repository of knowledge of what is going on in civil society, in high schools, in colleges, universities and in government departments, be they provincial, territorial, or federal, in the international sphere all across the country, so that in this one place, in addition to equipping teams that will help in developing countries, they will have some knowledge of what is going on in a particular developing country.

Again, this will focus better what is happening already in the international sphere across Canada.

In regard to the Speech from the Throne, let me say that in our letter we mentioned other investments that happened before this. I would like to express our feeling of great relief that some years ago the government invested in a number of foundations, for example, the Canada Foundation for Innovation, the climate change foundation, human Genome Canada. We invested money that will flow in millennium scholarships and graduate student scholarships over a period of years so that they are no longer subject to the economy or to the annual vicissitudes of the government. We think those early investments are going to stand Canada in good stead.

•(1230)

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, it always amazes and surprises me when I hear members opposite talking about how to make programs more efficient and the good things we can do in the country and I watch in disgust as money is being stolen from taxpayers day by day by the Liberal Party and its members in the House of Commons. It really is disgusting when we think about it. Talk is pretty cheap when we are witnessing those kinds of actions.

I do want to ask a couple of questions concerning the education system, being one of the CEOs of a fairly large educational school district. One question concerns the foreign student intake in post-secondary facilities. Much of what is being done, even in high school today, is done because of the high student fees and the extra income that motivates educational institutes within Canada to bring in foreign students.

The consequence of that exercise, of course, is that the GPA for Canadian students to enter a post-secondary school goes up every year and it gets harder for Canadian students to get in because seats are being filled by those who are willing to pay a lot higher fee. It also drives up the fees for our Canadian students.

I would like to ask the member if any consideration has been given to looking into the situation to find out how we can get more of our students into our own facilities and to stop screening them out by requiring higher GPAs, because of other problems we are seeing in the country.

Mr. Peter Adams: Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague's interest in these matters with respect to international students.

As he knows, tuition is a provincial jurisdiction. I am sure he would join me in my support of the idea that in the transfer that we make to the provinces there be a designated transfer for post-secondary education that could only be spent on that.

He mentioned the higher tuition. In Ontario, which just recently had a Conservative government, tuition is the second highest in Canada. We just got rid of grade 13, which was an essentially free college or university year. We replaced it with a year in college or university, which has the second highest tuition.

The Address

In the adjacent province, the province of Quebec, as my colleague knows, it has two years of free college. This is with the same transfers to that jurisdiction as others. If we go to British Columbia we would discover that tuition has been kept low for a number of years.

I strongly support the lowering of tuition in the provinces where they have raised it to an extreme extent.

Going back to the international students, my view is that we benefit in at least two ways. We benefit from future contacts with those 200 or so countries around the world from which they come and our students benefit from them being on campus. I do think, though, that the federal role in those things should be better coordinated, in the way I tried to describe in my remarks.

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Speaker, I recognize the benefits of foreign students. The trouble is that we in Canada are screening more and more Canadians out by way of GPA; that is their marks in high school. We are screening them out of entrance into our universities because our universities are filling up fast with, in addition to Canadian students, foreign students.

There are several concerns with this. We are keeping many young people in Canada, who are more than eligible to get post-secondary training, out of our facilities.

What remedy does the federal government have for that, other than just saying that it will throw more money at it? The government throws money in a lot of bad places, as we know. It could have done this for the last 10 years but has not. What is the government doing about accommodating those students who have GPAs that are less than what the requirements are today?

• (1235)

Mr. Peter Adams: Mr. Speaker, in the open letter that I mentioned, which is available on my website, we discuss this question of capacity in great detail. The capacity problem is partly physical and we are transferring funds to the colleges and universities which help them with the physical problem.

It is partly a faculty problem. The universities simply cannot afford to hire faculty to replace faculty who are retiring. As I tried to say, it is also a tuition problem for our own students.

If the member reads the letter he will see that the capacity of our universities and colleges must be addressed for the benefit of the students and of the economy of Canada. I appreciate the member's great interest in this.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure today to respond to the Speech from the Throne.

I want to begin by talking about an issue that was absent from the throne speech. It is amazing that the government and the Prime Minister failed to address what I think is perhaps the greatest crisis facing Canada today: the beef issue. It is certainly a crisis of a national issue and one that affects western Canada.

The Prime Minister said that his mission was to address concerns in western Canada but the fact that he failed to address the issue of mad cow even once is such a failure on his part that it is inexcusable.

The fallout from this disease has made beef, feed and the slaughter of livestock a national crisis. The Liberals, frankly, have mishandled the issue since the first case was discovered in May 2003. The border remains closed. Confidence in the beef industry has been shaken, which is truly heartbreaking. Thousands of Canadians are losing their jobs and their way of life because the Liberals have overlooked this plight. The Liberals have overlooked the fact that the beef industry is the third largest contributor to our gross domestic product.

We must encourage the government and the agriculture minister to get active now to address the problem. We do not have months to address the problem. We have anywhere from 1 million to 3 million head of cattle in Canada that will be surplus if the border is not opened. The situation will be catastrophic if the government does not act.

I should point out that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from New Brunswick Southwest.

The second issue I wish to speak to is the Kyoto accord. In the throne speech the Prime Ministers says that he will go above and beyond Kyoto, whatever that means.

I want to give some background for people. In the summer of 1997, Canada and 160 other nations met in Japan and agreed to targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The agreement that set out these targets and the options available to countries to achieve them is known as the Kyoto protocol. Canada's target is to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 6% below 1990 levels by the period between 2008 and 2012, which, considering that our economy has grown since then, is about a 30% reduction from today's standards.

Five years later the government brought forward a motion in the House of Commons and ratified it in December 2002. What happened at the time is that members, on this side of the House especially, were demanding an implementation plan of how the government would reduce our emissions and possibly our production by 30%, especially when the Canadian manufacturers and exporters predicted that 450,000 jobs would be lost in Canada if we were to actually achieve those targets.

What did the Prime Minister do? When he was out of cabinet he criticized the then minister of the environment and said that the government had no implementation plan. It was at a Liberal leadership debate where he was debating the former finance minister and former deputy prime minister and said that the government had no implementation plan whatsoever, which was a direct criticism of the former minister of the environment.

What does the Prime Minister do when he assumes office? He reappoints the same Minister of the Environment who has done such a lousy job on this entire issue to the same position. Then the Prime Minister says that we will go above and beyond Kyoto. The government does not know how it will do it but it will say it because it thinks Canadians want to hear it.

The fact is that the government has no plan on Kyoto. It had better produce one because a lot of Canadian jobs are at risk if it does not produce one and it tries to achieve these targets.

The Address

We at the industry committee have asked two fundamental questions on this issue for months and we have not received a response. What questions have we asked? First: Who will measure the emission reductions or increases according to companies and industries? This is a basic question because different companies say they have reduced emissions by different amounts. The answer we get back is that the government does not know who will measure the emissions.

How will Canadians know if they have achieved targets if they do not know if they are actually meeting the emissions because we do not know who is actually going to measure them?

The second question is very important to many industries and companies. When the government signed Kyoto in 1997 a lot of companies, such as NOVA Chemicals in Alberta, took some fundamental steps in addressing and reducing their emissions. They got what they called low hanging fruit. They reduced their emissions as much as they could between 1997 and 2002. They are still waiting for an answer on whether they will get credit for reducing emissions based upon their good faith at that time. The government still has not said yes or no to giving the company credit for those early emissions. It is absolutely inexcusable.

• (1240)

The third area I want to touch upon is the whole issue of corporate welfare. I want to quote what the present Prime Minister said when he was finance minister in his famous budget speech of 1995. He said:

Across government, we are taking major action to substantially reduce subsidies to business. These subsidies do not create long lasting jobs. Nobody has made that case more strongly than business itself.

It is now clear that that statement means nothing because the government in fact has doled out billions and billions of dollars, particularly through Industry Canada and certain other agencies, in business subsidies. In fact, it does not apply even to the Prime Minister's own companies because as we know he received about \$160 million in government grants.

I want to use the example of Technology Partnerships Canada which is run by Industry Canada. It is a perfect example of what is wrong with corporate welfare. Less than 2% of the money that has been loaned out since 1996 has been repaid. Therefore, of the \$1.6 billion of hard earned taxpayer money given to various companies that the Liberals deemed fit, 2% has actually been paid back.

Industry Canada no longer keeps track of jobs created or jobs maintained through this program. It said that it was for job creation. Now it has even removed that from its website.

Our own calculations show that it costs Canadian taxpayers \$625,000 to create one job under the program. That is absolutely amazing. It is impossible to tell whether this money is being spent on research and development or if it is just subsidizing certain activities within the various corporations.

The fact is that generation and development of new scientific knowledge is pivotal to the growth and prosperity of the Canadian economy. We in the Conservative Party are absolutely committed to that. We are committed to improving Canada's capacity to perform research but that does not mean getting involved in corporate welfare

and giving money to companies across the country that are Liberal friendly.

I would also encourage the government to reassess its R and D tax credits. The member who spoke before us bragged about how much the government improved it. Almost everyone in the sector, and in small business across the country, say that it does not work, that is too regulatory and too administrative to even fill out the forms. They want to see it reformed.

The previous member spoke to the science agenda. In a sense I compliment the government a little on the appointment of Dr. Carty as the national science adviser. However I want to offer some comments. This is another example of the Liberal government taking a good idea and not implementing it fully.

It was at least five years ago that this party and in particular Preston Manning, a former leader, and the member for Kelowna who still sits in the House with us, called for a chief scientist. It is heartening to see that the idea has finally reached the government's benches, but our concern is that this person will again report to the Prime Minister. This is another example of the centralization of power in Canadian politics.

What should happen is what happens in the United States. The chief science adviser actually sits at the cabinet table as a full cabinet minister and is a very high profile person. Even better than that would be the example set in the United Kingdom where the chief science adviser has a full budget and reports to Parliament so that parliamentarians of all parties can access this person's information and ask him for advice on issues like Kyoto and so on. We should have a chief scientist in Canada who actually reports to Parliament.

I want to touch on one more science issue. Preston Manning wrote in the *Globe* recently about the difficulty of scientists across the country accessing government funding. They have to go to various sources. We should have one funnel where scientists and researchers can go to one government agency or one department to get approval for their big science project, such as the synchrotron in Saskatoon, and then have the government decide how to fund the particular project.

I want to finish up on the biggest issue in my riding over the past week or so, the sponsorship scandal. What is most disturbing to me today is the continuing pattern of absolute disregard and disrespect by the government for Canadian tax dollars.

I was listening to Rex Murphy on *Cross Country Checkup* yesterday. A lady from Calgary said it best when she said "This government simply does not treat our tax dollars as taxpayer funds in trust. They treat it as their own to do with as they see fit".

That is fundamentally wrong, which is why we need a change in government.

The Address

• (1245)

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to elaborate a little more on the democratic deficit. The present Prime Minister has spoken about this. Last week we saw examples of his imposing closure on the House after only having been in the House six days as Prime Minister. I think it is the earliest that closure has ever been imposed by a sitting prime minister.

I want the member to speak to that issue. What does he see presently that the Prime Minister has done that would lead us to believe he is serious about addressing the democratic deficit?

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. It was truly astounding to see the Liberals, I believe for the 85th time, invoking closure and cutting off debate again.

It was interesting that during the debate the government House leader said, "We do not want to talk about process. We want to talk about issues and policies". Obviously the Conservative Party does as well.

That motion was actually about reinstating Jean Chrétien's old legacy bills. It was not about the government or the Prime Minister introducing their agenda. He has wanted to be Prime Minister since he was five years old and the best he could come up with in his throne speech was to regurgitate all of Chrétien's old bills.

It is funny that we had about a day and a half of debate about reinstating about five to 10 bills. The government decided that was enough debate and shut it down. It shows that the fundamental problem in Canada today is the centralization of power within the Prime Minister's Office. Look at the way the Prime Minister has set up the cabinet with a myriad of secretaries of state. What he is doing is actually centralizing power in his own office. The science adviser now reports to him.

Frankly that is the biggest problem. He needs to devolve power to parliamentarians and citizens. The fact is that the Prime Minister and the government will never do that because it is not in their nature to do that. They simply do not trust citizens and parliamentarians enough to do that and that is why frankly we do need a change in government.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to some of the earlier comments of members. I am wondering whether the member has any comments about the whole issue of the gas tax.

It has been very disturbing in a rural area like mine, Provencher. We hear ministers talk about all this money that is going to be poured in to the big cities but the largest community in my riding is 10,000 people. Where does the Liberal scheme leave the small communities? Does the Conservative Party have a better option?

• (1250)

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, I was struck by that as well. I do not know if the member opposite, the former minister of transport, knows of anything that exists outside of Toronto. His focus was exclusively on the Toronto area. Toronto is very important in our nation obviously, but the fact is that we are a nation from sea to sea to sea of communities of various sizes. Just focusing on the extremely large cities is frankly not good enough.

Our party's proposal is to take a portion of the federal excise tax on gasoline, perhaps 3¢ to 5¢, negotiate with the provinces and transfer it to the lower levels of government for them to address their infrastructure needs.

That means it would hit the smaller communities because it addresses the highways that they rely upon. A lot of places in the member's own constituency do not have GO trains. They rely upon the highway infrastructure and the water quality and sewer systems. That is what the infrastructure program should be, stable funding, using perhaps up to half of the gas tax and transfer it to the provinces and municipalities to let them address their infrastructure needs.

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask another question along the same line.

Part of the Auditor General's report last week indicated the dire situation in Parks Canada. In my riding it is a big issue because one of the primary highways, Yellowhead Highway, goes right through Jasper National Park. It is a transportation route, but Parks Canada's budget actually has to maintain that highway. The money comes out of Parks Canada's budget when the parks' infrastructure is in such dire straits, rather than from the gasoline tax.

I am wondering if the hon. member would comment on whether the money should come out of the Parks Canada budget or whether some of the taxes that we are paying on gasoline should pay for that infrastructure.

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, I know that area well. I have driven that highway many times. It is one of the most beautiful areas in the country, perhaps the most beautiful.

No, it should not come out of the parks budget. The parks budget is stressed enough. It should come out of this infrastructure fund. It should come out of a fund set up to address specifically these types of needs. That would be our suggestion.

It is very disappointing it was not in the throne speech. The government has had 10 years to do this. All we hear is that the government might consider it. Frankly it needs to be done and it needs to be done now.

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Following the Speech from the Throne a journalist asked me what I thought of it. I said that it was just words on paper. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. In other words, the government has to act on some of its promises because that is what it amounts to, things the government would like to do, things it is interested in doing.

To make my point, I want to go through some of the promises made by the Liberal government since 1999. I could go back a little further than that, because there were other promises made. Possibly I could touch on those as well.

The Address

One of the interesting things is that of the 114 promises in the 1999 and 2001 Liberal throne speeches, about a third of them were completely ignored at the time of the 2002 throne speech. Another 28 promises were incomplete or, get this, too vague to measure. The 2002 throne speech outlined 85 promises, reiterating many from the earlier throne speeches of which little or no action was taken on 33 promises.

If it does not get done between throne speeches, just re-promise it. That is the strategy of the government. If the government keeps saying it long enough, I guess people will believe it. The fact is the government has a horrible track record in following through on those commitments.

Between 1999 and 2002 only 23% of the promises made in successive throne speeches have actually been implemented. Quick arithmetic will tell us that 77% of the government's promises have been broken. That would lead us to believe the words that I originally used with that journalist, that they are words on paper. That is it. The government has no commitment or follow-through on most of its promises.

In fact, when we look at the Prime Minister, he is the man who single-handedly authored the red books. We have had successive red books and of course the history of implementation of the red book is worse than throne speeches. We will not get into that because it is probably getting a little too political and we would not want that to happen on the floor of the House.

The Prime Minister is the man who said that the GST would be scrapped. That one obviously did not happen.

Hon. Wayne Easter: That is not correct.

Mr. Greg Thompson: There are cabinet ministers who actually resigned because of the use of those very words, Mr. Speaker.

In fact back about 1995, the deputy prime minister of Canada at that time actually resigned her seat on that very promise. She is the only one on that side of the House who had enough integrity to do that.

Every one of those people over there who tend to get excited when they hear this, knocked on doors continually through 1993 promising that that dreadful tax would be eliminated. Of course it never was and we know it never will be.

Hon. Wayne Easter: And now we are eliminating it from the municipalities, or reducing it in some cases.

Mr. Greg Thompson: I hope the member from Prince Edward Island gets a chance to speak and perhaps I will sit in my seat and heckle. But of course I would not heckle like that.

That is the same government which in 1993 said it would change NAFTA. Between NAFTA and the free trade agreement with the Americas, with the United States of America in particular, that has been the engine that has propelled our economy, as members well know. That coupled with the GST has really been the reason the government has—and we will give the government some credit, in terms of eliminating the deficit, but the deficit is only one side of the coin.

●(1255)

The Liberals do not brag much about this but the Government of Canada today is indebted by \$35 billion more than when they took office. It is close to \$600 billion in total accumulated debt. When the Liberals talk about eliminating deficits, they are only telling part of the story. The fact is that during the high growth period between 1993 and 2003, the Liberals paid very little attention to paying down the debt, something they said they would do but they have not done. As we stand here the country of Canada owes \$35 billion more than when the Liberals took office. They cannot get out from underneath that. That commitment has not been honoured. Promises were made, but there was no commitment, no follow-through and no action.

A member spoke earlier on the democratic deficit. That is an interesting one. The present Prime Minister has talked about democratizing Parliament, giving more power to individual members of Parliament where their vote would count. We have seen some pretty horrid examples of how he has followed through on that one. The House had been in session for less than a week and he had already implemented closure. He will do it again before the session is out, provided he can survive that long because the Liberals are dropping like a rock in the polls. One of the reasons they are is the very topic that we are on today, throne speeches and promises not kept, promises broken. The track record as I said is 77% of their promises either have been broken or have not been kept.

Finally, after 10 solid years of promises and lip service, results are showing up in the polls. When the present Prime Minister was chosen as leader by his party and he became the Prime Minister of Canada, people expected something different, something new, something refreshing and it just did not happen.

On the very first day back in the House of Commons, he had to swallow himself whole attempting to explain the \$161 million that his shipping company received courtesy of the taxpayers of Canada.

An hon. member: I thought it was \$137,000.

Mr. Greg Thompson: Originally it started out being \$73,000, or was that \$173,000?

An hon. member: I thought it was \$137,000.

Mr. Greg Thompson: Mr. Speaker, it was \$137,000, but give or take \$160 million, it was just a small mistake, was it not? That was when the Prime Minister stood in the House and said that he did not know about the mistake in the numbers.

Why would his company receive \$161 million and he would not know it? His excuse was that he was busy in the leadership race. We know he was busy undermining the Prime Minister at the time for 10 solid years, so we can accept the fact that he was busy. The most interesting thing is that he knew that excuse would not hold. Then he said he did find out about it at such and such a time but that he did not do anything about it. "Then when I finally became Prime Minister", and I am quoting him from that public meeting televised by CBC, he said, "Only when I became Prime Minister and I had my hands on the levers of power, could I actually ask for the real number".

The Address

The Prime Minister himself does not believe that one. That is the biggest fabrication in the history of Parliament. Every single member of Parliament, and Mr. Speaker, you know it because I am sure you have done it, can pick up the phone and ask the Auditor General to investigate. I have done that and just about every member on this side of the House has done it.

The fact of the matter is, the Liberals are dropping in the polls because 10 years of unkept promises have finally caught up with them.

• (1300)

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, speaking about broken promises, among all of the scandal to do with this Liberal money laundering scheme, we now hear about \$2 billion on the gun registry. When I first heard about this I thought no, that was \$2 million. I distinctly remember the Minister of Justice saying it would cost taxpayers \$2 million. Now the Liberals say it is \$2 billion.

Does the member have any comment about the impact on crime that this \$2 billion boondoggle is having?

Mr. Greg Thompson: Mr. Speaker, that is another example of the Liberal government not paying attention to detail. Originally, it was going to cost \$1 million and then that ballooned to \$1 billion. Now we are hearing it is up to \$2 billion and it has done nothing, as our justice critic will confirm, to reduce crime. Basically, it is taxing innocent Canadians on a failed policy.

There have been a number of failed policies on that side of the House. For example, the former international trade minister has been promising us for years that he will fix the softwood lumber dispute with the Americans. They are just a bunch of words. That dispute has not gone away. Nothing has gone away on that side of the House. We have had 10 years of inaction on any of those major files.

The gun registry is a failed policy of the Government of Canada. A few weeks ago the Prime Minister, in talking about the democratic deficit, said that it would be opened up for review. There would be a discussion among the Liberal caucus on that failed registry. Even the Prime Minister admitted it has been a failure.

Now, after the House resumed for a couple of weeks, he has finally told his caucus there will be no free vote on the gun registry. The gun registry stays. It is \$2 billion and counting. How much more will the taxpayer take?

• (1305)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's facts are quite wrong in a number of areas.

He went on with a lot of rhetoric and conjecture in terms of saying that \$2 billion have gone to the gun registry, which is absolutely wrong. As I understand the way those numbers are calculated, it is a cumulation of the work done by the police and the courts. He is exaggerating the numbers way out of proportion.

The cost of the registry, yes, is too high. The government has admitted that. It has put in place an action plan to control it. It will be about \$1 billion by 2005, but that is beside the point.

The hon. member talked about some failures when he was talking about the throne speech. Yes, the government has been in power 10

years, but would he see the fact that we have now had several budgets with surpluses a failure?

When we took over government there was a \$42 billion annual deficit and we brought that under control. The throne speech talks about the emphasis on health care, children and infrastructure programs. The reason we are able to do that is because we manage the funds of this country properly.

Does he consider the fact that we manage the finances right and are doing things for the economy and people a failure? Does he consider that a failure or is he just playing politics?

Mr. Greg Thompson: Mr. Speaker, the sheer fact that the Government of Canada owes \$35 billion more today than when it took office in terms of the accumulated debt tells me that there has been some level of failure on that side of the House. I give credit where credit is due on some files, but the fact of the matter is there are a number of failed policies and the gun registry is one of them.

The member will try to slide out from underneath that one, but unfortunately he lives in a rural riding and he will not be able to. No matter who does the calculation, it is a failed policy and it has failed miserably to the tune of \$2 billion.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Health, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the Minister of State for Public Health.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to this motion this morning. As Minister of Health, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Official Languages, I am pleased to support the vision for Canada laid out by the government in the Speech from the Throne.

As the speech and the Prime Minister's recent comments have made clear, health care is still our country's priority. We are at the dawn of a new era in federal-provincial relations, and linguistic duality will continue to be at the heart of our identity.

Canadians continue to believe in the fundamental values that the Canada Health Act is based on. They also believe in justice and equality, and in government provided services to ensure that access to them is based on need, not the ability to pay. That is the Canadian difference.

This government, along with its provincial and territorial partners, has achieved great things with respect to renewing and strengthening the health care system. We have recognized the challenges that await us and we will meet them without hesitation.

The Address

Last February, for example, the first ministers reached an historic agreement on health care reform, an action plan to ensure proper access to quality care according to need, rather than ability to pay, as well as to increase the transparency of the health system and its responsibility to the people of Canada.

By investing \$34.8 billion over five years, the Canadian government has indicated its commitment to implement the agreement. The bulk of this amount has been transferred to the provinces and territories to provide them with predictable and growing funding for their health programs. Funds were also allocated to long-term structural reform, as well as immediate reduction of certain tensions within the health care system.

I am pleased to say that, in his initial meeting with Canadian first ministers last month, the Prime Minister indicated to his provincial and territorial counterparts that the federal government would be increasing its commitment by \$2 billion this year.

This investment will provide more support for reform and help provincial and territorial administrations meet the major challenges ahead of them. These are substantial investments. Yet, as all those who have looked at our health care system are aware, money alone is not enough.

We need deep and lasting structural changes. That is why the governments have committed in this agreement to improving access to home care, as an alternative to hospital care. This is a cost-effective solution for Canadians.

We are also renewing primary care, in order to facilitate patients' access to the appropriate care from the appropriate source at the appropriate time. We are also looking at a way to provide coverage of the cost of expensive medications for people who are putting themselves into financial ruin by having to buy certain necessary prescription drugs.

It is a good to know that, together with our partners, we are making progress in these vital sectors. I am sure that progress will continue.

[*English*]

We have already achieved a lot. There was the inaugural meeting of the new national health council composed of leading Canadians from coast to coast.

The council embodies the government's commitment toward openness, transparency and accountability. The council will monitor the implementation of the accord and report back to Canadians.

In particular, it will monitor how long Canadians have to wait for important diagnostic results or badly needed treatment. It is information that will be critical to our shared commitment to reduce waiting times. The council's job is not to point fingers but to give Canadians vital information on medical outcomes.

● (1310)

Canadians are investing more than \$100 billion a year in health care. They have the right to see how the system is performing and how it might work even better. Ultimately, it is about accountability to the people who use the health care system and who pay for it.

In December, the Government of Canada delivered on another important promise by establishing the Canadian Patient Safety Institute. This new, non-profit organization will work with the provinces, territories, and other stakeholders to examine the circumstances that result in patients becoming ill or injured through medical interventions. The goal, obviously, is to decrease the risk of accidents or errors in the health care system.

Another key commitment we have fulfilled relates to new employment insurance benefits for Canadians forced to leave work temporarily to support a gravely ill or dying parent, spouse or child.

These are some of the more prominent steps that the government has taken, but permit me to underline that we are not starting from scratch.

Health Canada and its many partners have had in place for a long time a vast range of excellent initiatives to improve the well-being of children and youth, women, seniors, aboriginal people, the disabled, and indeed all Canadians. Given the complexity of the health care challenge, more needs to be done.

Toward that end, the Speech from the Throne promised that the Government of Canada would take the lead in establishing a strong and responsive public health system starting with the new Canada public health agency. I know my colleague, the Minister of State for Public Health, will want to elaborate on that point. We will be working together on that.

The federal government wants to improve the overall health of Canadians so my government will focus on health promotion with a view to reducing the incidence of avoidable diseases. We look forward to any advice and recommendations that will come from the proposed new chief public health officer for Canada to address the toll of both communicable and non-communicable diseases.

Shortly after taking over the health portfolio, I had the opportunity to travel across the country to meet with my counterparts in all the provinces and territories. I am encouraged to find and to report to the House that there remains a deep and abiding respect for the Canada Health Act. Though there will always be differences of opinion on how best to deliver or organize health care services, there is a strong consensus about the fundamental principles—the idea that we can work together within the act to improve the health of Canadians.

● (1315)

[*Translation*]

Allow me to say a few words on federal-provincial relations, an area where our government, the government of the current Prime Minister, is determined to change the tone, promote cooperation and consider the provinces and territories as partners in governance, in helping our country adjust to this era of globalization. We want the provinces to be partners and we want to cooperate with them. We know that we can achieve a lot more by working with the provinces.

The Address

Of course, there will always be differences and tensions in our federation. This is normal. These differences and tensions can truly generate healthy competition within the federation to better serve our fellow citizens. However, the tone must change. This will be achieved in part through new policies. The Prime Minister indicated his willingness to negotiate the issue of parental leave with the Quebec government. He asked me ensure that we work more efficiently with provincial governments, particularly the Quebec government, at the international level.

So this is the beginning of a new era. The end of polarization is providing us with a unique opportunity. For the past 40 years, the issue of Quebec's independence has created a polarization that, in this debate, has prevented an approach as balanced and rational as it should have been. Last week, we lost a great political voice. My former boss, Claude Ryan, will be remembered for expressing so profoundly such a balanced and rational view.

I believe that, at last, without this polarization around the issue of independence, such political voices can significantly strengthen Quebec's chances of faring as well as it did in the past, before this polarization, when Mr. Pearson and Mr. Lesage were in office.

As regards official languages, we will implement the action plan that our government fully intends to recognize as essential to our Canadian identity.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to question the Minister of Health. I wish him the best of luck.

I have two questions for him. As a Quebecker who is deeply attached to Quebec, something I do not question, is he not a little worried about his government using health for nation building? Does he not remember the Quebec intergovernmental affairs minister saying he was concerned about the creation of a Canadian public health agency when there is a Quebec public health agency? Quebec only has observer status at the Canadian health council because it already has its own health council.

My first question for the Minister of Health is the following. Can he give us assurances that he will not be part of this movement using health for nation building? Second, does he not believe that it is contradictory of his government to appeal parental leave when the minister says his government wants to negotiate, and can he promise that Quebec will be given what it is entitled to, by being allowed to develop a truly integrated parental leave system without an appeal?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew: Mr. Speaker, there are two questions. I thank my colleague, the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, for his interest in this issue. He has been following it for a number of years.

Essentially, I know that the Bloc Québécois tells us, and I think the people of Quebec know it well, that because we are different, we must achieve independence. With the slogan last fall of "Parce qu'on est différents"—because we are different—we can see that the Bloc Québécois's platform has always been to focus on differences, on what divides, rather than on what unites us with others.

If there is one way Quebeckers are not different: germs do not stop at political borders. When we see crises like SARS or any other similar situations, while we respect the expertise developed by the

Government of Quebec, like the excellent expertise developed in British Columbia, naturally, we do not want to duplicate research or reinvent the wheel.

Nevertheless, to us—in the light of the what we have experienced, particularly in the case of SARS—it seems imperative to develop Canadian expertise which will, of course, rely on what exists in each province and allow better coordination among the various jurisdictions. That is the reason we want to take this course of action.

As for the second question, concerning parental leave, the decision about an appeal will be made by our government, on the basis of a judgment that goes far beyond the issue of parental leave. The Attorney General of Canada and cabinet will make a decision on this. I think this decision to appeal or not—with respect to the entire decision by the Quebec Court of Appeal—should not be interpreted as a refusal to negotiate.

The judgment goes far beyond parental leave. Perhaps we will need to seek the opinion of the Supreme Court. It will be up to the government and the Attorney General to decide. Nevertheless, we could open parallel negotiations with the Government of Quebec on the subject of parental leave. That is what the Prime Minister of Canada suggested to Premier Charest of Quebec at the first ministers meeting last month.

• (1320)

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I want the Minister of Health to state clearly in this House that there is no question of implying that our sovereignty plan is dividing Quebeckers and does not respect the anglophone or francophone communities.

I would like him to explain the following. How can he, on the one hand, say that there is room for negotiations and, on the other hand, appeal the ruling on parental leave? Does he recognize that this has been going on since 1998? Will he be a bit more aggressive, vocal and active in cabinet? This matter has remained unresolved for far too long.

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew: Mr. Speaker, in 1997, when I was Minister of Human Resources Development, I received a mandate to negotiate parental leave. I tried to resolve this issue in 1997. If it has taken so long, it is perhaps because, in 1997, the Quebec government did not make budget decisions that would have allowed Quebec to implement a parental leave program.

If the Quebec government wants to provide a more generous program, we encourage it to do so. The Canadian government is a strong believer in this federalism which is a kind of race toward better programs, where the experience of one jurisdiction will benefit other jurisdictions.

We are delighted with this. This is what happened in 1997. We were completely open-minded, and we made a generous financial offer to the Quebec government, but Mr. Landry did not want to allow Ms. Marois to allocate the necessary additional funds to implement such a program.

The Address

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of State (Public Health), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to take part in the debate on the address in response to the Speech from the Throne, in my new position as Minister of State for Public Health.

[*English*]

I would like to thank my constituents in the riding of St. Paul's who over the past six years demonstrated the civic literacy and participated in the two way accountability that are the prerequisites of a robust democracy. From 9/11 to SARS, their understanding of the complexity of the problems and their commitment to finding real solutions have inspired me and informed my work in every way.

I would like to start with a point on which I believe we can all agree: health and health care are our nation's first priority. Both the Speech from the Throne and the Prime Minister's reply have made this clear.

[*Translation*]

Canadians have made it clear to us that their main priority is health and health care.

• (1325)

[*English*]

Canadians expect us to be serious about ensuring that this most cherished Canadian social program is sustained for our children and our grandchildren. As Roy Romanow said, it is "Building on Values", most important, the Canadian values of that double solidarity between the rich and the poor and the sick and the well.

Our only real hope of sustaining our publicly funded health care system is to help Canadians stay healthy so they do not have to use it. Protecting and promoting health is the key to achieving that goal.

Last year's public health crisis from SARS to BSE to West Nile taught us that we were all in this together. This means that no one can be forgotten, no community is worth less than another, no threat can be dismissed. The planet has never been smaller and germs do not respect borders. Therefore, as the Prime Minister has said, working in partnership with the provinces and territories, we will design an effective, co-ordinated Canadian public health system that serves our citizens and allows us to play our part in global health.

That partnership is already in place. We want to strengthen the foundation by building on it. The federal government will start by getting its own house in order to re-energize a national partnership that can truly protect Canadians.

[*Translation*]

The government will therefore be getting its own house in order and re-establishing a national partnership that will truly protect Canadians.

[*English*]

We will begin by naming the first chief public health officer for Canada who can sit at the table with the medical officers of health from every province and territory. This officer will be a woman or man who Canadians will come to see as the country's doctor, a health professional who can be trusted to advise citizens and advise the government.

The chief public health officer for Canada will also speak for Canada to the world and build upon the strong relationships existing in other organizations, such as CDC in Atlanta and the WHO in Geneva.

We will create a Canada public health agency, the federal hub of a network built on partnerships and collaboration that is pan-Canadian and global in scope and that is accountable to Canadians. This agency will operate on three principles.

The first principle is collaboration with the provinces and territories. Public health is a shared responsibility between the federal, provincial and territorial governments. This means that we must work together to ensure that we have a strong, viable Canadian public health system, one that recognizes and respects the differences between jurisdictions.

[*Translation*]

We will be negotiating agreements with the provinces and territories, which will together form a solid public health system, one capable of managing both health emergencies and long-term strategies in the best interests of Canadians.

Working together will ensure that the various jurisdictions help each other progress. By setting aside old quarrels, we will join forces to create a vast network that is respectful of each jurisdiction.

[*English*]

That collaboration must also extend to aboriginal communities. Too many aboriginals in our country face enormous public health challenges, ranging from suicide to tuberculosis to bad water. We can build effective strategies to address those problems by working together with aboriginal communities, another important function of the federal public health system.

The second principle is value for money, transparency and accountability. Canadians expect us to use their money wisely, and public health experts have told us what they need us to invest in first. They need better surveillance, better information systems, better labs, more people and better co-ordination.

Some look to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta and ask where CDC north will be. It will be first and foremost in the systems and procedures that link our best scientists with one another and with the frontline doctors and nurses who care for Canadians.

The Address

Let us be very clear. Our public health boast will not be about a single, shiny complex. Our achievement will be an outcome, a network that has shown its ability to protect Canadians and help put us among the world's healthiest people. It will be about Canadians feeling that we are prepared for emergencies, can minimize a threat of infectious disease and turn around the growing epidemics of chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes and obesity. In addition, we must be accountable for the results.

Canadians have made it clear that they prefer clean air to more puffers and respirators. We know what we have to do. We know where we have to invest. All we have to do is focus on getting the job done right.

The third principle, the one that will drive all others, is this. The interests of Canadians will stand at the very centre of the agency. Citizens, not just governments, will help us guide the mandate of the agency from one year to the next. Citizens will help us set priorities and strategies so they have a meaningful effect on the quality of Canadian life. Citizens will tell us what we get right and what we need to improve. Any effort to protect the health of Canadians must place the confidence of citizens at its centre.

As a physician, I have recognized that often the best solutions can be found in our own communities. They are the public health professionals, patients and ordinary Canadians armed with information and experience and instincts.

I also have to mention the enormous contributions stakeholders will be able to make to this process. It is clear that we will need to engage them, as well as citizens, in guiding the mandate of this agency from one year to the next because they will always let us know what we get right and what we need to improve. Citizens will tell us what they need us to do. Our obligation is to listen and act.

Therefore, Parliament itself, with a revitalized democracy, stands on the frontline of health protection and promotion, for these citizens are our constituents. They are the ones who walk into our offices, who ask for help and whose support we each seek.

Each of us in the chamber is an officer of public health. The democratic reform restores to each of us, regardless of party, the power to protect our own neighbours. That is why I need Liberal, Conservative, New Democratic, Bloc Québécois and independent colleagues to ask the same questions in their ridings over the next few weeks that I will be asking across the country. What do Canadians need from a new public health agency? How do Canadians wish to interact with it?

The House has the power and now has the democratic culture to rebuild a partnership with provinces, territories and communities that is truly capable of protecting Canadians.

Canadians expect us to do better, to collaborate, to communicate and to co-ordinate across government departments and across jurisdictions. We must know what is working and what is not and who does what and when. We need a real public health strategy for Canada. We will build upon the existing excellence across Canada, from the fabulous BCCDC, which I visited on Friday, to the remarkable Winnipeg labs to the Institut national de santé publique in Ste. Foy. We will learn from one another and then keep learning.

A real system is a complex, adaptive model that measures, adapts and measures again. Canadians deserve a real public health system that will be a learning culture. It will be an example for the whole country of a distributive model that can break through the jurisdictional gridlock by articulating the strong common purpose and then respecting local wisdom and local knowledge to get the job done.

The Speech from the Throne focused upon three themes: securing Canada's social foundations; an economy for the 21st century; and Canada's place in the world. I hope that in my role as Minister of State for Public Health that I will be able to make a positive contribution to all of these, particularly as it affects the special foci of our communities and of our aboriginal people.

● (1330)

Our report card will be closing the gap in the health status of our aboriginal people. I am confident that we have the support of all Canadians in our ultimate goal of keeping as many Canadians as possible healthy for as long as possible.

[*Translation*]

I am confident that we have the support of all Canadians in achieving our ultimate goal of keeping all of them healthy for as long as possible.

Good health. Meegwitch.

[*English*]

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to my learned colleague. I enjoyed her remarks.

What I am about to ask strictly falls under her department in that the Government of Canada is spending millions of dollars warning everyone of the health hazards of smoking cigarettes—and I think it is paying off—but I am also somewhat worried, with more scientific evidence coming through and after talking to respiratory specialists, about the dangers of pot smoking, of marijuana and hashish. It is becoming clearer that it is a real health hazard.

I wonder if the minister would consider doing the same thing against pot smoking that the government has done for cigarettes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed gratifying to hear the hon. member speak to the real problems that we face with tobacco in this country, and to the fact that we must do everything in our power to let our young people know the dangers. We must make sure that we do everything in our power before they become addicted to this extraordinarily addictive product.

The Address

It also important that as we develop the drug policy for Canada we learn from what both Senator Nolin and the special committee have told us: that we must move, I think, to a therapeutic approach, that making criminals out of young Canadian who are experimenting is not the way to go.

We have to start very early on. We have to teach kids about respectful relationships and about self-esteem and let them then make good choices in their lives. We know that if we work on all of the things that promote self-esteem, including exercise, nutrition, and just feeling good about ourselves, we find that kids make much better choices in terms of what might be an experiment with drugs.

I firmly believe that the present policy to decriminalize marijuana and to move it to a much more therapeutic approach, one that understands the reasons behind that kind of behaviour and which explains the consequences other than a criminal record, will be far more satisfying. Indeed, in the rest of the world, the hon. member should know that this is the only thing that works. We as a society must take the responsibility and not rely on the Criminal Code.

• (1335)

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am really surprised at the comments that were just made about a more therapeutic approach to drugs and marijuana and about this idea that decriminalization is a much more sensible approach.

The fact is that the way the government has approached this whole issue of drugs is rather pathetic. Having been the vice-chair of that committee and knowing what happened, I know that the real problem in this country is that there is no national drug strategy out there.

Also, there is the issue that when we talk about decriminalization of marijuana, the government says we are going to have maximum penalties for grow ops. Maximum penalties for grow ops are useless: the current penalties today are not being used. Judges and lawyers across this land are getting people off for any amount of grow ops. It happens in my community every day.

How can the member justify that this whole issue of decriminalization in legislation is great and therapeutic when the whole darn issue of drugs among the Liberal government is a mess?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I think the legislation being promoted now will be very satisfying in terms of actually providing that the people pushing the drugs, the people growing the drugs, are the people we actually want to punish.

The hon. member should know that yesterday morning I was in Vancouver's downtown east side; it is unbelievably sad. I want to tell the member some facts that he maybe does not understand. At Women's Own Detox in downtown Toronto, 85% of the clients are incest victims. When we look at a lot of the problems of addiction, we see that these are people who were abused themselves. These are people who therefore did not have respect for authority and did not have any understanding of their lives or of their parents.

I think we must begin with those kinds of facts. We must begin with the fact that in some places home is not a safe place before we begin to make policies that actually may make us feel good in terms of criminalization but actually are not dealing with the individual

Canadians who are really in trouble. We have to do everything we can to turn their lives around.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for the consent of the House to share my time with my hon. colleague from Drummond. Each of us would have 10 minutes to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve does not have to ask for the consent of the House to share his time. If that is what he wants to do, he only has to mention it.

• (1340)

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I will therefore share my time with the hon. member for Drummond.

There is something of a paradox with the throne speech. With the House not sitting since November, we are finally able to see where the government is going.

I was very glad to have the opportunity earlier today to put questions to the health minister, to whom I wish good luck in his new duties.

We now realize that the Liberal government wants to use the health issue to do some "nation building" and to become more centralizing than ever. What the federal government has put forward is quite a paradox.

Following a suggestion made by the Bloc Québécois and supported by the NDP, the Standing Committee on Health travelled throughout Canada these last few months to consider the issue of drug costs.

We found out that there is a huge problem with on-line drugstores. U.S. citizens are buying drugs in Canada. The problem is particularly serious in Manitoba.

Consequently, there are Americans who manage to buy drugs without a prescription. Without a prescription, people can buy drugs, which are exported under mechanisms established by online drugstores.

The federal government wants to establish a Canadian public health agency, although it is not responsible for public health. It did not, however, intervene to counter Internet or online drugstores, which threaten our drug supply in Canada and Quebec.

For example, I was talking to one of my friends who works for the Centre québécois de coordination sur le sida or CQCS. She told me that pharmaceutical companies—such as Pfizer, to name just one—threatened to impose drug quotas, because obviously they are unhappy that Canada is selling drugs to the United States, when the Americans sell those same drugs for more money.

On the one hand, the government did not intervene with regard to Internet drug sales although it is responsible for drug exports, but it is proposing to intervene in areas not under its jurisdiction by establishing a Canadian public health agency and a Canada health council.

Earlier, I was listening to the Minister of Health say that this was not something we should be concerned about. I want to voice my disagreement. Drug costs will be the number one issue facing Quebecers and Canadians over the next few years.

Mr. Svend Robinson: And patents.

Mr. Réal Ménard: And we will have to think about the Patent Act. My colleague from Burnaby—Douglas is saying, “And patents”.

I strongly support a review of patents. This does not mean, as some neo-Bolsheviks are proposing, eliminating all forms of intellectual property. I do not believe that this is the direction we will go in. Intellectual property must continue to exist.

However, I am not afraid to recognize in this House that innovative pharmaceutical companies have abused patents and obtained a new patent from the commissioner of patents, despite the fact that there have been very few therapeutic innovations. This is extremely worrying.

All these mechanisms must be reviewed and, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I moved four motions. I would be quite disappointed if hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas has not read them. I will review them for him.

Here is the first proposal from the member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve: review the role of the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board. Does anyone really think that the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board has no control whatsoever over the price of generic drugs, which cost 30% more in Canada than in the United States?

• (1345)

I would remind the member for Burnaby—Douglas, who is approaching his fifties, that the second proposal from the Bloc Québécois is to tighten the rules with regard to drug advertising. He himself wisely warned the Standing Committee on Health about this. He brought the journal of the Canadian Cancer Society and eloquently demonstrated to us that even though it is prohibited under the Food and Drugs Act, there is advertising that refers specifically to various drugs or pathologies.

There is a third proposal. Yes, we want to have better control over generic drug prices and we want to look at advertising, but the most important proposal—a stroke of genius on my part—is that we must ensure that clinical monographs submitted by pharmaceutical companies deal with products that are truly innovative.

It is unacceptable that companies use patents to extend their intellectual property rights. That does not mean, as some members suggest, that intellectual property should not exist. If marketing a new drug costs \$800 million or \$900 million, it is normal that companies get a return on their investment.

The Address

What is not normal though, and the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board looked at this reality, is that a company can apply for two, three or four patents for the same drug, when there is absolutely no difference from a therapeutic point of view. This is what we should look at. The Bloc Québécois proposed that Health Canada be provided with new tools to conduct more in-depth studies of the clinical monographs that are submitted. I hope I will have the support of the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

When a patent is issued, it is very important to ensure that the period of time will not be unduly extended and that Canadians will not be prevented from having access to a cheaper drug.

Mr. Svend Robinson: What does the hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques think of this?

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas is asking, through the Chair, a question that is almost a subtle one. He is asking what the hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques think of this.

First, I believe this House will want to pay tribute to the hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, who is such a hard worker. He is a social democrat who believes in the redistribution of wealth.

I agree, however, with the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas that there must be debate within political parties. It is normal and I understand that. I remember the NDP's debate on Bill C-20. Perhaps the member for Burnaby—Douglas will want to speak to us about that, as he was the only one to vote in favour of the rights of Quebec in that file.

So debate within political parties is normal. I would point out that debate within our party is vigorous. We understand that the best way to counteract one idea, in a democracy, is to come up with a better one. I have great hopes that the proposals I made to the Standing Committee on Health may one day be received with enthusiasm by all members of this House.

The question of drug costs is extremely important, and the Bloc Québécois will continue to address it very specifically.

I would like to address the matter of parental leave. It will represent a test of the truth for the Quebec Liberal caucus. On the one hand, since 1997 and even before, the previous government, the Parti Québécois government—one of the best to have ever sat on the government side—was prepared to improve the parental leave program so that working parents could be away from their job for one year at 70% of salary.

The federal government refused to make the necessary funds available from the EI fund. Now the appeal court is supporting this, by finding that the amendments proposed to the Employment Insurance Act in 1942 did not allow it to be amended to include parental leave.

The Address

I hope that the member for Beauharnois—Salaberry will join with the Bloc Québécois in recognizing in this House that funds must be transferred to Quebec in order to set up an improved parental leave program. It is a matter of justice and social progress. This has dragged on and on. A good thing that the Bloc Québécois has been here to defend the interests of Quebec.

• (1350)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue of social justice is very important. The member will know that Bill C-204, which was my private member's bill, was adopted by the government to extend parental leave to a full year. I am quite proud of that and I know all Canadians are pleased with it.

There was a line in the throne speech about the health and well-being of seniors, and the member talked about jurisdictional boundaries. I wanted to advise the member that I have been working on a seniors' poverty initiative, which includes matters such as introducing a guaranteed annual income for seniors, establishing provincial, territorial and regional poverty lines, eliminating mandatory retirement at age 65, increasing the caregiver tax credit, extending employment insurance benefits to caregivers, doubling the medical expense supplement, providing the opportunity for Canada pension plan continuity for caregivers, regulating the nursing home industry, as well as dealing with affordable housing and pharmacare.

Seniors' poverty is more acute than it has ever been. There is provincial jurisdiction. Would the member agree that we should collaborate, all parties with all levels of government, to ensure that we address the significant issue of seniors' poverty?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois calls for the Quebec appeal court's judgment to be respected in its entirety.

Hon. Serge Marcell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the passionate speech made by the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, who always speaks with a great deal of passion.

I would like to make two comments. First, in 1997, the current health minister, then the Minister of Human Resources Development, came up with a very generous proposal that he submitted to Minister Marois at the time. Unfortunately, the then finance minister, Mr. Landry, turned it down, because the Government of Quebec did not have the money to provide all the matching dollars required for the program.

I think it is important to point that out. We often tend to blame the federal government. I can tell the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve that the Liberal members from Quebec will work hard to settle the issue of parental leave.

Second—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve.

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, the proposal was \$300 million short. It is unbelievable to hear something like that from a former member of the National Assembly.

I hope that the Liberal caucus will put the decision of the Court of Appeal of Quebec on its agenda and examine it. They have no business interfering in the area of parental leave. What they should do is hand us the money we all have been demanding since 1997, including the intergovernmental affairs minister and former law professor, Benoît Pelletier. This is not a partisan issue. The only ones turning this debate into a partisan issue are the members of the Liberal caucus. Thank God the Bloc Québécois is here to watch over the House.

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve and I know that he does a good job for his constituents.

I would like to ask my friend a question. He talked about the importance of changing the Patent Act to put an end to abuses by large pharmaceutical companies. However, when my colleague, the member for Windsor West, tried to convince the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology to make these changes, it was the member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, the Bloc Québécois industry critic, who blocked these efforts. He said that changes to the Patent Act were not needed, that there was no problem.

I have to ask my friend and colleague from Hochelaga—Maisonneuve this question. Who is speaking for the Bloc Québécois? Is it the industry critic, who deals with issues related to pharmaceutical companies, or is it the member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve?

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to make two comments. The difference between the NDP and the Bloc Québécois is that we believe in intellectual property. We know that if pharmaceuticals make \$800 million investments, we agree with the 20 year patent protection, but we say that it should not be more than 20 years.

My seatmate, the critic for industry, also agrees that we should stop the abuse by pharmaceuticals, but never in the way that the NDP would like, which is by providing no intellectual property. We believe that any research deserves to be rewarded and protected. We want the patents to end after the 20 year period. This is what the health critic and the industry critic say.

• (1355)

[*English*]

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am interested in one of the statements made by the member opposite. He said that seniors' poverty has never been more acute in this country. We have watched recent events with the government imploding over the fact that it has virtually stolen money out of the pockets of taxpayers of millions and millions of dollars.

I find it hard to put it into perspective how government members can say that seniors' poverty has never been more acute, yet they just steal some of their money, give it to some of their buddies and pound it back into the Liberal Party's coffers. If they were so darn concerned about seniors' poverty, perhaps they should not have stolen from—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Order, please, the hon. member Hochelaga—Maisonneuve,

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I agree with our colleague's statement. Of course, this group of patronage people who are in the government seats has not always served the interests of Canadians and Quebecers.

My colleague from Champlain led a praiseworthy campaign to ensure that the guaranteed income supplement would go to the elderly. It is ironic, to say the least, that a Liberal member would rise in the House to talk about poverty among the elderly, when 68,000 Canadians were deprived of the money they were entitled to. And they are being refused payments retroactive to 1994.

In this House, the person who defended the elderly is my colleague, the member for Champlain.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

EEL FISHERY

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to scientists, the latest victim of overfishing in Lake Ontario is the commercial eel fishery.

Forty years ago, there were 30 eels per hectare in the inshore waters of Lake Ontario. Now there is only one eel for every 5.6 hectares. Furthermore, at the height of the commercial fishery in 1980, about 225 tonnes were caught per year. Now the annual catch in Lake Ontario is less than 10 tonnes.

As with northern cod, overharvesting hastened the depletion of eel stocks. Habitat destruction, dams, seaweed harvesting, invasive species and water pollution: altogether they have taken their toll.

Therefore, as a matter of urgency, provincial, state, and federal governments should adopt the scientists' recommendations aimed at taking immediate protective action of the depleted eel stocks before it is too late.

* * *

AUTO THEFT

Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my City of Surrey, although it is a wonderful place to live and work, unfortunately has the dubious distinction of being a North American leader in auto crime. While joyriding youth contribute to the problem, criminals stealing cars to commit other crimes are a major factor.

The typical Surrey car thief is a drug addicted adult male with multiple prior convictions. They steal vehicles, preferably SUVs, for personal transportation and for use in drug trafficking, home invasions and drive-by shootings, among other crimes.

The city plans a number of measures to reduce auto thefts, including bike patrols and a bait car program to bolster current efforts. However, liberal laws and lenient courts allow B.C.'s estimated 300 car thieves to commit up to 90% of thefts each year.

S. O. 31

There is rarely jail time even for multiple convictions, no deterrence, and no incentive to stop stealing.

On Wednesday, a public forum will be held at the Surrey Arts Centre to discuss the facts and the measures everyone can take to protect their property. I urge the citizens of Surrey to attend this event and become part of the solution to auto crime in our city.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to report concerns in my riding about Canada's involvement in the ballistic missile defence system. As there is still widespread public misunderstanding about this matter and about Canada's possible participation in it, I have supported the idea of a debate in the House so that decisions can be made with full public involvement.

One of the concerns my constituents voice is that the establishment of such a system encourages nuclear proliferation around the world. However, if a system is to be put in place by the United States alone, would we be better or worse off?

I urged the Minister of National Defence to bring this matter to the House in a special debate. I am delighted that there will be such a debate this very week.

* * *

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in June 2003, as a Liberal member of Parliament, I tabled a question in the House concerning sponsorship programs so that the people of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik could find out the answer today.

I have received an answer from the House of Commons which reads as follows:

The amounts shown represent the amounts committed, including the commissions paid to the coordinating agency—3%— and to the communications agencies—12%—for the events approved before May 27, 2002.

Here is an example: the Liberal riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik received only \$65,000 under this program, while the riding of the leader of the Bloc Québécois, the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, received over \$5 million. Is that what they call a parallel culture for those in the Bloc Québécois, who received 500 times more in sponsorships than the remote regions?

S. O. 31

[English]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it would be so hard for this Prime Minister not to have seen the unfolding of the advertising scandal in Quebec. It would be kind of like not noticing a three tonne pink elephant in the middle of the living room.

Consider that to pull off this scam required the cooperation of people in the offices of cabinet ministers, crown corporations, the federal public service, four ad agencies and the Liberal Party. That is a lot of people who had to stay quiet over a four year period.

One letter said that Liberal Party activists had been talking about possible criminal activity in the sponsorship program in the fall of 2001. The letter was sent to our current Prime Minister in February 2002, but he just cannot remember it. Despite its allusion to criminal activity, no one in his office thought to call the police.

Oh, yes, and remember too, Mr. Speaker, that he was also vice-chair of the Treasury Board, which had responsibility for spending oversight, and a Quebec cabinet minister who had even employed one of the notorious ad firms in his first leadership bid back in 1990.

All this proves is that we can lead a minister to this scandal but we cannot make him look.

* * *

ALGOMA STEEL

Mr. Carmen Provenzano (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are not many good news stories in the Canadian steel industry. However, I am happy to report to the House that Algoma Steel Inc., which was recently restructured with the help of \$50 million in loan guarantees from the federal government, is just that: a good news story.

The largest employer in the Soo, Algoma Steel Inc. reported this month a net income of \$10.1 million for the three months ending December 31, 2003, or 33¢ per share. Algoma Steel is now on its way to sustained profitability.

On another high note, the share value of Algoma Steel on the Toronto Stock Exchange has grown to more than eight times its share value in June 2003. This latest financial news for Algoma has uplifted the spirits of our community, which is grateful for our government's participation in the restructuring of Sault Ste. Marie's main economic engine.

I would like to congratulate the board of directors for Algoma Steel Inc., its president, Denis Turcotte, and all of Algoma's employees for this amazing turn of events at one of Canada's largest steelmakers.

* * *

NATIONAL FLAG DAY

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, National Flag Day provides all Canadians with an opportunity to reflect on this great nation.

On February 15, my constituents in Brampton Centre joined millions of fellow Canadians across every region as they paid

homage to the colours of our flag and celebrated what our flag represents to us.

With their drawings of our flag, poems about our flag, and posters, paintings and skits all dedicated to the celebration of the Canadian maple leaf, the children in the schools in my riding exhibited the greatest enthusiasm toward our national flag.

I wish to extend congratulations to tomorrow's leaders for showing their patriotism toward the flag and also to all Canadians who took the time to honour our flag and, by doing so, honour Canada and Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government's withdrawal from health care funding, the aging population, the increasing costs of health care in our hospitals, and the fiscal imbalance all threaten the very existence of the universal health care system.

Luckily, there are still men and women in our communities who are concerned with the quality of life of their fellow citizens.

Today, I would like to acknowledge a significant financial contribution of \$100,000 from the Cascades company so that the Hôtel-Dieu d'Arthabaska can continue to serve its population.

I salute the initiative of the President and Chief Executive Officer of Cascades, Alain Lemaire, and the participation of all the people at Cascades, and remind the House that improvements in the effectiveness of the health system are also dependent on effective funding.

* * *

● (1405)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Gilbert Barrette (Témiscamingue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 5, I attended the opening of a vine tomato production complex at the Serres coopératives de Guyenne in Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

I saw for myself the significant impact the Softwood Industry and Community Economic Adjustment Initiative had on this rural community.

With innovative technology, this cooperative will offer a new product, expand its market and provide jobs in this region that has been affected by the softwood lumber crisis.

Members of the cooperative told me personally that without the support of this program, they would not have been able to carry out this project. They also commented on the efficiency of the staff at Economic Development Canada.

I would like to thank my government and the minister responsible for Industry Canada and Economic Development Canada for supporting structuring projects in rural communities.

[English]

HEART AND STROKE MONTH

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this month is Heart and Stroke Month. The Heart and Stroke Foundation warns that fat is the new tobacco. Although smoking rates have dropped by half during the last three decades, we are still not out of the woods with this killer.

But now, overweight and obesity are on the rise. Obesity and smoking, when combined, are a double-barrelled threat, shortening people's lives by years and costing billions of dollars.

All three levels of government must support strategies to encourage healthy living, such as urban planning that supports recreational activity, quality daily physical education in all of our schools and, most important, a public health system that has the resources to address overweight and obesity and the prevention of chronic diseases.

Let us as Canadians work together to improve our lifestyles.

* * *

AIDEN DOIRON

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to say a few words about Aiden Doiron of North Rustico, who passed away recently as the result of an accident.

Aiden was well known and respected in the fishery and throughout Atlantic communities. In the 1950s, he had the foresight to start a deep sea fishing business that has proved successful to this day, providing not only an economy for the area but an education and a great experience for those tourists and locals fortunate enough to fish from his boats.

When the local fish co-op shut down, it was he who supported the local fishermen by buying and selling their product. If one wanted fresh fish or lobster, Doiron's was the place to be.

With his vast knowledge of the fishing industry, he was the voice of experience. When he spoke, we on the political side ought to be listening.

An avid sportsman, particularly fond of snowmobiling, Aiden was foremost a family man who loved so much to spend quality time with his family.

On behalf of all members, I wish to extend my condolences and pay my respects to his wife Beverley and his family.

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IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE BOARD

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in Toronto I met with Korean refugee Song Dae Ri and his young son, Chung Il.

Mr. Ri fled to Canada with his family from the terror of the brutal North Korean regime in 2001. Both his wife and his father were executed in North Korea, and now a Canadian officer of the Immigration and Refugee Board has ordered that Mr. Ri be sent back to North Korea even though he faces certain death himself.

S. O. 31

I call on the immigration minister today to immediately reverse this outrageous, cruel decision and allow Mr. Ri to remain in Canada with his beloved son. It is cruel to keep him waiting any longer.

The minister should also reprimand Bonnie Milliner, the officer who made this incredible decision, and change the blatantly political IRB appointments process.

Song Dae Ri is not a war criminal. I join with thousands of Canadians in appealing to the minister to show compassion and humanity and grant Song Dae Ri and his son permanent residence in Canada today.

* * *

[Translation]

ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in my riding of Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, more than 150 people attended a conference on the U.S. Army's plan, which is supported by the federal government, to widen and deepen the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Speakers Alain Saladzius from Rivers Foundation, Luc Bergeron from Stratégies Saint-Laurent, and Nicolas Milot, a Master's student in environmental science, talked about the environmental impact the U.S. project would have on our St. Lawrence. The erosion of banks, toxic sediment resuspension and an increase in invasive species are just a few examples of the likely consequences to our ecosystem.

I call on all Quebeckers to join the coalition started by the Bloc Québécois and six environmental groups to oppose the expansion of the St. Lawrence Seaway. Let us send a clear message to the federal government to keep its hands off our river.

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● (1410)

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Serge Marcil (Beauharnois—Salaberry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every year in February, Canadians from coast to coast recognize our culture, our history and our values by celebrating Black History Month, National Flag Day and Heritage Day.

Today, to mark Heritage Day, the Heritage Canada Foundation has chosen the theme "Defending Canada: Our Military Heritage Sites and Buildings". We can all take part in that theme by preserving personal objects and public collections that symbolize our military heritage. Let us never forget.

Oral Questions

Canadians can celebrate by accessing the virtual exhibits on New France and Dieppe through the National Archives site, or by viewing masterpieces depicting the battlefields of Europe in the Canadian War Museum collection. It is also possible to discover stories in our communities, through our public libraries, historical associations and dedicated volunteers.

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[English]

PROCEEDS OF CRIME

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the great Canadian dream is to own one's own home after years of hard work to pay the mortgage. I want to tell Canadians what is really going on so I will use just one example of many.

Phu Son came to Canada in 1994. He was 38 years old and had no money when he arrived. He has been on welfare from the time he arrived 10 years ago. He recently got busted for drug dealing. Now I find he owns three homes, not one but three: one in Abbotsford, another in Aldergrove, and yet another in Langley, British Columbia.

How does a person come to Canada and stay on welfare for 10 years? How does a person living exclusively on welfare come to own three houses? Why are these houses not seized as proceeds of crime and used for rehabilitation of drug addicts?

I do not know the answers, but the government of British Columbia and the federal Liberal government have a lot of explaining to do. This situation is becoming all too common in this country.

* * *

[Translation]

LIBERAL TASK FORCE ON SENIORS

Ms. Yolande Thibeault (Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that, last week, the Liberal task force on seniors tabled its report on the means through which seniors' lives could be improved.

As chair of this task force, I wish to point out the excellent work of my colleagues, who have held consultations across the country and who have met with over 325 stakeholders, including local groups, experts on issues relating to seniors and, of course, the general public.

The concerns of our seniors can be summed up in these words: health, dignity and safety. As citizens, we have a duty to see that the rights of all those who have built our country are respected. We hope that this report will help decision makers ensure that seniors obtain the services they need, when they need them, and are able to take an active part in community life. It is by creating favourable conditions for them that we will continue to benefit from their contribution—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

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[English]

CISN RADIO

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate CISN radio in Edmonton. CISN radio

has been a pillar of support in our community, contributing to numerous charitable and local projects.

Among the many honours it has received were the president's award from CORUS Entertainment, and afternoon DJ Chris Scheetz's nomination for "on air personality of the year" from the Canadian Country Music Association.

The crowning achievement was the awarding of the Canadian Country Music Station of the Year.

For the community, Chris Scheetz lived in a tractor for five days to raise over \$103,000 for struggling farm families. CSIN's efforts with the "Mad Dash to the Border" rallied Canadians to support Alberta's beef industry.

Most recently, CISN raised over a million dollars during a radiothon for Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation.

I am proud CISN FM is located in Edmonton. I congratulate the station on a very successful year.

The next time members are in Edmonton I ask them to remember to turn their radio dial to 103.9 FM.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

●(1415)

[English]

AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has launched his pre-election damage control tour. Who is paying? The taxpayer, of course.

However it would be nice if we could clean up some of the scandal here at home.

My question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. Has the Prime Minister asked all his cabinet ministers who sat at the table what their involvement was in this scandal?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the government have been absolutely clear. We want to get to the bottom of this matter for the Canadian public. That is why we have instituted what can only be described as the most comprehensive action plan that probably any government has ever put in place: a public inquiry; a public accounts committee; the work being undertaken by my colleagues, the Minister of Public Works and the President of the Treasury Board.

This is a government and a Prime Minister committed to getting to the bottom of this situation.

Mr. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, did anybody in Canada hear the answer to my question, which was pretty specific?

Oral Questions

The Deputy Prime Minister sat on the cabinet's unity committee and communication committee. In those positions, she had to have precise knowledge of what was going on with the sponsorship program in Quebec.

I am asking her specifically now. When did she know about the sponsorship problem and why did she not speak up?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as has been said in the House on many occasions by any number of us, of course we were aware of the sponsorship program. However none of us were aware of the details, the allegations put in play by the Auditor General last week.

That is why we called for a public inquiry. We want to get to the bottom of this. We all want to know what happened here. We believe that is what the Canadian public deserves to know.

Mr. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I note again: no response to the specific question.

We have \$250 million, a quarter of a billion dollars worth of taxpayer money, and \$100 million of that went for commissions and fees with absolutely no benefit to the Canadian public.

My question once again is: What will it take for the Deputy Prime Minister to get up and tell us when she knew? Does she have to go kicking and screaming to a public inquiry under oath?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think any number of us have been very clear. As a matter of the existence of the program, of course we knew there was a sponsorship program. However, did we know the details in relation to how the program was being operated? No.

In fact it was a former minister of public works who called in the Auditor General to review this program. It was my colleague, now the Minister of Finance, who froze the program. And in fact it is this government and this Prime Minister who have put in place a comprehensive response to—

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, getting to the bottom is a great idea because that is where they will find all those Liberal Party bottom-feeders. However it will leave a big oil slick on the surface.

Yesterday the Prime Minister told Canadians that spending oversight was not his job; that, he said, was the responsibility of the Treasury Board president.

Perhaps the former president of the Treasury Board could tell us how \$100 million could be ripped off from taxpayers right under her nose? How could she stand the smell?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think we can start with the changes that were undertaken in, I believe, June 1993, by the then Kim Campbell government who removed the comptrollership program, the second line of oversight, something that this Prime Minister has offered to restore.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, so in 10 years that member could not speak up and ensure it was put back in? What is the matter with them?

It was pretty unseemly yesterday to see the Prime Minister tossing women and children out of the lifeboats so he could save himself.

The former president of the Treasury Board was supposed to be minding the store while Liberal Party activists gorged themselves on taxpayer dollars.

My question is for the current industry minister and the former president of the Treasury Board. How does it feel to be left to hang out to dry by the former vice-chair of the Treasury Board, the current Prime Minister?

● (1420)

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member only needs to listen to the speeches I have made in this House and elsewhere on this very issue.

There has been a serious structural problem in public management. It began with the new public management move to destroy the comptrollership. An error was made. The past government did not put it back in. This Prime Minister will.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when he was Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister paid Earnscliffe, the communications firm that worked on his leadership campaign, very handsomely to advise him on the state of public opinion. The problem is that, in many instances, there is no written proof that the work was actually done, as the Auditor General has pointed out in her report.

Will the Prime Minister admit that he broke the rules and that this is exactly the kind of behaviour the Auditor General has denounced in connection with the sponsorship scandal?

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a commission of inquiry has been set up precisely to find the answers to all the questions that have been raised. There is no reason to assume that some people in this House have a stronger desire than others to find out the truth.

We want to get at the truth. That is the point of our government's initiative, and I will not be happy until we know the conclusions of this inquiry.

● (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is no need for a commission of inquiry to provide an answer to a clear question.

In the sponsorship scandal, the Prime Minister has said repeatedly that, if any ministers knew and did nothing, they should resign. I wonder what fate he plans for those who blatantly broke the rules. In any case, during the Prime Minister's reign in finance, there were five public opinion surveys and no reports were provided.

Oral Questions

Is it not true that the Auditor General's report clearly shows that the Prime Minister, who says he wants to shed light on the sponsorship scandal, broke the government's rules himself, by having no report, as was the case with Coffin Communications?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. gentleman may be mistaken. He should, I think, be referring to three specific incidents where the reports were filed verbally, three specific incidents over a period of three years for one incident per year.

In each case I have been told they were live, real time focus groups and they were reported upon verbally while the focus group was in progress. That would be the normal professional way in which the reports would be filed.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in her report, the Auditor General states that one poll costing \$27,000 was sold ten times to ten different ministers of this government.

I ask the government the following question. If the Prime Minister is serious when he says he wants the truth, and questionable practices, to be revealed, could someone tell us which ten ministers each paid \$27,000 for a report, for a total of \$270,000?

[English]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report on public opinion research came to the conclusion that in general she found that the public opinion research was conducted in a transparent manner with adequate controls.

She did find, however, that there were some inadequacies in a small number of cases where the voting behaviour and political party image was actually touched on in a syndicated poll.

That being said, the government accepts those criticisms, although the program in general was supported, and it has made changes to make sure that does not happen again.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government should not think those listening are fools. I repeat my question.

Ten ministers among those present purchased the same poll at a cost of \$27,000 for the first copy, \$27,000 for the second copy, \$27,000 for the third copy and so on, ten times.

Does the government not realize that these are not more or less appropriate practices but rather practices strangely similar to those used with regard to the Groupaction report that has yet to be found? That is unacceptable. A total of \$270,000 was paid for a report that cost \$27,000.

[English]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the Auditor General made these observations with respect to the preferred or the recommended bulk buying of syndicated public opinion research polls.

The government has accepted that criticism and is taking steps to ensure that happens in the future.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister wants us to believe he is getting to the bottom of all these Liberal scandals but Canadians are way ahead of him. They know that Liberal corporate cronies and backroom boys have seen the public purse as a branch plant for their corrupt party.

The Prime Minister also wants us to believe that he is really mad about all of this. Let us see if he is mad enough to ask the Liberal Party to give us our money back, starting with the almost \$300,000 it received in kickbacks from its corporate cronies at the centre of this scandal. Is the government willing to start with the \$300,000 and give it back to the Canadian people?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe the member got all of her hot words into the question but what she has not provided is a single shred of evidence. She should put evidence on the table that says that and it will be responded to. However to simply sit here and come to judgment before anybody has had a chance to look at the facts does not help the dignity of this place.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the evidence is there but the member chooses to ignore it.

I have homelessness in my riding, seniors who cannot afford prescriptions and kids choking on smog. While these scandals are going on, people are literally dying on the streets in our major cities, thanks to this Prime Minister's conservative budget.

We want our money back so we can do what the government should be doing, which is helping Canadians who are hurting, not stuffing money into Liberal pockets.

Again, when will the Liberal government ask the Liberal Party to give Canadians their money back?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it would be exceptionally important for us to have a discussion on the very issues the member raises. I would like to be talking about how we deal with homelessness and about children.

If the member would like to pose a question that is substantive on that subject, I am more than willing to debate it.

[Translation]

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health is described as the Prime Minister's strongman in the province of Quebec. Since 1996, he has sat at the table of every government and has had full access to all the government's business for the province of Quebec.

We want to know how long the Minister of Health has known about this horrible scandal in the province of Quebec. When did he know and when did he talk to the Prime Minister about the scandal?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it seems strange that, instead of following the path we have chosen to get to the bottom of things and to find out the truth about everything that happened, the hon. members continue to ask questions as if they were on a fishing expedition.

If my colleague has any evidence, I suggest he should submit it to the commission of inquiry so that we can get to the bottom of things and find out what really happened.

[*English*]

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if it seems like we are going on a fishing expedition, it is because the government seems to put up one or two ministers to answer the questions. My question was specifically for the Minister of Health. If the government would allow ministers who knew the information to get up in the House and answer the questions, we may not have to do some of these fishing expeditions that he describes.

My question is for the Minister of Health. When did the Minister of Health know about this scandal and when did he ask the prime minister to investigate this? When did he know?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Health, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like the Auditor General of Canada, I have noticed the excellent work the Minister of Finance did when he was the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. The Auditor General said that the work was much appreciated and that the government had cooperated with the Auditor General's office since 2002.

We are the ones who asked the Auditor General to do the work. We have taken a series of measures—and that is unprecedented—with the judicial public inquiry. We have the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and we have the special legal counsel for the recovery of money.

[*English*]

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I notice the minister did not say he did not know about it. The Prime Minister has told Canadians he would leave no stone unturned to get to the truth in the sponsorship scandal, so has he kicked over some of the pebbles in his cabinet?

The President of the Queen's Privy Council has been in the thick of Liberal Party politics in Quebec for more than 20 years. I wonder if the Prime Minister has asked this minister what he knew about the scandal.

Will the minister tell the House whether he and the Prime Minister have discussed the minister's possible role in the sponsorship program?

• (1430)

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister and this government have been absolutely plain. What we want to do is get to the bottom of this. That is why we have put in place a public inquiry. That is why we constituted, with the

support of the opposition, the public accounts committee as quickly as possible. That is why the President of the Treasury Board has put in place a number of reviews, including our relationship with crown corporations.

Canadians should be under no misapprehension: this government wants to get to the bottom of this matter.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how will we get to the bottom of it if the people who knew something will not speak up for themselves?

Canadians are watching that minister very carefully. He has already been caught out being, shall we say, less than candid about his cozy relationship with the president of a Quebec advertising agency, and the courts recently ruled that he misled Parliament.

If this minister is found to have been complicit in this abuse of public money or knew about it in some way, will he immediately resign as a minister?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Some hon. members: Sit down.

The Speaker: Order, please. Hon. members know that when they pose questions to the cabinet, any minister may rise to respond. The Deputy Prime Minister has risen to respond and she has been recognized by the Chair. She has the floor. We have to have some order.

Hon. Anne McLellan: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, this Prime Minister is absolutely committed to getting to the bottom of this matter. He has promised Canadians that we will find out what happened here.

Let me again remind the opposition that it was this Prime Minister who immediately put in place a public inquiry. It was this Prime Minister who asked the public accounts committee to take up a study of this matter. It was this Prime Minister who asked the President of the Treasury Board to look at the relationship between government and crown corporations. This Prime Minister—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lotbinière—L'Érable.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—L'Érable, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to the Auditor General's report, and also according to an employee of the Minister of Finance, there were five different investigations at Finance Canada without any written report, exactly the same situation as the untraceable reports from Communications Coffin, which cost the government \$116,000 and are now the object of criminal proceedings.

How can the Prime Minister exonerate himself by claiming he was not informed of the situation with the sponsorships, when something very similar was going on in his own department at the same time?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no one in Canada is above the law. Everyone in Canada who is found guilty of reprehensible acts must be punished. This is why the Prime Minister has set up a commission of inquiry, appointed a special council and taken steps within Treasury Board. We can go on and on about these issues, but the important thing is to let the process get to the bottom of things, so that we have the answers Canadians want.

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—L'Érable, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how can the Prime Minister justify having paid such sizeable sums for verbal reports other than because they had more to do with the Liberal Party leadership race than with the interests of the Department of Finance?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I explained earlier, the three reports in question were verbal reports delivered with respect to live, real time focus groups while those focus groups were in progress. The files, unfortunately, failed to explain the nature of the kind of research that was being done. That was the nature of it I am told and that would be the normal way that they would be reported upon. One could not file a written report in the midst of a live focus group.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, through their taxes, Quebecers, unfortunately, are paying one quarter of the salary for Don Cherry, who is always insulting them. And now, they have paid one quarter of the subsidy given by the federal government to an American, Conan O'Brien, with exactly the same outcome.

Is the government prepared to invest the same amount of money—through the Government of Quebec—to launch a campaign that would counter the negative effects of these racist and scornful remarks about Quebecers?

• (1435)

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government completely dissociates itself from the remarks made by that person. They are completely unacceptable. The money was given to a non-profit organization in the Toronto area in an effort to promote tourism in the Toronto area. We sincerely regret these incidents.

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GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the heels of the offensive comments by Don Cherry and Conan O'Brien, a government member has joined in the Quebec bashing. The minister from Thunder Bay said, "This is Quebec's problem, and I think that is the way they do politics".

What is the Prime Minister waiting for to tell his minister that this is the Liberal way, not Quebec's way, of doing politics?

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe what I have just heard. It is not their prerogative to defend Quebec. Quebecers are just as committed to justice, the facts and truth as any other Canadians. If they would just support the commission of inquiry, then we could find out what happened. Seeking the truth, that is Quebec's way.

[English]

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at least the Minister of Health struggled to his feet and tried to answer a question. It would be okay if the President of the Queen's Privy Council managed to do the same.

It is interesting. Canadians are having their doubts about this inquiry because they remember the other inquiries. We remember the Krever inquiry got bogged down in legal wrangling. The Liberals refused to act on the recommendations of the APEC inquiry. Panellists resigned citing interference. The prime minister refused to testify. It was the usual stuff. In the Somalian inquiry papers were shredded and people were moved out of town. The inquiry cancelled on the eve of the election. Does it sound familiar?

What will be different about this inquiry?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a highly distinguished judge of the Quebec Superior Court has been appointed, with wide terms of reference, to look into these issues. The rules in terms of a public inquiry have been clarified by the Supreme Court of Canada where inquiries can continue when criminal investigations are underway in a way that will not complicate one to the other.

We expect this to go ahead expeditiously with an urgent report. We do not expect any barriers to the full inquiry of people who have knowledge about this issue.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the inquiry could start today with a few simple answers from a few simple ministers over there.

Unfortunately, we know what happens when Liberals get involved in inquiries. We all remember when the Liberals cancelled the Somalia inquiry on the eve of a federal election, prompting the chair of the inquiry to bluntly say that shutting down the inquiry was done to prevent him from finding out who was responsible for the actions of the government at the highest level. That is why they shut it down.

What possible assurances can be given Canadians who are asking the Prime Minister this question. What is any different about this inquiry? Why not hold off the election until this inquiry reports?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister has made a very clear commitment to the people of Canada. He has said that he will get to the bottom of this. Part of getting to the bottom of it is putting in place a public inquiry, and this Prime Minister has made it absolutely plain that the inquiry will have the authority to answer all the questions and hear all the evidence it needs to, to get to the bottom of this on behalf of the Canadian people.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Friday the President of the Treasury Board said that there would be no judgments made about the sponsorship scandal without sufficient evidence. However, yesterday the Prime Minister proclaimed that his former boss, the former prime minister, was innocent of any wrongdoing in this disgraceful Liberal money laundering scheme.

If the Prime Minister knew nothing about the sponsorship scandal when he was finance minister, on what evidence does he now bring in this not guilty verdict?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I could offer some advice to the member for Provencher, the former attorney general in Manitoba. In this country we tend to hold people innocent until there is proof of their guilt, unlike the opposition. I am a little surprised at the concern about the public inquiry. What the public inquiry will do is put out the truth. We are not afraid of it. Why are you?

•(1440)

The Speaker: I am sure that the President of the Treasury Board meant the member for Provencher in his answer.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yet the government had no trouble firing the former public works minister without any hearing. Even before a public inquiry has started, the Prime Minister has said that heads will roll at a number of crown corporations over this Liberal money laundering scheme. This sounds like *Alice in Wonderland*; execution first, trial later.

On what basis is the Prime Minister prejudging the innocence of his former boss and the guilt of everyone else? What else does he know that he is not telling Canadians?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been no finding of guilt or innocence in any one of these cases. The fact is, and this came out very clearly in the matter of the privacy commissioner, there is another bar and that is the bar of confidence. It was confidence in the member to continue to do the job of representing the country in light of the fact that the Auditor General in her report on more than 20 occasions indicated his potential involvement in this.

His guilt or innocence will be determined by the inquiry and by the courts. However, whether we have confidence in individuals in these positions is a judgment that government makes, and it did.

Oral Questions

PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Eugène Bellemare (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the air needs to be cleared on rumours and mixed messages in the media regarding the public service.

I ask the President of the Treasury Board this. Is it true that the government is planning: one, another program review; two, job cuts; three, outsourcing; and four, freezing justified promotions and reclassifications?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans is the first member to rise in this House and ask a question about our public servants.

There are no current plans to outsource. There are no current plans to privatize. There are no plans at all to privatize. What we are working very hard on is building the best public service in the world. This process is about excellence. It is about delivering the kind of public services that Canadians expect.

I thank that member for his interest in it, and his continued pushing of me to do the right thing.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

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

The Supreme Court of Canada will hear an appeal by a Quebec physician, Dr. Jacques Chaoulli, who wants a parallel private health care system, which would destroy the public system. Now, ten senators, including Senator Michael Kirby, are intervening in support of this appeal.

Can the minister confirm who is subsidizing this intervention, and why these Liberal senators are supporting this attack on our public health care system?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Health, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to confirm our government's commitment to the Canada Health Act and to each of its five principles.

As minister, I have had the opportunity to visit each of the thirteen jurisdictions, meaning the ten provinces and the three territories. Wherever I went, I recognized the strong support of each of my counterparts for the Canada Health Act. I can assure you that our government will continue to promote and defend this legislation.

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is not one word about these despicable senators in his reply.

[English]

I have a supplementary question. The Liberal government is silent on the Romanow report, yet it stands by while Liberal senators support an illegal assault on the Canada Health Act.

Oral Questions

I want to ask the minister whether he will ask his Liberal buddies in the Senate to stop attacking the Canada Health Act, to listen to Roy Romanow and to back off on using public money to subvert the Canada Health Act.

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Health, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our commitment was in the throne speech. Our government is quite clear, and I will not begin to comment on actions that the Senate and some other courts and some other houses might be taking.

I do believe honestly that our job as a government is quite clear. It is in the Speech from the Throne. We will continue to promote and defend the Canada Health Act and will not begin to comment on actions by the Senate or any others.

* * *

• (1445)

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday on television the Prime Minister said he knew nothing about the sponsorship scandal, even though he was vice chair of the Treasury Board. A quick look at the website for the Treasury Board says that it was Treasury Board's responsibility to approve the proposed sponsorship spending plans by public works and then to review the sponsorship program.

As the vice chair of the Treasury Board, the Prime Minister was paid to know what was going on. It was his job to know what was going on. Why did he not know what was going on?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there was an internal audit in the Department of Public Works in late 2000. This led to an action plan to deal with some identified managerial problems. By late 2001 it became clear through investigative reporting as well as other means that this was beyond just ministerial problems. In early 2002 the then minister was removed from that job and specific programs were put in place to come to grips with bringing to end the problems that existed in the sponsorship program.

That led in an incremental way to the situation we have today with—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he might have different questions than we have, but the Deputy Prime Minister just a few minutes ago said, "None of us knew about the details of the sponsorship program". The Prime Minister said in his press conference last week, "A very few ministers, Quebec ministers, did know about the conduct of the sponsorship program".

Both answers cannot be right. Did they all know? Did a few know? Did some know? How many knew?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me say again that we are committed to getting to the bottom of this. The government is committed to finding out what happened here on behalf of the Canadian people.

I would ask the opposition perhaps just for a minute to stop slinging the mud, stop playing the partisan games and in fact join us in getting to the bottom of this on behalf of all Canadians.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister is mistaken. It is not the opposition that is slinging the mud. It is the Liberal government that slung 100 million tax dollars that belonged to Canadian taxpayers right out the window.

The Prime Minister himself said a few Quebec ministers may have known more about the real dealings behind the scandal than he did. Who were they? Do they still sit in the cabinet? Could it be the president of the Privy Council with his deep connections with the Liberal organization in Quebec? Could it be the Minister of Health?

Why will these ministers not stand up and tell us what they knew and when they knew it?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is the worst kind of example of partisan mudslinging.

What we are committed to is getting to the bottom of this, finding out what happened. That is why the Prime Minister has called for a public inquiry. That is why we asked the public accounts committee to sit immediately. We are committed to finding out what happened.

The Speaker: Order, please. Before we proceed with the supplementary question, I would remind hon. members that there is a little-used lobby just outside the doors at the far end of the chamber. Discussions across the chamber could perhaps be carried on out there so the rest of us could hear the question and the answer in the House.

The hon. member for Calgary Southeast has the floor.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first they claimed ignorance, then they blamed a dozen bureaucrats, then backroom operators blamed the Prime Minister. Now they are blaming the opposition for the culture of corruption and Liberal sleaze for which the government is responsible.

The Prime Minister said that he heard rumours about this. As finance minister, as senior minister in Quebec, as vice chair of Treasury Board, did he follow up on those rumours? Did he call any of the ministers responsible? Did he raise this at cabinet, or did he just bury his head in the sand because he did not want to know about the Liberal culture of corruption?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, part of the problem is in this environment where we have 30 seconds and it is easy to lay on the table some of these sleazy innuendoes. I understand that.

Tomorrow I understand we are going to have a debate in the House. I am going to have 20 minutes and the opposition will have 10 minutes to question me. I will come into this place and put some facts on the table. I am going to talk substantively about what has gone on. I will be very interested to hear what facts the opposition puts on the table, facts, not sleaze.

Oral Questions

● (1450)

*[Translation]***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs says the government has not yet reached a decision on its participation in the U.S. Army's missile defence shield project. Yet the Canadian Minister of National Defence has indicated that there are interim contracts to the tune of \$700,000 for radar tests during an exercise planned for this summer by the Americans.

In this context, how can the government continue to say that nothing has been committed, when it has sunk \$700,000 already into the missile defence shield, even before anything has been signed?

[English]

Hon. David Pratt (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to emphasize once again that the government has made no decision on the issue of ballistic missile defence. The contract that was issued by Defence Research and Development Canada was intended to test high frequency surface wave radar. It was intended to participate in these missile detection trials with a particular emphasis on cruise missile detection. The nature of this radar is such that it looks over the horizon and does not look up.

I would urge the hon. member not to jump to conclusions.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the Minister of National Defence, who has just answered, that he himself wrote to his American counterpart stating that we would extend the Norad mission for the missile defence shield and that we would even share the costs. Today we learn that they are working on a project that will cost the taxpayers of Quebec \$700,000. The amount of \$700,000 is not peanuts.

Will the minister at last admit that he is interested in the missile defence shield, that he will be taking part in the project, and that it is already a done deal?

[English]

Hon. David Pratt (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the hon. member got the figure of \$600 million or \$700 million. That is clearly not what is being proposed here.

As I indicated earlier, what is being proposed is to test a system that we have here in Canada, the high frequency surface wave radar system, that is going to be operational in August. We look forward to understanding all of its capabilities, but with particular emphasis on this business of cruise missile defence.

* * *

FIREARMS PROGRAM

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to the CBC, the Firearms Act has not cost taxpayers just \$1 billion; it is instead approaching the \$2 billion mark. There are many costs still unaccounted for in that number.

The Prime Minister said that he was outraged by the waste of \$250 million on the sponsorship program. The cost of the gun

registry is now not 500 times over budget but 1,000 times over the original projection given to Parliament.

Why is the Prime Minister not outraged about that?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be absolutely clear. We do not accept that number referred to in the report referred to by the hon. member. In fact, we have asked Radio Canada to provide us with its numbers and its calculations which to date it has refused to do.

Let me reassure the House that to date, the Canadian firearms program has not cost \$1 billion let alone \$2 billion.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the cost benefit analysis of the gun registry has been kept a secret. The Auditor General blew the whistle on that. Trust for the Prime Minister is in free fall and he still keeps the gun registry reports hidden from Parliament.

The gun registry is closing in on \$2 billion and the Prime Minister just orders another review. Look at the similarities of this and the sponsorship scandal. Ignorance is no excuse on this file. The Prime Minister wrote most of the cheques. He helped hide the most damaging reports. When will he take responsibility for—

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me remind the hon. House that since the Auditor General tabled her report in relation to the gun control program, we have accepted her recommendations and we have implemented her recommendations.

Full program costs, as the hon. member should know, were tabled last October as part of the justice department's performance report. I will soon table a complete response to the public accounts committee report on the program. A ministerial review of this program is underway.

We have been transparent in relation to the cost of this program.

* * *

● (1455)

*[Translation]***SUMMER CAREER PLACEMENT PROGRAM**

Mr. Gilbert Barrette (Témiscamingue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, each year, students, businesses and other organizations in my riding show a keen interest for the summer career placement program.

Could the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development tell us what he intends to do with the program this year?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently had the pleasure of announcing the 2004 edition of Summer Work Experience. I am also pleased to point out that employers interested in hiring a student this summer have until March 26 to submit an application to our local offices, and until April 2 in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Oral Questions

Last summer, through the summer career placement program, the Government of Canada invested \$93 million—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Skeena.

* * *

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Andy Burton (Skeena, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the current Prime Minister is too busy putting out his own fires to deal with economic issues important to Canadians. For example, the softwood lumber community adjustment fund announced in October 2002, 18 months ago, was supposed to assist B.C. communities hard hit by United States lumber tariffs. Approved projects that should have been underway months ago have yet to be funded.

Liberal friends of the government seem to have no trouble getting cheques. Do B.C. communities have to wait for handouts during an election to get theirs?

Hon. Rey Pagtakhan (Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this issue was referred to me at once by my predecessor on the day of oath taking. I approached the Minister of Industry so that we could facilitate the process. In 10 days we had a definitive response from the Minister of Industry, right on the eve of Christmas. I have met with members of the advisory group and I have told them the status of the projects.

* * *

OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

Mr. Andy Burton (Skeena, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is as clear as mud. The bottom line is when do they get their money? That is what they are waiting for.

On another issue, the throne speech highlighted new energy opportunities, including oil and gas development off the coast of B.C. The environment minister, the Prime Minister's senior B.C. minister, is currently pushing a plan for a marine wildlife area that would effectively prohibit commercial activity in the ocean from northern Vancouver Island to the Queen Charlotte Islands.

Why is this anti-development environment minister shutting down B.C.'s ability to decide its own future when it comes to offshore oil and gas developments?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government plan is quite clear. There was no change in the Speech from the Throne. It is to make sure we identify the knowledge gaps in the area in question, particularly the Queen Charlotte Basin.

Once the knowledge gaps are identified, studies will be undertaken to fill those knowledge gaps. There will in addition be public hearings to get the views of the public and separate hearings for aboriginal peoples on the coast. When that information is gathered, a decision will be made as to whether or not the moratorium should be lifted and that is appropriate.

[Translation]

HAITI

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Haiti is on the verge of collapse. Haitians feel that the international community has let them down. Friday, the United States, CARICOM and Canada merely reiterated a request to President Aristide to make promises that he has already made on numerous occasions but has never fulfilled. The situation is urgent.

Should the Minister of Foreign Affairs not try to convince the international community of the need for a UN intervention to restore the rights and safety of Haitians, and to establish conditions that will ensure a free and democratic election?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, the Secretary General of the UN General Assembly, the United States Secretary of State and officials representing the OAS and the Francophonie met in Washington. We were all represented because we want to find a political solution to this issue.

The Prime Minister of Canada clearly said in Monterrey that we are prepared to support CARICOM and the peace process on the island, but that President Aristide and the opposition must at least agree on certain things. We are pushing the peace process and we will continue to do so. We have a good policy and we also have the support of the whole international community, which is committed to this policy.

* * *

● (1500)

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

The BSE issue has become a tragedy affecting not only the beef industry but all of rural Canada. In my riding alone, 1,000 families are directly affected.

I have asked before and I ask again, what is the minister doing to help farm families hit by the BSE crisis?

Hon. Bob Speller (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that the Canadian beef industry is in a difficult state. I have had an opportunity to consult with Canadian farmers and farm families. They have told me that they would like us to remove the slaughter provision from the cull cow program.

I am pleased to announce today that in fact we are doing that; however, more needs to be done. I want to assure all hon. members that I am working with the industry to do exactly that.

Points of Order

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, like the Bloc Québécois, the Auditor General is once again condemning the surplus in the employment insurance fund. However, during the 2000 elections, many ministers came to our ridings to make empty promises. These promises were made three and one half years ago, and the Auditor General is speaking out against the raid on the employment insurance fund.

Does the government intend to take immediate action, or is it trying to pull the same trick it did last time, which was to make promises during the election campaign and then forget everything as usual?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it must be noted, as I like to point out, that the employment insurance program pays regular benefits to those in need for a total in excess of \$8 billion. There is an additional \$2 billion allocated in special benefits, as well as transfers to the provinces of more than \$2.5 billion for the implementation of programs required to meet local needs.

[English]

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons has indicated he wishes to rise on a question of privilege that arose last Thursday. I would be pleased to hear the hon. parliamentary secretary now.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Hon. Roger Gallaway (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to provide more detail on the three points raised in the question of privilege last Thursday, February 12, by the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby.

First, he noted that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts was considering the sponsorship program. It is actually studying the Auditor General's report. Second, he quoted from the Auditor General's report on the sponsorship program that funds appropriated by Parliament were, in the Auditor General's view, used in an inappropriate manner. Third, he noted that this was explicitly the matter before the public accounts committee.

Both the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby and his colleague, the member for St. John's West, suggested that this was a question of privilege which should be sent to a committee.

It is unrealistic and nonsensical because it is already before a committee. It is not logical on the one hand to state that the public accounts committee is studying this—we all acknowledge that—and on the other hand to assert that this is a question of privilege and should be sent to a committee.

It is inappropriate to suggest that there could be a prima facie question of privilege if a matter is already before a committee. The committee is in fact studying the matter and has not completed its work.

I suggest that we allow the public accounts committee to get on with its work and not take up the time of the House with attempts to meddle in the committee's work which is already underway.

• (1505)

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this was a question of privilege raised last week. I find it a bit odd that at this late stage in the game the member is trying to tell the Speaker how to rule on the question of privilege that was raised. We know the Speaker has spent a lot of time and energy determining whether or not the points raised constitute a prima facie case of privilege.

I am not sure what we are seeing here, unless it is an attempt to deflect attention away from the very serious business that the House wants to get down to.

The Speaker: I will continue to take this matter under advisement. As I indicated to the House, I had left it open so that we could hear from the hon. parliamentary secretary or whoever was going to speak for the government today and we have now heard the reply. I will consider the matter and get back to the House.

I also have notice of a point of order by the member for Cariboo—Chilcotin.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Mr. Philip Mayfield (Cariboo—Chilcotin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the first time parliamentary secretaries have been sworn in as privy councillors and are thereby sitting at the cabinet table. The very scandal the public accounts committee is charged with investigating involves members of the cabinet, both past and present.

I wish to argue before you, Mr. Speaker, that it is inappropriate for any cabinet minister to sit on the public accounts committee due to the very serious and obvious conflict of interest.

There are not one nor two, but three parliamentary secretaries on the public accounts committee looking into the sponsorship program scandal. Unlike in the past, these parliamentary secretaries have a place around the cabinet table if invited to do so.

While there are no rules precluding cabinet ministers from sitting on committees, established practice has precluded them from holding membership in recent years. Marleau and Montpetit states on pages 819 and 820:

While no rule prevents any Member from being named to a committee, current practice normally excludes certain Members who have other parliamentary functions—

On that list of exclusion are cabinet ministers. The last minister to be named to a committee was Allan MacEachen who served on a striking committee from 1976-77.

In the early years of Confederation, ministers being named to standing committees were more common; however, this practice died along with the practice of a government member chairing the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in the mid-1980s.

Points of Order

In the mid-1980s the McGrath committee recommended that parliamentary secretaries—and we are not talking about the hybrid parliamentary secretaries/cabinet ministers of today—not participate on standing committees. The reason for the exclusion of parliamentary secretaries was for greater independence. Greater independence is also the theme of the government's latest proposal, an action plan for democratic reform. Of course, that document was tabled before the sponsorship program corruption scandal.

I am asking you, Mr. Speaker, to rule whether there is enough precedent existing in our modern day practice to prevent parliamentary secretaries, who sit at the cabinet table, to continue on the public accounts committee, particularly as the committee undertakes a study into abuses of cabinet regarding the sponsorship program. It is a clear conflict of interest that needs to be addressed.

I think the Speaker and Canadians will agree that those privy councillors on the committee must be removed if the public accounts committee is to have any credibility during this inquiry.

On April 14, 1987, on page 5121 of *Hansard*, Speaker Fraser said:

When interpreting the rules of procedure, the Speaker must take account not only of their letter but of their spirit and be guided by the most basic rule of all, that of common sense

On page 219 of Marleau and Montpetit, it states:

The Standing Orders, though a vital reference, constitute a comparatively small part of the much larger body of House of Commons procedure and practice that the Speaker will consult in preparing a ruling.

It also states that there is “the fine balancing act that is often involved in adapting old rules to new situations”.

The Prime Minister has created a new procedural situation with these hybrid cabinet ministers and has created an ethical dilemma by placing three of them on the very committee that will conduct a study into a government scandal where cabinet members are actually implicated.

• (1510)

Hon. Roger Gallaway (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is clearly not a point of order and I say that for the following reasons.

The hon. member makes the incredible assumption and jumps to the conclusion that if one is a privy councillor one is a cabinet minister. If that disqualified people from sitting on committees, there would be many members of the House who would be disqualified. In fact, there are privy councillors in other caucuses, and I refer to one member in particular of the NDP who is a member of this House and a privy councillor.

I would refer the hon. member opposite to the *Hansard* of the other place for February 2, 2003, and he will find contained in the record who in fact is a member of cabinet.

There are many members of the privy council. To say that somehow if one is a privy councillor, one is disqualified from sitting on a committee is preposterous and incorrect, and could never be a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as I begin, I would like to say to the hon. member for Cariboo—Chilcotin that we are in complete agreement with the point he raised, namely, that three parliamentary secretaries sit on this very important committee, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. This is a clear case of conflict of interest. I am certain, Mr. Speaker, that with your usual wisdom and judgment, you will receive the hon. member's point of order favourably.

I would add, and I direct my remarks toward the government, that this proves that all this talk of democratic reform is just a show. I am certain that the people of Quebec and of Canada have figured it out. We are talking about a very important committee, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. It is the only committee in our British parliamentary system that is chaired by a member of the official opposition. As a member of the 1993-1997 Parliament, I was chair of that committee in 1996 and 1997. The British parliamentary system recognizes that a member of the official opposition should chair this committee, precisely to shed light on any elements brought up by the Auditor General.

In the case at hand, we are discussing an issue of capital importance, such as has not been seen in this House in decades. We are talking about a scandal involving some \$250 million, where \$100 million was spent on companies close to the current government.

The current Prime Minister keeps telling us that he wants to enhance the role of ordinary MPs. If he and the members of his cabinet were serious about democratic reform—if it were more than words with which they are trying to buy votes in the coming election—they would have appointed Liberal backbenchers to really shed light on this sponsorship scandal, instead of naming three parliamentary secretaries who are members of the Privy Council.

It is one more piece of evidence that shows the words of this Prime Minister do not match his actions. I completely support the point of order raised by the hon. member.

• (1515)

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans for his remarks on the point of order raised by the hon. member for Cariboo—Chilcotin, as well as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House for his contribution.

[*English*]

I have considered the matter and it seems to me there are two important issues here.

The first is whether or not members of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada can sit on the committees in this House. I believe it has been the practice that they can.

The hon. member for Davenport, for example, has been chair of a committee in this House for many years. He is a privy councillor. The hon. the parliamentary secretary pointed out that there are others in the House who are privy councillors and who can sit on committees.

Routine Proceedings

The right hon. member for Calgary Centre could have sat on a committee had his party put him forward. Whether he in fact was on a committee during the last session of Parliament I am unaware, but he could have been and was entitled to do so because of the fact that he is a member of this House.

It is certainly the practice that ministers cannot sit, but the parliamentary secretaries who have been sworn of the Privy Council are not ministers of the Crown. They are sworn of the Privy Council. They may be able to attend cabinet meetings; I do not know. They may be able to have access to cabinet documents. That has been stated to be the reason for them being sworn of the Privy Council, at least to deal with certain matters in relation to the departments for which they work, but the Chair is unaware of any move to make them members of the cabinet. In fact, the opposite, as I believe to be the case, has been stated: they are parliamentary secretaries and have been sworn of the Privy Council.

[*Translation*]

In these circumstances, I believe it is not appropriate for the Chair to render a decision on such a matter, indicating that these individuals cannot sit on House of Commons committees. In my opinion, this is not a matter relating to procedure.

Obviously, this is causing serious debate, and it is quite possible that members of this House have different opinions on who may sit on which committee, particularly when three parliamentary secretaries are members of the same committee.

However, this matter could be subject to a debate. In fact, it could be raised during a debate either in committee or in the House at a later date. In my opinion, it does not concern House procedure.

As a result, I cannot interfere by making a ruling that would prevent these members from being named to this committee or to limit the term of their membership.

[*English*]

The House itself adopted the report of the striking committee determining who was sitting on this committee. How is it for the Chair to say that the decision of the House was somehow incorrect or wrong or improper when the House agreed, I believe unanimously, to the adoption of the striking committee report?

In the circumstances I am not in a position to interfere. I do not believe the Chair should be. If hon. members wish to continue the debate they can do so elsewhere, or by bringing the appropriate motion to the House at a later date, perhaps on an opposition day, not that I would ever make suggestions as to what items might be discussed on an opposition day, tempting as that might be.

REINSTATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday the hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough rose on a point of order concerning differences between bills, Bill C-34 of the second session, and Bill C-4, which the government tendered as a duplicate of Bill C-34 to comply with the special order of the House allowing reinstatement of bills.

My colleague drew the attention of the Speaker to difficulties in the printed versions, particularly in clause 19(2).

I want to draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to variations with the versions of Bill C-4 on the website.

The PDF electronic version of the bill is different from the HTML version, again in clause 19(2), and I know the Speaker is quite familiar with these versions so I will not explain to him what they are.

The order of the House permitting reinstatement is very clear. The bill must be in the same form. It cannot have different language or alterations that have not been approved by the House of Commons. It is not open to tinker with the bill in any way.

The House was very specific in requiring the bill to be reintroduced as it was at prorogation.

The subject matter of this bill is ethical conduct, so I call on the government to take this opportunity to bring in a new bill reflecting the Prime Minister's views on ethics, not those of the previous Chrétien government.

I ask the Speaker to declare the proceedings of Bill C-4 to be null and void.

• (1520)

The Speaker: The Chair has undertaken to review the contents of the bill based on the point of order raised by the hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough last week. I understand that something of a review has been made, but the answer is so complicated that it is going to take me a little time to sort it out in my head and be able to explain it to the House in a sensible ruling. I am working on it.

I appreciate very much the hon. member for St. John's West bringing to the attention of the Chair these website versions of the same bill. We will need to have a look at those too. The next time I surf the web, I will be sure to go to see these bills. I was unaware they were there. I will want to have a look. I appreciate his diligence in reading these and studying them. It is very much appreciated, I am sure by all hon. members.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to subsection 24(2) of the Auditor General Act, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third round of updated sustainable development strategies from 29 departments and agencies, on behalf of the government.

[*Translation*]

These strategies are one of the means used by federal departments and agencies to take decisive action to ensure that we consider environmental, economic and social issues in government policies and programs.

This initiative clearly illustrates the major support provided by the government toward sustainable development in Canada and other countries.

Routine Proceedings

This commitment was reinforced in the Speech from the Throne that was presented to Canadians earlier this month.

[*English*]

In the spirit of sustainable development, I have decided not to have paper distribution of these strategies to members of the House and senators unless they so request. Members and senators will receive an information kit on how to obtain them from the Internet or, if they wish, by way of a hard copy.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the third report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the provisional Standing Orders governing private members' business. The change recommended is to reflect the fact that there are now only four recognized parties, and I should like to move concurrence at this time.

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)

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have another motion for concurrence. By way of an explanation, this refers to the second report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding televising of committee proceedings, which was tabled on Friday.

If the House gives its consent, I move that the second report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House Friday, February 13, and recommending that the guidelines for broadcasting committee meetings be extended to the end of this session, be concurred in.

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)

* * *

• (1525)

PETITIONS

MARRIAGE

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from Audrey Tyan of Kirkstone Road in North Vancouver, and 143 others, in which they draw the attention of the House to the following: Whereas marriage is the best foundation for families and the raising of children; whereas the institution of marriage as being between a man and a woman is being challenged; whereas this hon. House passed a motion in June of 1999 that called for marriage to continue to be recognized as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others; and whereas marriage is in the exclusive jurisdiction of Parliament, the petitioners pray that Parliament pass legislation to recognize the institution of marriage in

federal law as being the lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to table today on the same subject but from a different perspective, signed by residents of my constituency of Burnaby and from North Vancouver and elsewhere in British Columbia.

These petitioners point out the provisions of section 15 of the charter of rights, the equality rights section. They note that the British Columbia, Quebec and Ontario courts, as well as various governments in Canada, the law commission, the Human Rights Commission, unions, groups of citizens and others have called for Ottawa to end marriage discrimination. The petitioners call upon Parliament to protect human rights in Canada, uphold the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and take all necessary steps to ensure that the definition of marriage be changed to encompass same sex couples.

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have another petition signed by hundreds of residents of Quebec who note that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are often the target of heinous crimes across Canada. They also note that federal justice ministers have committed since 1999 to change the Criminal Code to protect these people against heinous propaganda. They ask Parliament to make heinous propaganda against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people illegal.

[*English*]

MARRIAGE

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present a petition on behalf of my constituents. The petitioners pray that Parliament passes legislation to recognize the institution of marriage in federal law as being a lifelong union between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will be submitting tens of thousands of names on petitions over the next few weeks with regard to Bill C-453, an act to amend the Criminal Code, failure to stop at the scene of an accident.

The petitioners state that current hit and run legislation does not provide an adequate sentence to offenders who leave the scene of the accident and that prosecutors should be unable to offer those accused of fleeing the scene of an accident the opportunity to plead guilty to an offence with a lesser punishment.

The petitioners ask government assembled in Parliament to vote in favour of Bill C-453, an act to amend the Criminal Code, failure to stop at the scene of an accident, to make sentencing for hit and run offenders more clear.

SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in addition I have several other petitions, one that asks Parliament to enact legislation to establish a retroactive national sex offender registry.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the other petition asks Parliament to pass legislation to recognize the institution of marriage in federal law as being the lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we heard some questions on that crazy gun registry today where one of my colleagues said that it was now costing \$2 billion. Unfortunately, I have several hundred petitions from my constituents who think it only costs \$1 billion. I feel a little remiss because it has actually cost double what they think. It also is not supported by the provinces. They also petition that the gun registry actually has not reduced gun crimes.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to repeal Bill C-68.

I cannot see any good logical cost effective argument for why they are wrong. I think they are right. Bill C-68, the gun registry—

• (1530)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary West is an experienced member and he knows that in presenting petitions, he does not want to express any opinion in respect of the matter. That would be out of order. He can give a nice summary of the petition, which he has done. Beyond that, his comments are out of order.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Philip Mayfield (Cariboo—Chilcotin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, hundreds of citizens from Cariboo—Chilcotin have petitioned Parliament to immediately hold a renewed debate on the definition of marriage and to reaffirm, as it did in 1999, its commitment to take all necessary steps to preserve marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[Translation]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session.

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, those who were expecting to see a great moment in politics and the beginning of a new era with the Speech from the Throne of Martin I must have been very disappointed. Instead we had a long speech worthy of his predecessor, Chrétien IV.

Address

The speech contains no big surprises, except for this decision to retroactively reimburse the goods and services tax to municipalities. The Prime Minister himself had already made commitments on a number of things. His predecessor had already promised a number of things as well. I will name one that we feel strongly about, that is the payment this year of \$2 billion to Quebec and the provinces for health care. Thus, this government's work plan is a continuation of what has already been put forward and what has been going on since 1993.

Journalists and political analysts had to use a whole range of synonyms to ensure their texts were different from one another. We saw expressions like ambiguous speech, quiet invasions, vague game plan, mere formality, election opportunism, you name it.

The Prime Minister has not been able to embody change. In the continuity of more than 10 years of Liberal rule, the Speech from the Throne has left out the essence.

The most despicable and hypocritical thing about what we are hearing from the Liberal government and this Prime Minister is that, having caused the problems himself, he wants now to pass himself off as the rescuer. There are two terms that very aptly summarize this year's throne speech: meddling and hypocrisy.

The new Minister of Finance, who has learned his lessons well from the member for LaSalle—Émard, claims that the government's finances are tight, yet the Prime Minister is loosening the purse strings in favour of the municipalities. But, when the subject of health funding comes up, the government is incapable of honouring its commitments.

I do not know whether the Liberal member for Shefford has taken the time recently to look at what is going on in her own riding. Last week, the emergency room at the hospital centre in Granby reported a 400% occupancy rate. My question is this: Does she agree with her government's decision to fund the municipalities and not fund health?

Here is the situation: the government is committed to the tune of \$11 billion for the municipalities and the environment, yet there is nothing for health. This decision comes at a time when the federal surplus for the current year might be as much as \$7 billion.

Every year in the past ten, the strategy has been the same. In the budget, they downplay revenues and pad expenditures, so that in the end they end up with billions of dollars that were not forecast. As a result, they can put these billions of dollars into foundations and apply the surplus against the debt. I understand that the debt needs to be paid down, but the way things are going, it is going down all by itself.

Instead of creating foundations in order to duplicate areas of provincial jurisdiction, they should be investing more into areas where the present Prime Minister has made cuts. Hon. members will recall that, in 1993-94, there were drastic cuts in transfer payments to the provinces for health and education. There was also nothing for seniors, and they were not even informed about income supplement possibilities.

This new Prime Minister has changed absolutely nothing. He is doing exactly what this government has been doing since 1993.

Address

In the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, the author of the text has used a term he took the trouble to place in quotes. On page 2, it reads, "This government does 'get it'". One of the meanings of the word used in French, *pige*, is to help oneself. The government is certainly helping itself through a variety of subterfuges, scams, smoke and mirrors. The Liberal government has been helping itself freely to public funds to satisfy its craving for visibility.

● (1535)

There is the sponsorship scandal, the misuse of funds we have raised more than 441 times in this House and which is the subject of a scathing report by the Auditor General.

The Liberal government forgot to mention it. It chose to gloss over the whole thing. It also forgot its promises. Before and during the election campaign, all the regions of Quebec and Canada are visited and told that funding will be allocated here and there, that there will be help for the less fortunate. It is always the same thing.

With the Speech from the Throne, we are being told in advance. Yet there is nothing about the employment insurance fund, support for developing countries through international aid, the mad cow crisis, the softwood lumber crisis, compensation for seniors who have been unfairly denied the guaranteed income supplement, or help for older workers who lose their jobs. There is nothing for the people in my riding who work for a company called Denim Swift, that is going to close its doors because of the competition inherent to globalization.

Some 600 jobs will disappear. Some 600 people will lose their jobs because of this closure. Some of these people are seniors or couples who have been working there for 25, 30, or 35 years. They are in their late fifties. There is nothing for them. The program for older worker adjustment was supposed to be reinstated. At present, there is a program that the provinces share. The major unions tell us that it is absolutely worthless and that it takes too much time to set it up. It takes months and is not worth the trouble. It does not help workers.

These workers have contributed to employment insurance for 35 or 40 years. They want the EI surplus to be used for programs that will help them cope or at least provide them with financial support until they are able to retire. After all they have given, they deserve some help.

Coming back to the throne speech, we can see that, on the sole issue of the bottomless pit that is the employment insurance fund, the Auditor General estimates that the accumulated surplus is close to \$44 billion.

In 2001, just over half of the \$15 billion paid into the employment insurance fund was distributed to the 2.4 billion unemployed workers. If you divide roughly half of \$15 billion by 2.4 million unemployed, you get an average of about \$290 a week. That is what was given back to those who lost their jobs.

For the year 2001 alone, \$7 billion have just disappeared. We are being told that this sum has to be applied to the debt under various accounting principles. However, we know that several foundations have been established, but we never see where the money is going. We do not know what is going on with that. As several observers,

journalists and others have said, it is robbery. The government is helping itself to the money in the employment insurance fund instead of supporting those people who need that money.

Here is my question. Do members find it acceptable that, at the same time, communications officers hired through the sponsorship program were making over \$100 million, often without any real work being done?

● (1540)

Do members find that acceptable? People are preparing their income tax returns these days and find that they are sending a lot of money to the government. When they realize how their money is being wasted, do members think that they are happy?

I would have a lot more to say on this throne speech, but I know that I have only one minute left. I truly believe that, in the next election, people will pass judgment on what the government has done with their tax dollars.

[*English*]

Hon. Brenda Chamberlain (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the GST rebate has gone over really well in my community of Guelph. Mayor Quarrie is extremely pleased that her community will receive about \$2 million in rebates. She has talked about doing great things for infrastructure and fixing some of the things in the city that need to be done.

The hon. member talked about a lot of things in her speech but she did not mention how much money the city she lives closest to will receive from the federal government. What kind of good things could it do for the community? I would be interested in hearing that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauline Picard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the Liberal member that, first of all, the municipalities are creatures of the provinces. Provinces know the needs of the municipalities. These are two levels of government that can work together to develop infrastructure programs and to solve their problems.

It is true that municipalities are in great need of support and money. The promise that was made was to transfer the gas tax dollars or the GST to the provinces so that the provinces could support their municipalities.

What is regrettable is that the federal government is once again interfering in provincial jurisdictions. Eleven billion dollars is a lot of money. The provinces, and workers as well, need support.

The EI fund has now reached \$44 billion, yet we do not know what happened to that money. Those who need it receive only 50% of their salary, and only for a few weeks. These funds should be transferred to the provinces to help our workers, as should the \$2 billion, to help our health care system and support all those who are in hospital.

To solve the problems, Canadians have to suffer devastating effects, which do not affect only municipalities. Our health care systems from coast to coast are in shambles, and the provinces have to struggle to prevent the emergence of a new order that would allow rich people to get better services than the others.

This is not what we want. I know that the government and the member do not want a two-tier system. However, since 1993-94, the government has cut transfers to the provinces to the bone. Those transfers were meant to support the health system, the sick, education and the development of programs to support the municipalities.

The government is trying to help the medicine go down a little. It is saying, "We will transfer the GST. We will help the municipalities". However, it is not its role to help municipalities that way. It certainly can help them, but through the provinces, whose jurisdiction it is to do so.

• (1545)

[English]

Hon. Brenda Chamberlain: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear an answer to my question in that. I heard a lot of complaints and a lot of "poor me" but the reality is that the federal government is giving a GST rebate to the member's nearest city. I would really like to know what that means in dollars. To my city it means \$2 million.

It is easy but it is wrong to get up and continually complain when one receives money and help, as the federal government gives to communities in Quebec.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): There is no time left but, with the indulgence of the Chair, I will give one more minute to the member for Drummond.

Ms. Pauline Picard: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for giving me a few seconds to respond to the member.

I find that kind of reaction somewhat disappointing and humiliating. I did not complain. Nothing could be clearer; the public which is noticing it and saying it.

Only those who close their eyes to what is going on in and around their own region make these kinds of comments.

[English]

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to have an opportunity to debate the Speech from the Throne. I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Guelph—Wellington. I will take about 10 minutes so that my colleague will have some opportunity as well.

I think most Canadians noted in the Speech from the Throne the deep commitment the Government of Canada has to aboriginal Canadians and, in general, to the issues surrounding Canada and its dealings with aboriginal Canadians. This includes dealing with first nations, with the Inuit and the Metis. The Government of Canada has made a very broad based commitment to move forward on all the issues that impact aboriginal Canadians.

First I will talk about some general principles and then I will talk a little about the types of policies we intend to undertake.

In a very general sense, we are trying to close the gap that exists between aboriginal Canadians and Canadians in general when it comes both to the social circumstances and to the economic circumstances.

Address

Today a significant gap exists between aboriginal Canadians and Canadians in general. I think it is incumbent upon Parliament and the government to take measures, in conjunction with aboriginal Canadians, to reduce or close that gap.

In going about doing that, I am reminded of a comment I heard once concerning the definition of insanity, which is doing the same thing in the same way and expecting different results.

One of the things the Speech from Throne clearly indicated was the commitment by the government and the Prime Minister to take the issues at hand, to think outside the box, so to speak, and in conjunction with first nations people, the Inuit and the Metis, find creative solutions and new ways to achieve the objective of closing the economic and social gap that exists presently.

As the Minister of Indian Affairs, I intend to take what I would term as a collaborative approach with the first nations and Inuit to reach out to them to collectively work on solutions. It is absolutely imperative that we recognize that aboriginal Canadians need to be full partners with government in terms of developing the solutions.

The days where we could be in Ottawa, in a territorial capital or in a provincial capital and simply decide on the correct approach are long over. We need to approach things in a collaborative and consultative way to come together to find the types of solutions and the types of directions that we need to pursue as we try to deal with the challenges that we face.

It is absolutely essential that we work with aboriginal Canadians toward a shared vision, one that we jointly agree is the direction in which we need to go, that we treat each other with mutual respect and that, in time, we gain the trust and the confidence of the first nations and Inuit as we move this agenda forward. It is my intention to work toward achieving that type of relationship with the first nations people.

We must end an era where we do things for aboriginal Canadians, and sometimes that is read to aboriginal Canadians, and work more in terms of providing a set of tools that will allow first nations communities, first nations people, the Inuit, the Metis, the opportunity to develop in the ways that make sense for them, that make sense for their communities, that take into account the circumstances they face and that allow them to develop the solutions in a way that is most appropriate to them.

I believe that needs to be our approach. It is one that will result in achievements and in progress, and it is one that I am very committed to pursuing.

• (1550)

In doing this, there are two broad policy approaches that we need to deal with. The first one has to do with the whole issue of relationships. Relationships are an important part of how we will move forward in terms of the aboriginal file.

Address

By relationships I mean a number of things. First, the relationship between the Government of Canada, first nations people and Inuit and my colleague, the interlocutor, in terms of dealing with the Métis. It is absolutely essential that we define that relationship, and that we move forward on that relationship as the Speech from the Throne indicated, recognizing the historic agreements that have been a part of that relationship.

Part of that has to be the issue of governance. We have had an opportunity to talk about governance extensively in the House. Although there may be some issues about process, I do not think there is any issue about the principles that underlie the initiatives in terms of governance, accountability, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency. I believe those objectives are shared by aboriginal Canadians and non-aboriginal Canadians together. We will work toward developing that relationship in its broadest sense of governance.

There is also the relationship that exists between the federal government, the provinces and the territories when we are dealing with aboriginal Canadians. That is absolutely essential because it deals with a number of specific issues about whether a person is a first nations person that lives on reserve or off reserve, or whether a person is status or non-status. We need to better understand those relationships. We need to work through those relationships to understand how the various governments, provincial, territorial and federal, are going to work in conjunction with each other and in conjunction with aboriginal Canadians.

Then there is the relationships within the federal government itself. There are a large number of departments that have responsibility in terms of aboriginal Canadians. There are probably at least 14. One of the things that the Prime Minister has committed the government to is to take a comprehensive and rational approach to the issues, so that we do not work in a series of stovepipes on individual departments, but rather that we work in a horizontal manner across departmental lines where we are focused on the issues and solutions.

I was pleased to see the Prime Minister establish an aboriginal affairs committee of cabinet, so that we could bring that horizontal approach. I was also pleased to see the Prime Minister establish a secretariat within the Privy Council Office and the appointment of a parliamentary secretary specifically responsible to the Prime Minister to deal with these horizontal issues. These are good and important structures that the Prime Minister has put in place to help better define that relationship within the government.

As I have mentioned before, it is absolutely essential that we create an environment within which aboriginal Canadians can seek and achieve the success that they are moving toward.

In that respect, there were a number of specific policy areas that were mentioned in the Speech from the Throne: early childhood development, the need to get a good start; education; economic development; the quality of life, particularly in terms of housing; and ensuring we have a safe water supply.

Those are our commitments as a federal government. We will work with aboriginal Canadians to achieve these important objectives.

• (1555)

Hon. Brenda Chamberlain (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister who just spoke is absolutely right. There are gaps in our policies and in the way we have done business.

As members know, I have a special interest with the Métis. I have learned a lot in a short time. Aboriginal groups have some areas in which they do need help. I am glad to hear the minister speak about the horizontal nature of how we will begin to work because it is absolutely imperative to moving ahead.

I met with president Chartier from the Métis. We talked about health care issues and other issues, but health care was one of the areas where he felt there were a lot of gaps. I hope we can all work together.

The Prime Minister, in his Speech from the Throne, talked about addressing all groups and all Canadians. That is what we must do. To me, a Speech from the Throne means a better quality of life for all Canadians. This is what it is all about.

It is easy to sit and say negative things, but it is very important to identify where we need to go ahead. The Prime Minister has set out a strong agenda in the Speech from the Throne. One of the things he talked about was health care. Health care is absolutely the number one issue right across the country right now.

People are worried. If they need to get in to see a specialist, they cannot see one in a timely fashion. Many of them, as in Guelph, do not have general practitioners. That is a serious issue and clearly, it is one over which the provinces have jurisdiction.

Having said that, it is really important that we as a federal government take a leading role in working with the provinces to figure this problem out. People cannot wait to be looked after when they are sick. They feel strongly that they need help in this area and our Prime Minister has pledged to work with the provinces. That is a number one issue.

We have given money, but it never seems to be enough. That tells us that in health care, in addition to needing more dollars, we need different ways of doing things. We will only be able to do that by working with the provinces and with the doctors themselves. We must work closer with the people in the profession to find out exactly where it is that we need to reform this area.

We must look at health care and all the issues that surround it, for example, the latest epidemic of SARS which broke out across the world. When diseases break out, even though they seem a long way away, we know that within 12 hours they can be here in Canada. It is very important that we develop a proper response to that. The Prime Minister has put in place a mechanism that will do that now. All parties should be in agreement that it is an important thing.

Address

We must realize that with a doctor shortage there are things that we can do. We can look at the immigration process and the provinces can look at the credentials that these doctors have. We need to cut through the process and figure out what credentials they need. It is easy to say to just bring the people over and let them practise, but they must have a level that is consistent with Canadian standards. That is very important.

● (1600)

That is an area where we can train and recruit to ensure that doctors are accredited properly. I had the president of the Guelph General Hospital write to me not too long ago about a case of this very nature where he had someone working with him who was in Canada on a visitor's visa that was about to expire. Right now we are working with the immigration minister to get some help so that this person can stay to help administer to the people of Guelph.

My hon. colleague across the way asks, what can we do? These are the things we can do; these are the things we should do. These are the things that all parties need to agree upon because we are trying to help Canadians. We are trying to do the right thing. That is in the Speech from the Throne and that is crucial to who we are as Canadians.

In 2002 I did a survey and 95% of my respondents said universal health care was a must. We want to know that we will not be like the U.S. When we are sick, we want to know that we will not lose our homes or our cars and not be able to go to the hospital to get help. That is absolutely crucial to this country and to who we are. That has been the Liberal plank and party platform in the 10 years I have been here. We will continue to hold on to that universal health care because it is absolutely important.

Another area that the Prime Minister talked about was the Canada student loans program. We want to introduce a new grant for low income students. I think that is imperative. We have students out there going to school who are having real problems. They need to be able to afford and have access to college, university and skills training.

Skills training is a very important part of who we are in Canada. We do not have enough electricians, plumbers, pipefitters, et cetera. I hear the hon. members in the Conservative Party making snide remarks about that, but we need skills training. It is very important.

These skills are the backbone of our community. In our community, we are crying for them, quite frankly. We never have enough of them. It is an important component of who we are.

Not everyone is the same. That is why it is important to address the differences. Not everybody will go to university. Not everybody will excel and be a doctor. Not everybody will be an electrician. Not everybody will be a teacher. That is what makes this country great. We can be what we want to be. The Speech from the Throne will help in those areas.

As I mentioned earlier, when I questioned my colleague from the Bloc, cities are an important part of who we are. Cities have had a really tough time. They do not have enough money for infrastructure, even though we have had an infrastructure program that has helped them greatly. In this area, there is never enough money to go around. That is the problem. If there were enough, we would be

all set, but there never is enough. For our community in Guelph, the GST rebate will mean \$2 million, and that is the important thing.

There are many other things that we are pledging in the Speech from the Throne. One of the important things is that we want to maintain sound fiscal management. We will not go back into debt. We will continue to support things like R and D.

These things are important to who we are. They will make our country strong. The Speech from the Throne will give Canadians a better quality of life.

● (1605)

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for her comments with regard to the reply to the Speech from the Throne.

I am intrigued with her discussion and dialogue about the health care system. When I look at the last decade and what the Liberal government has done to health care, it has not been very pretty. When I look at the Prime Minister's words that if we want proof of where he is going, we should look at where he has been, I will look at where he has been.

What he has done is cut \$25 billion out of the health care system. That hurt and that cut was to the CHST, which is health care and education. The member talked a lot about health care and education being a priority and a value that Canadians appreciate. She is absolutely right.

There is a lack of human resources, of doctors and nurses and of individuals who will be trained as professionals in Canada. The number has shrunk significantly, so much so that we have a disaster on our hands with the shortage out there. Wait lists are growing. There are a million plus Canadians right now who cannot get into our system, who are dying on those wait lists.

How does the member square that with what she just said as far as identifying those problems with the words of the Prime Minister compared to his actions? I wonder if the member senses that there will be a change, because that change is not very apparent when we look at the history of the Prime Minister.

Hon. Brenda Chamberlain: Mr. Speaker, I can square it easily. The reality is we have put back more than that \$25 billion. The reality is that the government has given tax points that no one ever seems to want to talk about. Once they are given, they just disappear. No one wants to talk about the fact that we have attached stability on an ongoing basis. Is it enough? I will address that. It is never enough.

Address

Having said that, I was very concrete in the things I said on accreditation and immigration with respect to doctors and helping them train here and become accredited. I also mentioned having a dialogue with our nurses and doctors to know exactly where we are going and what are the right things to do.

When I am asked what answers do I have, I give them and so does the Prime Minister. He is spelling them out and saying very clearly the things we want to do to move ahead. He is saying that this is a priority for the government and for all Canadians.

The reality is that the member's party talked about health care in the last election and I am not sure where the Conservative Party is in the upcoming election because we do not know its policies yet. We do not know who the party's new leader will be. Quite frankly, we know nothing about where that party stands. In the last election those members did not stand for universal health care.

The Liberal Party absolutely does stand for universal health care. We will not have people lose their cars, their homes, lose everything they have in order to go to the hospital for an operation. We will not have this in Canada. That will never ever be.

• (1610)

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring attention to the member's recognition of throne speeches and government commitments.

I have in my hand a fact which no one will dispute, but I am sure the government will try to argue around it. Of the 199 promises and commitments made in the various throne speeches, 1999, 2001 and 2002 included, less than 23% of them have been acted on. In other words, there were promises but no action.

If my math is correct, that means 77% of all the government's promises in throne speeches have never been acted upon. How can the member reconcile this great throne speech with the past record of the government, of which she obviously was a part of and still is?

Hon. Brenda Chamberlain: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be a part of the government, very proud.

The reality is that I can reconcile it easily. The member is being quite cute but we all know, as does the hon. member across the way, the reality is that a throne speech is sort of a wide brush of things we will do and work toward. The reality is that the budget is a much more streamlined mechanism that tells people exactly where the money will be allocated.

The member knows that a throne speech maps out a vision of where the government wants the country to go, the things it wants to work on. The Liberal government has a very good record of strong fiscal management. The country's debt has been decreasing every day and so has the deficit. The government will continue to work hard for the Canadian people. Health care is our number one priority.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to add my comments to the Speech from the Throne. I hope the member who just spoke will listen to them because it will be a very good object lesson for her in how the government has failed miserably and repeatedly to keep a key promise. This is the promise with respect to recognition of foreign credentials.

I am the immigration critic for my party. There are many issues I wish I had time to address, but I only have a few minutes as I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Wetaskiwin. Therefore, I want to spend this time looking in some detail at the government's record with respect to the important key issue of recognition of foreign credentials.

I would like to quote from the throne speech. I know the Liberals will love this. This is what they said:

We will also deepen the pool of Canada's talent and skills by ensuring more successful integration of new immigrants into the economy and into communities. Immigrants have helped to build Canada from its inception and will be key to our future prosperity. The Government will do its part to ensure speedier recognition of foreign credentials and prior work experience.

That was a promise in the Speech from the Throne just a couple of weeks ago.

I will now quote from the Liberal Speech from the Throne in 2002, two years ago:

The government will work with its partners to break down the barriers to the recognition of foreign credentials and will fast-track skilled workers entering Canada with jobs already waiting for them. It will also position Canada as a destination of choice for talented foreign students and skilled workers by more aggressively selecting and recruiting through universities and in key embassies abroad.

The member opposite just said that the Speech from the Throne is about a better quality of life for all Canadians. That is what she said. What could be a better quality of life for new entrants to Canada than to have their credentials recognized, to be able to work in their chosen professions and trades where they have talent and training? The member said that the Speech from the Throne is about a better quality of life.

I have just quoted from two speeches from the throne. I could quote more if I had time, but I would like to quote from a report by the immigration committee in March 2002. I refer to the recommendations of the immigration committee, which is a committee of the House with members from all parties. Recommendation 27 says the following:

The recognition of foreign credentials should be given priority when the federal and provincial governments meet to discuss immigration issues. Partnerships between the federal and provincial governments and licensing bodies should be pursued.

What did the government say in March 2002? It said:

The Government is committed to making progress on this issue as illustrated in the 2001 Speech from the Throne.

That is one I did not quote.

These strategies commit the Government to working in partnership with provinces and territories and key stakeholders to develop fair, transparent and consistent processes to assess and recognize foreign qualifications before and after the immigrant's arrival.

Then we move on to June 2002. In June 2002 the immigration committee in another report made Recommendation No. 51:

The recognition of foreign credentials should be given priority when the federal, provincial and territorial ministers of immigration meet later this year. Partnerships between the federal, provincial and territorial governments, and the licensing bodies, should be pursued.

That is what the immigration committee said. It is easy to mix them up because they keep saying the same thing. Now let us hear the answer. Does it sound familiar at all to anybody?

Address

•(1615)

This was the response from the government:

The government intends to hold discussions on the barriers to successful integration as part of its Innovation Strategy. The government is committed to working in partnership with the provinces and territories and key stakeholders to develop fair, transparent and consistent processes to assess and recognize foreign qualifications before and after an immigrant's arrival.

The government keeps recycling the same old language. Recommendation No. 16 in the June 2003 committee report states:

The federal-provincial-territorial working group established to address the recognition of foreign credentials should move as quickly as possible in this endeavour.

The government replied as follows:

As highlighted in the Speech from the Throne, the Government is committed to working with the provinces and territories to help immigrants integrate into the Canadian workforce quickly and successfully.

Recommendation No. 18 also from June 2003 states:

The Government of Canada should provide greater support and assistance to foreign-trained workers through loan and internship programs, as well as other means.

The government responded as follows:

The Government of Canada assists foreign-trained workers through a variety of means and is supportive of exploring new ways of facilitating the entry of foreign-trained workers into the job market.

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act came into effect in June 2002. The government said in its own legislation, in section 3 of the act, that the act will work in cooperation with the provinces to secure better recognition of foreign credentials of permanent residents and their more rapid integration into society.

I have now quoted from two throne speeches, three committee reports and the government's response which refers to another throne speech in 2002. I quoted from the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the government's own legislation which it put into place in 2002, which is two years ago. This is a letter I received on February 3:

Dear Diane,

First of all, I would like to introduce myself. I am a landed immigrant residing recently in Calgary. I came to Calgary in August 2003. My original country is Indonesia.

I am writing this letter because of my concern about getting a job in Canada. I have read several articles on newspaper and also heard from TV about how difficult for landed immigrants to get an employment. Initially, I believed that cultural adjustment processes and language caused the difficulties. Over time, however, I apparently need to change my mind. The cases are so rampant. Many high skilled immigrants should inevitably take any job to survive, most often very low [paying] jobs. It is not easy either. Because of such rampant difficulties, I assume that there is a serious problem in the immigration policy. The landed immigrants become less productive compared to their productivity in their original countries and the original countries lost their most skilled workers, while their contribution to the Canadian economy is not significant due to low [paying] jobs. Consequently, the world becomes worse off.

I have the same difficulty in getting a job. I have master degrees in public policy and administration and also in economics, both from the United States. I also have doctoral degree in economics from the University of Missouri-Columbia. With those kinds of training, I came to Canada with strong hopes and optimism. I don't have problems with culture and language. But reality forces me to adjust my hopes. Now, I don't know to whom I have to talk. Also I don't know whether or not writing a letter to you is appropriate. If it is not appropriate I apologize. But one or two words from you are very important to maintain my optimism.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you very much.

This is a real live person with two masters degrees and a Ph.D. who cannot find a decent job in this country.

•(1620)

What did the Prime Minister say the very next day, after this letter was written, at a town hall meeting? He said, "I raised this issue at the meeting of the provincial premiers". That is what the government has been saying for the last decade.

I would say this to the government. The throne speech does nothing but throw hot air at a problem that is hurting and costing good people every day. It is time it put some real jobs and real money where its mouth is.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the remarks by the hon. member who just spoke. She is one of my colleagues from Calgary.

I want to ask her about what we can do. I had a letter from the manager of the International Student Office at the University of Saskatchewan, Kurt Tischler, who really wants to bring attention to the long delays in Vegreville and the implications for international students when they are applying to come into our universities and into the University of Saskatchewan.

I forwarded his letter to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, and this is the letter I received back. I am wondering if this is good enough. I will read a couple of points in it, and I would like the hon. member to comment. It states:

Supporting a robust foreign student program in Canada remains a priority of Citizenship and Immigration, and we are continuing to look forward to additional efficiencies within existing resources and legislation to reduce processing times. We will also be seeking the input of our external stakeholders, such as the Canadian Bureau of International Education, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges to explore creative solutions.

I would just like—

•(1625)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I am sorry to interrupt the member for a response by the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, no it is not good enough. It is the same old talk that I just quoted. The government says that it will talk to the stakeholders and that it will do something about it. Promises, promises but nothing, it is hollow. As my colleague said, only 23% of the promises the government makes in the throne speeches are any good.

I wish I had more time to talk about settlement programs and how the government has abused, misused and cut funding for needed settlement programs. I would like to talk about the backlog where people are lined up for years and years without know what their status is in the country. Now students are losing opportunities to study and losing opportunities for jobs because of the backlog in processing.

Address

I really have to wonder. The Liberals keep saying how much they value immigrants. I wonder if that is not just empty talk, just a pose to garner votes from newcomers and immigrant groups. I do not see that the government delivers for those groups. I do not see that it delivers anything except of a lot of empty rhetoric.

Even the Prime Minister, when asked this month what he would do for medical people, doctors who could not get residencies in the country, said, "Why don't you tell me what the answer is?". He said that to the poor doctor who could not get a residency so he could practise in our country, which supposedly needs qualified medical people.

In throne speech, after throne speech the Liberal government has promised to do something about the problem of foreign trained professionals being able to practise their profession in our country.

"Why don't you tell me", said the Prime Minister. Obviously, these Liberals do not have a plan. They do not have a clue. They do not have any real compassion for the highly qualified people who are frustrated by being unable to get on with things in the country.

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the first point I would make is this. What is the government doing? The government is acting in conjunction with the governments that have responsibility for professional qualifications; that is to say, the provincial and territorial governments which the member knows full well determine who have engineering qualifications and who have medical qualifications.

Can we change this by ourselves? No. Can we work with other governments in Canada to change this? Yes. Is the Prime Minister raising it with his counterparts in the provinces? Yes. Are we trying to do this? Various ministers are.

I respectfully invite the member, who has asked if we are helping groups of immigrants who come to Canada and do they believe we are helping, to come to my riding in downtown Toronto. Any time she wants she can meet with groups from practically every country and they can tell her directly whether they believe they are more likely to get a fair—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Order, please. The hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, it is clever how the member opposite suddenly changes the argument.

In case the hon. member missed it, the issue was recognition of foreign credentials. Now he says that the government cannot do it by itself and that it is asking. It said in 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 that it would talk to the stakeholders and fix it. How many years has it said that it would talk to the other people and make it happen? How many years can it get away with it? At some point it will have to show some leadership and actually deliver on all this loose talk, and it is not doing that. A lot of immigrants, newcomers and professionals who cannot practise in the country know it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Davenport, Agriculture.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we speak to the Speech from the Throne, traditionally we like to talk

about our constituencies and how the Speech from the Throne, which is the government's plan for the future, will affect our constituencies.

Over the weekend I was acclaimed as the candidate for the Conservative Party in my riding of Wetaskiwin, and I would like to thank my board of directors and the candidate nomination committee for all the work they have done. I look forward to representing them for another term.

My constituency of Wetaskiwin has a lot of petrochemical industry. There is every aspect of it, including exploration, a seismograph, drilling, production, the refinery and the shipment. We even have some substantial value added product whereby different products are made out of ethane and those products are shipped all over the world. Some of the largest ethane producers in the world are situated in my riding. This augments the work in our constituency and adds to employment and so forth.

The backbone of our community has been and always will be agriculture. Even after the petrochemical industry has been replaced by some other technology, agriculture will remain the backbone of our community.

My constituency is situated between Edmonton and Red Deer and is ideally suited for agricultural production, but not for agricultural export, and that is too bad. All of this is extremely important to me because agriculture drives the economy in my constituency, yet it has not even rated a mention in the throne speech. I find that appalling and absolutely unpardonable.

Producers in my area have suffered through three years of drought and have had a tremendously difficult time making ends meet. Their natural gas, chemical, fertilizer and fuel costs have increased. Their input costs are going up all the time. The price they get for their product has been going down ever since the discovery last May of one cow in Alberta with BSE. The largest problem in western Canada today did not rate a mention in the Speech from the Throne. I cannot understand that.

Probably it is just as well because we have heard that tradition is a very important thing in the Liberal Party. The Liberals bring in a Speech from the Throne and then follow through with or carry out only 23% of their promises or directions. It is probably just as well that western Canadians did not get their hopes up thinking that maybe the government would do something for them because actually it would do nothing for them.

For months people have been coming to my constituency office asking for the culled cattle slaughter forms. I do not have any idea where those forms are. We keep contacting the department, but those forms are not available to us.

Address

In October I wrote to the then minister of agriculture and the then minister of finance about our situation. As a result of the drought and because of a lack of feed, people started to sell off their breeding stock for whatever they could get rather than starve their animals. They had about four or five years worth of income. They sold their breeding stock, their calves and their yearlings all at once. As a result, they had a large chunk of income that they would have to declare in one year and probably pay out half of it in income tax.

● (1630)

In the first year, government said it would defer part of that payment. Part of that could be deferred into next year's income. In October of this year, I think it was, I wrote to the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Finance to ask if they would extend that deferral so that producers could lessen their hit from Revenue Canada, because now their herds are gone and eventually they are going to have to buy them back. If they paid out all that tax money, they simply would not have the revenue, the wherewithal, to buy back the herd when the rains did come again.

Do you know, Mr. Speaker, when the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Finance announced that the program would be extended? It was on December 19, when there were five more business days in the year. They waited until everyone had made decisions, decisions that they did not have to make. They bought cattle to try to defray some of their taxes.

None of that was necessary. None of that was necessary, because this government has placed a low priority on the agricultural sector. I cannot imagine anybody in western Canada involved in the agricultural business seriously considering supporting the Liberal Party in the future.

The government does not have a plan to deal with the cull cows. To start with, the government said we had to have a slaughter ticket in order to pick up the subsidy on the cull cows. Because there was no program available, because the cull cows were worth only \$40 a head or something, the producers asked, "What are our options?" Their option was to turn those cull cows back out with the bull and hope they were impregnated; then maybe they could get a calf out of them and by that time maybe the border would be open. Maybe, maybe, maybe.

Now that has exacerbated the problem. We are going to have more calves born this year from cows that should have been knocked on the head and made into hamburger. It is going to make a bad problem even worse.

It was not addressed. I pointed out the problem to the Minister of Agriculture. I pointed it out to the Minister of Finance. I asked them if they could make a decision on this. They dragged their feet. At the last possible minute, after it was too late, when every producer had already made decisions that were irreversible, then and only then did they decide yes, by golly, farmers could roll some of that income into 2004.

There is more bad news. As if things are not bad enough, cattle receipts for the third quarter of 2003 fell by nearly 75% over the same period in 2002. What are those people supposed to do? Are they supposed to live on 25% of their income? In the early part of last year before we made the discovery of BSE in that Alberta cow,

Alberta producers had strong export sales: nearly \$160 million worth of cattle per month went out of Alberta into export markets.

This is a \$30 billion industry that provides nearly a quarter of a million jobs in this country and yet the Prime Minister and the finance minister continue to ignore this industry. I cannot understand that. I think they ignore it at their peril.

Last week, the federal agriculture department warned that Alberta farmers could expect a 57% decline in their 2003 income compared with that of previous years. Both of the previous years were drought years and yet we are expected to suffer another 57% decline in our receipts.

● (1635)

This has a large spinoff in our community. When I was a kid, one of my first jobs was delivering groceries and stocking shelves in a Co-op store in Ponoka. That Co-op store has been in business for 87 years. Two weeks ago, it closed its doors forever. That gives us an idea of what the agricultural industry is going through in my area.

This is a devastating problem. So far we have not seen any movement on the part of the government to address it.

I appreciate this opportunity.

● (1640)

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to what my colleague had to say. His statistics for Alberta really are extraordinary. I looked at some of the figures for cattle across the country; the predominance of Alberta among the provinces with respect to cattle, particularly beef cattle, is quite extraordinary.

On the other hand, there are millions of cattle in Ontario, Quebec and elsewhere in the country, as he well knows. Also, in my riding I am very conscious of the fact that we are dealing here with ruminants, as he knows. There is the beef industry as such and the dairy industry, which is kind of related, but there are sheep. We have substantial sheep farms in my area and we have goats. I have one very well established buffalo farm of 60 years or so in my riding, which is also being affected by this.

First I want to applaud what the member said. Anything we can do to deal with this BSE crisis, we should do. The thing that concerns me is that in terms of science there is no sense to it and in terms of health there is no sense to it. We are left with politics. I know that we have opposition parties on that side of the House and the government on this side, but what we are actually left with is U.S. politics and Canadian politics.

Truly, what does the member think we have to do to persuade the Americans to open the border, which, as he knows, is the only solution?

Mr. Dale Johnston: Mr. Speaker, I certainly do recognize the amount of cattle that there are in Ontario. At the heyday of our cattle producing in Alberta, we shipped a lot of feeder cattle by train to Ontario feeders, but I did preface my remarks by saying that I would be speaking specifically about my riding.

Address

I want to answer my colleague's question directly. What do I think is necessary? I think we need to convince the Americans that any restrictions they place on us will be restrictions that they are really placing on themselves. We need to convince them that we have to look at the continental market. The 49th parallel, for the purposes of cattle, should be erased. We need the slaughterhouses in the United States.

From the time we start to put the shovel in the ground to the time we actually get the coolers running might be a year and a half. By the time we build a slaughterhouse in a year and a half, I certainly hope that the border would be open. By that time we would be shipping live animals to be killed in the United States, where they really need the beef. The price of beef has gone through the roof in the supermarkets in the United States. If the Americans could take our beef, it would put a little pressure on their retail price and give the consumers a break. The slaughterhouses need to be investigated, I think, to see whether or not they are coming up with a decent markup or are actually guilty of gouging the producers.

The primary thing we need to do is build a good rapport with the United States government and convince it that America needs our beef as much as we need that border open.

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was on television in a public forum a couple of weeks ago and said that if he could not deal effectively with the aboriginal crisis and the alienation of the west, he would deem his prime ministership to be a failure. But it appears to me that by leaving agriculture out, he is not off to a very good start. Maybe the member could comment on that.

Mr. Dale Johnston: Mr. Speaker, it is actually a very good point. I know that the Prime Minister has said he feels that the western alienation is real. Unlike the previous prime minister, who did not think it really existed, this Prime Minister at least has acknowledged that the western alienation is a problem. He has said he will do something about it, but I think he got off to a very bad start by neglecting to be upfront and proactive about agriculture.

As my colleague from Peterborough said, the opening of that 49th parallel to get the cattle flowing back and forth, particularly live cattle going south, is of utmost importance.

• (1645)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to speak for the first time this session. Indeed, it is my first time speaking as a minister of the Crown. You and I have known each other for an enormously long time, Mr. Speaker.

I love to read speeches that are well thought out. Some people in my department thought that this would be a great time for the minister to make a great impression on all the government programs. They wrote this wonderful speech. Then my colleague from Mississauga South decided that he too wanted to say some positive things about the Speech from the Throne, a speech that is so detailed and so precise in the enumeration of the programs the government is outlining for all Canadians to see and judge that one would almost suggest it is budget-like.

I could not possibly say no to my colleague, Mr. Speaker, so you will have to allow me to forego the opportunity to do justice to those

who have laboured so mightily in crafting the words necessary to make a member of the ministry look thoughtful.

If I may be forgiven, I will sound rather pedestrian and representative of those people who really want to see the government of the day, the Government of Canada, address the needs they see every day.

Here are some of those needs. Members will have seen them already in the Speech from the Throne because, despite the naysayers on the other side, the government has put its finger on some of the most important necessities of the day.

On the first of these necessities—if I may be allowed because they pertain to my department—we spoke rather specifically not only about the problem but about how to address it: the first is, of course, investing in the human capital of this country. It is the most important investment that any government could make, in fact, not only this government but government of any stripe.

We have heard others speak of the necessity to build a physical infrastructure, whether it is in the industrial, agricultural, farming or fishing sectors. All of those things are important. This is especially important as well for those who live in larger municipalities, when they talk about the technological innovations of the day that make it necessary for us to build a knowledge based economy. These are all nice, tangible words, but we know that all of them hide something. For all of them, in every single line and in every single sector, we need to invest in our human capital.

All of us in this room, because of our age, have people that depend on us or have depended on us. Those people are now our premier citizens, those in whom we would place all of our faith and all of our hopes: the young people. They are people who are developing an ability to learn, to build capacity, to adapt to the challenges of the day, and to move those challenges as they meet them to the benefit of our society.

The Government of Canada has to do the same. It cannot do less. We want to foster lifelong learning. We recognize that not only must we give people an opportunity to pursue greater levels of education, we must give them the opportunity to advance and develop their skills in the workplace. We must give them the opportunity to adjust to the new challenges of a changing economy.

For example, within five years 70% of all new jobs created will require post-secondary education or better. Only 6% of the new jobs to be created will require less than a high school education. We need people to be adaptable.

What does education mean? Does it mean to be able to read, to add, to fool around with a computer? No. It means that a person is able to adapt whatever skills have been learned, both on the academic side and on the manual side—dexterity—to the new jobs that develop. We need to be able to do that.

We have the means for it. We have seen it in the Speech from the Throne. The government has already made several commitments. Many people will pooh-pooh this, but those who are most likely to be recipients of it recognize the great vision and the direction that the Prime Minister has already allowed us to examine.

•(1650)

We will be looking at the student loan program and we will enhance it. We want more students to have access to loans that will allow them to attend community colleges and universities. We will be extending the period allowed for the repayment of such loans in order to reduce that debt load. We will be introducing and enhancing the interest relief portions of the student loan mechanism so that no one will be overburdened by the loans they take for the purpose of pursuing higher learning.

We will also make sure that we do not limit this opportunity only to a select few but that we recognize that society is becoming much more than what it has been in the past in terms of its economic abilities, and that expenses have increased. We will be including a larger swathe of our population, a larger group of middle income families, in order to release them from the burden that has been placed on them.

In addition to that, we recognized long ago that those who are often left out are of course those young men and women who come from families that are more disadvantaged. They are the ones who do not have the opportunities to access these loans and programs that the Government of Canada put in place in the past. We will be offering students in the first year of a community college or university program an opportunity to access additional funds.

I do not want to scoop the Prime Minister or the Minister of Finance when they present the budget, but I am so excited about what I know they will be doing that I cannot hide the smile on my face. I am sure you have noticed it, Mr. Speaker. Those students will be delighted that finally a government has the courage to put money beside a commitment to engage those people from the classes in our society that have not demonstrated the greatest ability to finance their children's education.

That is something we have ignored for too long. Therefore we have decided that we should take a look at those families that do not have the sophistication and understanding of the economic instruments of investments that would allow them to make early investments into their children's education from the moment their children are born.

We have in the past, and this is a compliment to our administration, put in place a registered education savings plan, but we did not recognize that a lot of families do not have the economic means or the investment sophistication to do this. Therefore we will be putting in place a learning bond where the Government of Canada will come up with the opportunities for them to make those first down payments and provide them with the opportunity to begin to understand how these instruments can be best utilized for their own children.

This is not just idle talk. My colleagues opposite would say we cannot handle this because it is too specific for us. It is a vision that has substance. It is an idea that has a mechanism. It is a plan that has steps along the way.

Those kinds of steps lead me, as well, to what I said a few moments ago about skills development. We have an opportunity to build a culture of learning for those people who leave the educational parameters of a classroom. For example, we have learning

Address

institutions from labour groups, management groups and sector councils. We have labour trusts that are engaged in providing skills for their members as they are required to meet the demands of the marketplace as they see it. They are best equipped to make that connection with both business and with the requirements of their employees, their members. We need to engage in plans with them to ensure that the outcomes of their exercises are productive for all Canadians.

•(1655)

[*Translation*]

I myself studied this issue and had the opportunity to observe current practices. We have seen that it is possible to create a partnership between the government and these groups for the well-being of Canadians.

I thank you for giving me at least these few minutes to start elaborating on the government's plan. I hope that the Chair will give me more time in the future.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I want to congratulate my colleague on his appointment as minister. To be perfectly honest, I cannot recite the exact title yet, but he is in effect our minister of lifelong learning. I congratulate him on that and on the way he dealt with it in his speech. We have needed such a department for many years. I hope, not that he will take over the whole federal government in the area of lifelong learning, but that he will develop within his new department an expertise in these matters which reaches out to the other federal departments.

I have two specific things that I hope the minister will take under advisement. He mentioned student loans and the problems they create. I would point out that right now less than 15% of the students in our medical schools come from homes with what we call lower middle class incomes or lower; 85% come from upper middle class or higher. Would the member take under advisement the matter of residency? Is residency for a medical student training or work?

Second, would he consider working through cabinet so that he and his successors become Canada's permanent representative to the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada in order to have consistency in the federal government's dealings with the provinces in these matters?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, first, with regard to the second part of the question, I am very interested, as minister, to take part in this council of ministers of education.

Of course, there are jurisdictional problems, but my department has already indicated the interest of the current minister and of those who will come after me in becoming members of this council.

Indeed, it is important to have a truly Canadian concept that goes beyond classroom education, which is under provincial jurisdiction.

Therefore, my answer is yes, I am open to that.

*Address**[English]*

With respect to the first part of the member's question, I am pleased to say that I met with students from the medical profession just a few moments ago. They expressed to me the same kinds of concerns that the hon. member for Peterborough has indicated.

Consistent with what I said earlier, we have already taken into consideration some of the costs that are borne by students that have not in the past been considered as part of the legitimate or eligible cost for deductions either for their parents or the students themselves, and we are heading in that direction.

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I want to congratulate the minister on his appointment. He came into this place in 1988, as did you, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure he will do a good job. He is more than qualified, being a former educator. And we have had our sparring matches in this place.

I met with some medical students who were on the Hill today lobbying members of Parliament concerning their level of indebtedness as students. They are saying that the answer is not in being able to borrow more money, although that is a problem. The students are basically saying that yes, student indebtedness is a problem but they are suggesting that under the present conditions of the student loan program some of them actually cannot borrow enough money to keep going.

I see that my time is up. Could I seek unanimous consent to finish my question?

• (1700)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Is there unanimous consent for the member to finish his question, which means lengthening the time for questions and comments?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[Translation]

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague. He and I share some history.

[English]

Yes, we have sparred on many occasions but on this occasion we will not. We will agree. He is right, the debt load for many students, especially those in the professional faculties, is onerous at the very least and most difficult, and it is something we have to address.

I do not want to scoop the finance minister, but we have indicated in the Speech from the Throne that mechanisms will be put in place to allow for the inclusion of eligible expenses and we will include more eligible expenses for a larger swath of the middle class to be a part of this. We want to encourage more students to pursue higher learning. We will be able to give more details when the budget comes forward.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to make reference to and elaborate on one aspect of the throne speech. It has to do with our commitment under strengthening Canada's social foundations, that we will under our universal programs provide our seniors with income assistance and care when needed.

On December 10 I had a press conference. I announced a number of initiatives which I felt were important with regard to seniors. The motivation for the changes that I was proposing was that the seniors are the fastest growing and most vulnerable segment of our society. They are Canadians who have the least opportunities to address matters such as seniors poverty and the least tools available to them to correct a situation which may be of some difficulty to them.

I had an opportunity to host a town hall meeting on January 13 where 200 constituents came out to speak about seniors poverty and related issues. I will hold another forum on February 25. We expect that up to 400 people will come to talk about this issue because it received such an overwhelming, positive response when we first talked about it.

I would like to outline just for the information of members and Canadians some ideas that my constituents came up with. I will also briefly review the 17 motions which I tabled in the House on February 2.

We do not have a poverty line in Canada. Therefore I submitted a motion to establish provincial, territorial and regional poverty lines. This is important because we do not know the level of poverty that we are prepared to tolerate. The low income cut-off used by Statistics Canada is not an appropriate measure of poverty in Canada.

I also have a motion to implement a guaranteed annual income for seniors. It is important that we establish the level of poverty that we are prepared to tolerate and ensure that through instruments such as the guaranteed income supplement or other equivalent type programs, all seniors, regardless of how they got there, are at least raised to the level of poverty that we are prepared to tolerate.

I also proposed that we eliminate mandatory retirement at age 65. Mandatory retirement is an archaic concept. People are living much longer and quite frankly, what would we say to Canadians who for whatever reason may not have provided adequately for their own retirement, that they would have to leave a job when they in fact needed the job? We would put them out of a good paying job and all of a sudden they would be pumping gas or working at McDonald's. It would be a terrible waste of skills. We should work collaboratively with all jurisdictions to eliminate mandatory retirement.

I want to increase the caregiver tax credit to the equivalent value of the government subsidy per patient in nursing homes. Very slowly, the caring for our loved ones, whether they be the chronically ill, the aged, the disabled, et cetera, has been transferred to families. The caregivers have to withdraw from the paid labour force. We do not subsidize that activity enough. That tax benefit should have the same value as the government subsidy provided to nursing homes for chronic or continuous care for people who need it.

I want to extend employment insurance benefits to caregivers who withdraw from the paid labour force, much as we have done with regard to those who take maternity or parental leave under EI.

There is something in the Income Tax Act called the refundable medical expense supplement. It is a very modest amount. It is supposed to take care of those extraordinary medical expenses which Canadians sometimes incur. Certainly seniors are no exception. The amount is very, very low. I want to increase it, in fact double the current amount.

I want to amend the Canada pension plan so that those who withdraw from the labour force, who seek to care for a loved one, a senior, et cetera, would not lose the opportunity to continue to earn CPP benefits, even though they do not have earned income during that period. Not only are they giving up a pay cheque but they are also giving up the opportunity to improve their own pensions over a working career which is unfair. It is inequitable and it should be corrected.

• (1705)

There are three subsequent motions to do with home care, pharmacare and affordable housing. We could talk all day on those issues. To a great extent other jurisdictions are involved, but we have to ensure that our seniors have adequate and equitable access to pharmacare, to home care and to affordable housing.

We have heard a lot in the media recently about elder abuse. There were articles written in the *Toronto Star* some time ago. It was a beautiful series. There were documentary programs on elder abuse recently. They cry out for changes in the regulation of the nursing home industry. We have to start working collaboratively with other levels of government to ensure that the regulations of the nursing home industry fairly reflect the kind of quality care people expect to get when they pay upward of \$2,200 to \$2,500 a month for a loved one in a facility.

I also have proposed that we amend the Criminal Code for those who are convicted of either defrauding or abusing seniors. When someone takes advantage of a senior because of the senior's vulnerability, I consider that to be an aggravating factor warranting stiffer sentences under the Criminal Code.

I have also proposed the creation of a new officer of Parliament equivalent to the Auditor General and the Chief Electoral Officer, being the physician general of Canada. I am afraid that Health Canada has lost its closeness to the people. Too many issues have distracted Health Canada. It is on different sides of the fence. It has conflicting issues. We need an independent medical officer, a physician general of Canada to guide and advise seniors on appropriate care. It is very important.

I also want to establish the cabinet position of secretary of state for seniors. It is extremely important that we have a voice for seniors at the decision making table. It is time that seniors were represented at the decision making table.

Also, the second last motion was to develop a Canada-wide public education campaign to inform and educate Canadians about the issue of ageism. Ageism is discrimination on the basis of age. That kind of discrimination exists in many of our institutions already.

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Finally, I want to propose to the House that under the whole umbrella of helping seniors, we should be establishing and adopting a bill of rights for seniors. It would not be a law that would conflict with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms; rather it would be guidelines, a lens that we could look through, just as we do with gender analysis in some legislation.

The kind of thing that should be included would be that seniors should not be denied medical assistance. For instance, it has been reported that some doctors will not take on a patient if the person is over 60 years of age. That is a violation of the Canada Health Act, but it happens. Under the seniors bill of rights, no senior should be denied medical service from a medical doctor anywhere.

I have raised all these points for the information of members. I hope members will seek ways in which we can advance these issues. It is very clear that this involves all levels of government. It means that we as parliamentarians have to do whatever we can to collaboratively work with all levels of government to make sure that seniors are a top priority at all levels of government.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Madam Speaker, first, I would like to inform the House that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the hon. member for Joliette, who will convincingly point out, I am sure, the shortcomings of the Speech from the Throne recently delivered by the government.

One sentence in the throne speech struck me, because I do not quite get it. On page 14, the issue of regional development is raised. We are told the regions should be affected by economic development just like the rest of the country and that we should ensure they can reap the benefits of the 21st century economy.

The throne speech mentions our farms as well as our forest, mining and fishing industries. I am particularly interested in the fishing industry since I am the fishing critic for my party, so I will get back to this issue later on.

On page 14, the throne speech states:

This will be achieved primarily through the efforts of Canadians themselves.

And quite ironically, it adds:

But government has an essential enabling role.

If the government is content with its role as a stimulus, it is obvious that we will not get very far. As for us, in our region, I can tell you that we have been studied in many ways for many years. We have been stimulated in every way possible and today we still find ourselves in a very difficult economic situation.

We find ourselves in an extremely difficult economic situation, especially because we used to make a living from fishing. Ever since this government was elected, in 1993, we have faced a moratorium on groundfishing.

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We have had a moratorium, in fact, and it has been a total economic catastrophe in the lower St. Lawrence and Gaspé, but not only in my riding. It has been an economic catastrophe in all the Atlantic provinces, especially Newfoundland, as well as the Gaspé.

Thus, in 1993, we found ourselves facing a moratorium. We were promised that all possible steps would be taken to re-establish the stocks. Unfortunately last year, after 10 years of governance by the current government, we found ourselves faced with a new moratorium on groundfishing, particularly for the cod fishery.

Ten years later, we have realized that not only have we made no progress, but we are still in the same situation. Once again, the same regions are affected. The East has been affected and struck hard by the fisheries and groundfishing crisis.

In 1993, the government proposed a program intended to boost our economies, intended to get our economies to develop, intended to create economic diversification so that people could live, and so that people in the rest of the country would have access to these services.

Unfortunately, since 1993, we have seen that, on the one hand, there was a program, but, on the other hand, the government began to slash all the other programs.

If we just think of the cuts in employment insurance that used to provide a great many seasonal workers with a decent income. Today, not even 35% of the women, for example, who worked in the business, in the fish plants, can receive employment insurance. We can see that it is a major factor in impoverishing regions like ours.

We can also talk about the forestry sector. It is the same thing. We can also talk about tourism. The changes to the employment insurance program and the criteria for young people once they leave school seem a bit ruthless.

One very concrete example comes to mind, particularly with regard to tourism. Young people are being trained in the tourism industry in our region. They work for one season, but since it is still seasonal work, naturally, they do not have access to employment insurance, because they have to accumulate at least 910 hours before they can access EI benefits.

The result of the government's attitude is that young people are encouraged to leave the regions for the major urban centres in order to earn a decent living. Obviously, these young people will not stay in the regions without a decent income. Unfortunately, we are the ones training them. They are our young people and we are unable to keep them, because we do not have the appropriate means or measures to do so.

There is another extremely important element. In the throne speech—and this affects my region in particular—the government said, “We will develop new and environmental technologies”.

• (1715)

What is the federal government doing currently to develop wind power? This program will receive \$260 million over fifteen years.

This is nothing compared to what went into the tar sands or Hibernia, for example. The government invested \$60 billion over the years in oil and gas production.

A \$260 million program over fifteen years is announced. I consider this pathetic. We hope to use this kind of program to develop wind power in regions like ours. The Bloc Québécois had asked for more money. If much more substantial investments were made, up to 24,000 jobs could be created. There would be regional economic spinoffs, and benefits for manufacturing plants in Montreal and elsewhere, with a minimum of 24,000 jobs created.

Let us be conservative and say that if we simply double production incentives per kilowatt-hour, this would create 10,000 jobs, if the government bothered. When we say double, we simply mean doubling the \$260 million invested over fifteen years. So, we should invest twice as much so to enable wind power to become an established industry.

This is a program that has been launched by Hydro Québec and the former Quebec government that could produce some interesting results. We know that in our region, and particularly in the Maritimes, winds are strong and could be used to produce that type of energy.

If we want to protect our environment and help our economy to diversify and draw on more than natural resources, we will have to invest more in new energies, particularly in wind energy, and that does not seem to be the way the government is going.

I could also mention the case of Bennett Environmental, which right now is a threat to all the resources in Chaleur Bay. But I will come back to that later.

I have talked about employment insurance and about the fact that the current government has abandoned the provinces. This is true both for air and for rail transportation. The current government has abandoned all transportation services. Regions like ours feel the effects of this every day. This is a major element that is totally absent from the throne speech.

There is another important element that affects us in a very specific way. We are talking about the softwood lumber crisis that has not yet been resolved and that is affecting us significantly. We could also talk about mad cow disease that, in my opinion, was very poorly managed by the current government. This government has launched a program to address a crisis that, at the outset, affected mainly western beef producers, while agriculture in Quebec and in the other provinces was extremely different.

In conclusion, I obviously cannot agree with what has been submitted in the throne speech. To me this is a lot of rhetoric. There does not seem to be a future for my region with the current government.

Address

• (1720)

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise after the hon. member for Matapédia—Matane, who put the debate in its proper context.

We are dealing with a government and a party whose vision of the regions is not compatible with the one that Quebeckers want to develop. The trademark of this throne speech is that it does not recognize that Quebeckers form a nation that is neither worse nor better than the Canadian nation, but that is different and that needs its own aspirations and challenges.

If this is not recognized, it follows that, by denying this reality, all the policies and proposals found in the throne speech become obstacles to Quebec's development.

As I just mentioned, the idea is not to say that Quebeckers form a nation that is more or less interesting than the Canadian nation. Ours is exactly the same situation as that of the Canadian nation in relation to the American or, rather, the US nation. Canadians truly value their differences; they feel that they have their own challenges and they do not think they are superior or inferior to Americans.

It is exactly the same thing for Quebeckers. However, since we are in the Canadian federation, we unfortunately have neither the political and fiscal tools, nor the authority to be part of the decision making process at the international level to express our concerns and propose our solutions.

The major thrust of the whole throne speech presented to us by the new Prime Minister is a negation of Quebec's distinctiveness. This speech perpetuates the Trudeau and Chrétien approach. It is a departure from the federalism as conceived, for example, by Robert Bourassa or by Claude Ryan, who left us a few days ago.

As we know, the hon. member for Papineau—Saint-Denis, who is the Minister of Health and the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, was once Mr. Ryan's chief of staff. When he was interviewed, he said that under the new Prime Minister Ottawa would adopt the middle ground position that Mr. Ryan epitomized. We keep searching and looking in the throne speech, but we cannot find anything that remotely looks like Claude Ryan's vision of Canadian federalism, that is a federalism respectful of the Quebec nation and of its distinctiveness. In this sense, we should not be duped.

Whether in Quebec or in Ottawa, the debate among federalists is over. Trudeau has won. Canadians have the legitimate right to build their nation as they want to. However, if in doing so they not only ignore the distinct character of Quebec but also hamper its development, the Bloc Québécois, as a political party but also as the champion of Quebec's interest, will have no other choice but to rise and say it is unacceptable.

According to the hegemonic vision of federalists, Canada is made up of one nation, the Canadian nation, governed by one central government in Ottawa. Provinces are large regional boards that make a number of decisions based on the resources they are given, very little at a time. For instance, they get to choose the wall colours, but it is not up to them to decide if the building itself will be built or not. Such is the vision of the government, of the Liberal Party of Canada, which, as I mentioned earlier, seems to be shared by a lot of Canadians.

I have no trouble with Canada doing some nation building and promoting one central state run out of Ottawa. However, if, by doing so, they ignore the distinct character of Quebec and impede its development, as I said before, sovereignty will be the only option left to the Quebec people, the Quebec nation.

It is interesting to see how things have changed throughout the years. For example, in 1995, and even in 1980, in the last referendums in Quebec, there were three schools of thoughts. There was the sovereign movement of which the Bloc Quebec was part. There was a more nationalist movement, whose members thought federalism was a more interesting option than the sovereignty of Quebec. As I said earlier, Mr. Bourassa seemed to support that option, just like Mr. Allaire and Mario Dumont, who is now the leader of the ADQ.

• (1725)

There was also this third trend that was represented here, in Ottawa, by Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Chrétien. We must recognize that this trend has now prevailed among federalists. We see this when reading the Speech from the Throne presented by the new Prime Minister.

Consequently, the option open to Quebeckers is to agree to conform to the Canadian model, that is to refuse to meet our challenges in Quebec, or to choose the road to Quebec's sovereignty.

I believe it has been demonstrated once again through the Speech from the Throne that the only option open to the Quebec people and the Quebec nation is Quebec's sovereignty.

I will give a number of examples. One of the very important challenges for Quebec is its population challenge, that is the demographic challenge.

In Quebec, as in many Western countries, the population is aging and there is a demographic decline. In some regions, we can talk about this decline, even though, generally speaking, the population is growing in Quebec. This would lead us to have a population policy that would be integrated with mainly three aspects, that is a family policy that would encourage young families, an integration and immigration policy and also a policy for the elderly.

What is the government offering to in place of this integrated policy? It is offering a new choice of compassionate benefits. I find the principle quite interesting. Indeed, when natural caregivers have to help a family member who is experiencing health problems, it is a definite advantage for them to be able to withdraw from the labour market. However, the way the program has been devised by the Liberals is extremely bureaucratic and even inhumane. This person is required to present a medical certificate to confirm that the person he or she wants to take care of is likely to die in the next 26 weeks.

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I am sure that we have all seen one of those cartoons depicting a doctor visiting a patient and saying “I have good news and bad news. The good news is your wife is entitled to compassionate benefits, and the bad news—” We get the drift.

This is not at all the way this program should have been introduced. This might not have been the first priority for Quebecers, who would have preferred to see parental leave, currently financed through the EI fund. This is a bad parental leave program.

Quebec has long been asking, whether it is under the Parti Quebecois or the Quebec Liberal Party, to be given back the part of the employment insurance fund that is used for parental leave, so that we can have a true parental leave that is integrated to a family policy. But the federal government says no. Instead, it comes up with something called “compassionate benefit” that does not meet the needs of caregivers. In my opinion, this is a good example of the denial of Quebec's right to make its own choices.

Here is another example. We set up a daycare program at a cost of \$5 per day for users, but that cost has now increased to \$7, because of the fiscal imbalance, because the federal government is not transferring enough of our tax money to Quebec, thus penalizing Quebec families.

We devised a system that is recognized not only in the rest of Canada, but in the whole western world. Here is an example. Quebec families are losing between \$200 million and \$300 million in tax deductions because the federal government does not recognize them.

So, the federal government saved money on the backs of Quebec families. This example has to do with the family policy. I could provide others that relate to immigration.

There is the fact that 50% of the immigration flow is controlled by the federal government, which uses its own standards. Unfortunately, this morning again, we saw that immigration is used by the federal government and the Liberal Party as if it were an election issue. There is a headline in today's edition of the daily *La Presse* which reads “Access to citizenship: Expedited process a few months before a general election”.

And the government makes no bones about it. The Liberals want to deliver Canadian citizenship certificates to get potential voters. Why not do it on a year round basis and allow these people to participate in our social and political life at all times, and not just a few weeks or months before an election?

I could go on and also talk about the status of regions, but I will end on this note. The only thing that the government is proposing is to create conflicts in the regions by trying to fund municipalities, particularly large ones, directly, at the expense of the needs of all the regions.

Because of all this, the Bloc Quebecois will have no choice but to condemn this throne speech and continue to work even harder to promote Quebec's sovereignty.

• (1730)

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, having listened to the words of the hon. member for Joliette, I am wondering what planet he is from. Has the hon.

member not seen the Prime Minister meeting with his provincial counterparts and showing a new openness to working together? Has he not heard the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs say we are prepared to work more closely together?

I can assure the hon. member that the attitude he has described is not my attitude. I myself met with Ms. Gagnon-Tremblay in Sherbrooke a week ago. We discussed how we could work together in areas of interest to Quebec, such as the international arena or the Francophonie.

Would it not be better to stop these pointless quarrels of the past, which do no good for the people of Quebec or its opportunities for economic development? Ought we not to return to a willingness to hold discussions with a view to working together in order to build a stronger Canada, a Canada from which all of its population will benefit?

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Madam Speaker, we have heard all that before. We are not fooled at all by the words of the new Prime Minister or the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. In fact, I really like them, just as I do the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

That being said, it is a matter of structures. Concerning the ability to correct the fiscal imbalance, there was nothing in the Speech from the Throne that would recognize that this is a problem and that the government was going to try to solve it. Instead, what does it announce? That the discussions on health care with the premiers will be held next July, probably after the election.

On the equalization issues, the government introduced Bill C-18. This bill would extend for a year the current equalization formula, which does Quebec out of \$500 million this year. We expect losses of \$1.5 billion next year.

We must base our judgment on facts and not on the speech. The facts show—as does the Speech from the Throne—that there is no change on the policy options level. The government will respond at a snail's pace to the demands of the provinces and of Quebec. This will be to the detriment of Quebec's public finances, to the detriment of the needs of the Quebec people and, above all, to the detriment of democracy. Indeed, Quebec's national assembly, which does not have the means to implement its political choices, will be unable to respond to the needs democratically expressed by the Quebec people.

[*English*]

Hon. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness (Border Transit), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport.

It is a pleasure to speak today in response to the Speech from the Throne. I believe that, as my colleague has just said, our government is here to set a new vision to move together. Working together is extremely important. I am very proud to be part of the Prime Minister's team which is looking to work together with Canadians, with provinces and with municipalities to change the system.

Globalization, advanced technology and the changing geopolitical environment offers many opportunities for Canadians. However, with the ongoing threat of terrorism, along with increasingly sophisticated criminal activity, there is a need to strengthen our border management.

As mentioned in the throne speech, there is no role more fundamental for government than the protection of its citizens. That is why the government has established the new Canada Border Services Agency as part of the new Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Innovative approaches to border management are required to protect and support Canadians. We have to support our security systems, our health system, our social and economic well-being, and that is what the new Canada Border Services Agency is about.

The creation of the Canada Border Services Agency brings together all major players involved in the facilitation and control of movement of goods and people under one roof. The CBSA will build on smart border initiatives, and the important progress that has been made so far is good for Canadians.

The CBSA is comprised of the customs program from the former Canada Customs and Revenue Agency; the intelligence, enforcement and overseas interdiction functions from Citizenship and Immigration Canada; and the food, plant and animal inspection at the border functions from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

The CBSA operates at over 1,300 service locations, including air, sea and land ports of entry to Canada, some 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at every entry point in Canada. Its role is multi-faceted, securing our borders against external threats while facilitating the flow of legitimate trade and travel that is vital to the Canadian economy. Its success depends on strong partnerships, both in Canada and abroad, to ensure that it has the information it needs to do the job that needs to be done.

What does the CBSA do? First and foremost, it protects the integrity of Canada's borders. The officers of CBSA play an important role in working with Citizenship and Immigration Canada to identify organized fraud and to conduct intelligence reporting related to illegal immigration, organized crimes, war crimes and security concerns.

These officers maintain a steady flow of key intelligence information which allows the agency to continually enhance the integrity of the immigration program, our borders and the security of our nation. They also work to respond to the ongoing threat of terrorism and increasingly sophisticated criminal activity.

The CBSA is working to push the borders out to identify threats to Canada overseas before people reach our borders. For example, there are immigration integrity officers who operate in key locations overseas to combat illegal immigration, people smuggling and trafficking.

Their hard work to intervene caused 6,000 individuals attempting to enter Canada illegally by air last year to be stopped before they reached Canada's borders.

The CBSA also prevents the entry of illegal and dangerous goods, such as drugs and weapons, as well as commodities, such as animals,

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plants and food products that introduce foreign diseases or exotic pests to Canadian agriculture and the public.

• (1735)

Last year over a half a billion dollars in narcotics and over 57,000 prohibited food, plant and animal products were kept off the streets of Canada by the agency.

What else are we doing to protect the border? We are investing in state of the art technology. One major example is the vehicle and cargo inspection system, or VACIS. These truck-mounted machines use a gamma ray scanning system, similar to an X-ray, to detect contraband, weapons and potentially dangerous goods inside containers. VACIS is in place at 11 locations across Canada to help officers intervene in security matters.

However, security is not the government's only priority. The CBSA also works to facilitate trade. Anyone in business knows that the way we manage our borders is critical to the success of our economy. Given that over 80% of our trade is with the United States, infrastructure and inspection facilities at border points must be modern and efficient to maximize the movement of legitimate travellers and trade.

Being from the riding of Chatham—Kent Essex, I am keenly aware of the volume of people and goods arriving at the border for I live very close to the busiest border in Canada. Every year more than 7 million travellers and 1.7 million commercial vehicles cross the Ambassador Bridge, making it the busiest crossing in Canada. In fact, the Ambassador Bridge alone accounts for 25% of the \$400 billion trade between Canada and the United States.

There is no question that the border must be secure but it must also be efficient. One way of doing this is through initiatives such as Nexus and FAST. These binational programs allow us to pre-approve low risk individuals and goods. This in turn allows Canadian and American authorities to concentrate their efforts on potentially high risk people.

Nexus and FAST are currently offered at a dozen border crossings across Canada. As we reduce the risks of dangerous people or commodities entering Canada, we increase investors' confidence in the security of our borders.

We have the unprecedented ability to carry out this mission by bringing all key players involved into a single portfolio. Because we are better integrated than ever before, the CBSA will be able to work a smarter border.

Increased inter-operability will enable the government to capitalize on our respective strengths and abilities to move forward with various organizations.

Equally important to taxpayers, this synergy will reduce red tape and duplication. The resulting increased efficiencies will benefit government, business and individual Canadians.

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The benefits extend beyond our own borders. Just as criminals and terrorists are globally connected, we are now also better connected so that we can communicate effectively with our domestic and international partners to respond to global threats of crime and terrorism.

In addition, we have improved liaisons with our major trading partners and their border related agencies, such as the U.S. department of homeland security.

As a result, the CBSA will be a much stronger presence on the world stage, speaking for Canada with a unified voice, whether addressing issues of food security, terrorism or trade.

Canada is positioned for greater progress and we are preparing to meet all of the challenges of the future.

• (1740)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in the Speech from the Throne, the government sent a clear signal that it was according a high priority to safeguarding our natural environment. The speech highlighted a leading role for green technologies and energy efficient transportation and housing. Green technologies will play a significant role in meeting our environmental challenges.

Climate change is a case in point. The government has indicated that it will respect its commitment to the Kyoto protocol in a way that produces long term and enduring results while maintaining a strong and growing economy.

Green energy is clearly a part of the solution to the climate change, and our efforts in recent years have demonstrated our determination to introduce more efficient alternative sources of energy into our economy.

The transportation sector is a prime example. Transportation is a key enabler of the Canadian economy. In fact every year Canada's transportation system moves more than \$1 trillion worth of goods. Unfortunately, the transportation sector is also a major contributor of greenhouse gases, accounting for 25% of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada.

In addressing climate change, the Government of Canada has introduced measures worth some \$250 million to increase the production and use of alternative fuels, fuel cells, ethanol and biodiesel, to increase vehicle fuel efficiency, to improve passenger transportation and to increase the efficiency of freight transportation.

With respect to new vehicle fuel efficiency, we are aiming for a 25% improvement. This target is important. If adopted and implemented in a timely way, it could produce a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 5.2 megatonnes by the year 2010. This represents about a quarter of the emissions reductions from all the transport related measures that have been identified today in the government's climate change plan.

Any effort to effect change on a national level must be supported by all four pillars of Canadian society: government, industry, academia, and most important, community. That is why Transport Canada is calling upon transportation sector stakeholders from various backgrounds to develop the technology, processes and

services that can help make Canada a world leader in transportation systems.

The department's approach to innovation and skills is rooted in the government's key objective to foster healthy communities, a clean environment and a strong economy for all Canadians.

Strong emphasis in outreach and partnerships, skill developments and research and development will be a key to success in this area. In the long term this approach will help us achieve results not only for Canadians but also for other states in our international community.

I believe that citizens working through each of the four pillars of Canadian society can help us meet our goals with respect to wise environmental stewardship and can make an important contribution to our collective global future.

For this reason, Transport Canada is actively pursuing partnerships with experts in universities and centres of transportation excellence, capitalizing on the unique strength of individuals and organizations across the country. Transport Canada is committed to acting as a catalyst to promote skills development, education and training in the transportation logistics operations and research and development.

This type of partnership is also important in achieving excellence in research and development. For instance, Transport Canada's Transportation Development Centre is cooperating with Overland Custom Coach, Battery Engineering and Test Services, Siemens Canada Limited and Natural Resources Canada in the development of a functioning prototype of an energy efficient, low-floor electric transit bus. This bus can be adapted to use one of the three electric and/or hybrid drive configurations, depending upon the needs of the potential clients.

The Government of Canada is also taking the approach of trying to negotiate a voluntary agreement with the automobile industry. The industry has been called upon to accelerate the introduction into the marketplace of many new technologies that can reduce emissions, technologies that affect vehicles and engine design and the use of different fuels. Many of these technologies are already available, but right now they are being used to improve vehicle performance rather than fuel economy.

• (1745)

Unfortunately, of course, it is the consumers who buy the vehicles and decide whether they will purchase a heavier, less fuel efficient model or a lighter, more fuel efficient one. Consumers have a responsibility to inform themselves about their choices.

The federal government is ready to help. Through the annual EnerGuide on vehicle fuel consumption, the government publishes the data collected by Transport Canada from vehicle manufacturers showing the fuel economy of every make and model. New programs are under development to increase information to consumers about vehicle emissions and a new national awareness campaign, called the "One Tonne Challenge", will encourage every Canadian to reduce emissions. As well, Transport Canada is evaluating a fleet of fuel efficient advanced technology vehicles from around the world, some of which are now available in Canada.

Needless to say, last week we saw the Smart car at the Toronto car show. These vehicles are powered by fuel cells, batteries, low carbon fuels or advanced gasoline and diesel engines. They include gasoline-electric hybrid vehicles and vehicles using advanced power trains and lightweight materials. At the same time they provide the safety, emissions, reliability and performance consumers expect in today's automobiles.

Transport Canada is assessing how these advanced technology vehicles comply with existing regulatory requirements related to safety and emissions. Our goal is to encourage the development of advanced technology vehicles while maintaining the high standard of safety expected by Canadians.

The department also plans to assess the potential of advanced technology vehicles in the marketplace. We will identify barriers to the introduction and use of these vehicles and suggest remedies. We will raise awareness of the vehicles through events such as presentations, student competitions, public exhibitions, demonstrations, test rides and evaluations.

Transport Canada is exploring how it can help the transportation sector tap into the centres of excellence program and other federal sources of funding focused on innovation and skills development.

Through its urban transportation showcase program, Transport Canada is helping fund some innovative ideas to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from urban transportation.

We need to work more closely with the automobile industry and other stakeholders, including environmental groups, to determine how to bring about a more sustainable transportation system for passengers. At the same time, I personally would like to see the Government of Canada provide some real incentives for people to buy environmentally friendly vehicles and get the gas guzzlers off the roads.

We need to answer questions like, how can we get someone to drive a smaller, more fuel efficient car? How do we tell someone who is driving a hybrid that it is the best thing there is? I keep asking people why they need six or eight cylinder vehicles or why they need SUVs. Why do we not promote smaller cars? If we are to achieve a major improvement in vehicle fuel economy, all of us may have to take additional action.

I have indicated that I would like to initiate a dialogue with those most involved in this issue to explore how we can move forward constructively. I want to hear people's views as to how we can better bring technology to bear, both to reduce fuel consumption and to enable the production of better models in Canada that will strengthen

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our auto industry. We need a process that brings views together and advances the goals of consensus and concerted action.

In this area I am very passionate and I am looking forward to working closely with stakeholders to improve the efficiency of vehicles on Canada's roads and to help meet Canada's Kyoto targets.

There is another area that I am very passionate about, and that is Canada. I have travelled to many other countries. I have seen how Canada has accepted people from all nations. I have seen the opportunities for Canadians to help other nations develop. This is the best country in the world, and I believe it is because of the diversity of our population. This diversity gives us natural ambassadors, people who can go back to their homelands and help us sell our technologies around the world.

Our multicultural tapestry gives us the tools to help the rest of the world achieve a better tomorrow and a healthier 21st century. Together all stakeholders can move forward to ensure that we meet our Kyoto targets and beyond.

• (1750)

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the member a question concerning his last comment about Canadians being natural ambassadors. The member has been extraordinarily active in encouraging his constituents to return to the Horn of Africa to work with other governments and to try to help bring peace to troubled regions. Would he like to elaborate a little more on that?

I know he has had a great deal of experience with a very diverse multicultural constituency. I think this idea about how we can engage Canadians and how we can make Canada's presence felt more abroad is something to which we have to give more reflection. I know the member has been very active in that respect and it would be helpful if he could help the House understand a little more about some of the work he has done in that area.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Madam Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and I had conversations a few years ago when I was halfway around the world. I had an opportunity to call him from Lahore, Pakistan and relate to him the things I had seen at Khyber Pass in Afghanistan. I talked about providing Canadians with the opportunity to go back to their homelands, to go back to where they came from and provide sustainable development. It was about building nations, building democracies.

I am very proud that the Prime Minister a few days ago created the Canada corps. As we go through and examine what Canada corps is all about and under which ministry it should be, we will empower Canadians, the vast diversity of people who have come from every corner of the world. We are the only House that has a website which celebrates where we come from. At www.parl.gc.ca people can see the nations from all over the world that are represented in this House.

Address

Why can we not also engage our communities? Why can we not reach out to the multicultural tapestry of this country and help people to go back to where they came from? Why can we not lend them for six months? Through HRDC, through external affairs, through CIDA why can we not support them in their programs?

Canadians are already doing good work abroad. Why can we not make it a government policy? Why can we not work with everyone concerned to provide the tools to Canadians who have been here for one or two generations to go back and help build their countries, develop their nations? Countries that are failing or that are about to fail can be helped in the Canadian way. We have something that is unique.

I look forward to working with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the minister for CIDA and members of all parties in the House, because in this there is no party line.

Some would say I am foolish to talk of this but look at Canada. Look at the face of Toronto where 57% of the people have come to Canada in the last 50 years and have made this country their home. They could have gone anywhere in the world but they chose Canada and it is time that we provided through them the means to build a better country and a sound world.

• (1755)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Earlier today in question period in providing an answer to the opposition, I made reference to three specific reports that were filed a number of years ago verbally with the Department of Finance.

I have had the opportunity this afternoon to review the record, to just check on that arithmetic. I have also re-examined the report of the Auditor General and in fact my reference should have been to five reports, not three.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Technically, that is not a point of order, but we will just let it sit.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Madam Speaker, I must say you look great in the chair. You really fit it well.

My hon. colleague spoke eloquently about how great and diverse Canada is and I think everyone in the House would agree. There is one thing I would like him to focus on. The Speech from the Throne did not address the issue of immigration. The member talked specifically about the idea of supporting Canadians who are the backbone of this country no matter where they come from. One of the basic issues that we have been talking about across the floor is the idea of accreditation of many of the recent immigrants who have come here and actually giving them the chance to work in their professional designations.

Unfortunately we see too many people driving taxis and working as janitors and not in the areas where they should be working, such as engineering or medical doctors. This is a problem the government has been sitting on for 10 years and has done nothing about it. If he speaks so passionately about immigrants, why does the government not do more to support them?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Madam Speaker, when it comes to immigration I do not think there is a more passionate individual in

the House than the member who just spoke. I want to thank my colleague across the way for bringing that to my attention.

For many years we have been struggling in order to move this file forward. However, I think my hon. colleague across the way also should reach out to the provincial governments and the governing bodies and say that they must recognize the credentials.

By training I am a professional engineer, and it is the Association of Professional Engineers of Ontario that recognizes our credentials. It is something that the federal government has to work with. The immigration minister brought this to the table about a year and a half ago. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration is working on it. We are moving forward passionately and positively.

I hope that my hon. colleague across the way will talk to our provincial counterparts so that they can come forward with us.

• (1800)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for St. John's East.

On behalf of the people of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, it is an honour and a privilege to stand here in my place and reply to the government's Speech from the Throne. I thank my constituents for the confidence they have placed in me and I am pleased to return their trust.

On behalf of those same trusting individuals, it is with sadness, disappointment and now disgust that I find it necessary to focus on just one aspect of the Speech from the Throne, that is, the lack of ethical behaviour on behalf of this government and, more important, the lack of ethical behaviour on the part of the Prime Minister, which is becoming the continuing legacy of the Liberal Party.

What is truly disappointing on behalf of thoughtful Canadians is how the Prime Minister has personally let each and every one of us down.

This past weekend I had the opportunity to attend a real Ottawa Valley get-together at St. Mary's Church in the hills of Wilno. In typical Ottawa Valley fashion, the community had come together to help a well known local personality, Barney McCaffrey, whose home burned down on New Year's Eve. Barney had no electricity, no phone and no insurance. The hall was packed as Barney's friends and neighbours helped to raise funds to rebuild his home.

Between the softwood lumber dispute and the crisis surrounding BSE, life has become very lean in rural Canada. People in my riding may not have all the trappings of rich Liberal ad men to be able to afford fancy lunches at expensive restaurants where the tab for one lunch is more than some people in my riding receive as income for an entire month. This is real Canada. These are the people who have been let down by this Prime Minister. I can see it in their faces. There were high expectations for this Prime Minister, but they are all gone now.

The Ottawa Valley knows the Martin family better than most Canadians. Paul Martin Senior lived in Pembroke. Two of the Prime Minister's aunts still reside in the community, and my condolences to the Prime Minister on the recent passing of his Aunt Lucille.

If the Prime Minister ever had a shred of compassion like what we have in the hearts of other Ottawa Valley folks, that is all gone. The Prime Minister is not his father's son. No amount of Liberal spin will change the fact for the people in my riding who knew Paul Martin Senior that this Prime Minister has never had the welfare of Canadians in mind. Actions speak louder than words. We have to walk the walk and talk the talk, but all Canadians have heard is idle talk.

Canadians have now started to realize what kind of person the Prime Minister is. He broke his promise to scrap the GST and it has been downhill ever since he broke that very first promise. The Prime Minister wants to take credit for eliminating the current account deficit, but Canada still has a huge debt. We are more in debt today than when the current crew took office. When it comes to taking responsibility for spending, he claims ignorance. The Prime Minister cannot have it both ways.

The Prime Minister deserves a Genie award for his acting. Canadians are insulted by his phony rants of concern. Canadians know that any outrage has more to do with the fact that greed allowed the Prime Minister's party to get caught than with the fact that skimming was actually going on. In fact, it was Chrétien, Mr. Integrity in the eyes of this Prime Minister, who publicly stated that if a few million got skimmed, so what. That was his signal. That fat signal was what the Liberal Party was waiting for: get out the expensive cigars and the champagne and book those fancy restaurants.

It was not until the official opposition drew attention to the fact that the Prime Minister's personal companies, like Canada Steamship Lines, were receiving tens of millions of dollars in taxpayers' money that the Prime Minister passed the company off to his boys, far enough to claim that he was out of it, but close enough to ensure that taxpayers' money flowed to increase the private wealth of family members.

● (1805)

If that was not bad enough, as finance minister the Prime Minister made sure that his international tax shelter remained in place. This was happening even as the Prime Minister bragged that other tax shelters were being closed. This was done so that Canada Steamship Lines, the personal company of the Prime Minister, could benefit to the tune of \$100 million in tax avoidance, that we know of at this point, and this does not include the benefits that the Prime Minister's family realized by flying any flag but the flag of Canada in order to avoid our labour and environmental laws on his fleet of ships.

How blind is the so-called blind trust when the Liberal lap dog, better known as the unethics commissioner, met with the Prime Minister 13 times over expensive taxpayer funded lunches. To discuss what? Only the Prime Minister knows.

Where was the media in all of this scandal? The Liberals spent \$793 million in taxpayers' funds in the last five years by buying media silence in the form of advertising contracts. That is a lot of money. Obviously it did buy a great deal of silence.

Address

The silence in the Speech from the Throne about the ethics of this government is even more deafening. Remember our old friend, former CBC reporter Jason Moscovitz? Jason was starting to ask too many embarrassing questions about Grand-Mère and the Shawinigan scandal. Where is he now? Bought off as a spin flunky for the Business Development Bank at some obscene salary. It would be informative to tally up the numbers of all the ex-journalists who are now on the taxpayers' payroll.

Canadians are outraged at the sheer enormity of the greed on behalf of the Liberal Party. We can hear the seething anger in their voices as people think about the waste the government keeps on incurring.

First we had the actual incompetence of government ministers for such things as the HRDC billion dollar scandal, the billions spent on the gun registry, and the billions being poured into agencies like the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. Under the guise of research, many of these institutes are just a front for anti-family Liberal propaganda. The Institute of Gender and Health is an example of how it wastes millions of dollars producing anti-family pamphlets, much of it intended for third world countries with no benefit to Canadians. That is not medical research. This is money that the government calls basic research and it is misleading; in fact, Canadian researchers are leaving the country because the dollars for research just are not here. They are being siphoned off into non-accountable foundations.

In the area of science and technology, the government claims to have spent \$13 billion since 1997, but unfortunately we have no proof that this occurred. The use of foundations by the federal government to deliver public programs like research and development is this government's way of transferring public money beyond the reach of effective parliamentary scrutiny.

Fortunately for Canadians, the Auditor General has audited the government's practice of flowing money through foundations, with the audit finding, in the words of the Auditor General, and I quote: "significant gaps and weaknesses in the design of the delegated arrangements; limits on what the Auditor General can look at...; the 'parking' of billions of dollars of the public's money in foundations, years before it is [supposed] to flow;" and little recourse for taxpayers when things go wrong. So much for dealing with the democratic deficit.

Canada is like the *Titanic* and the iceberg we have hit is Liberal Party corruption. Canadians can only see a tip of the iceberg; it is what lies below the surface that really concerns people. It can be likened to democracy. As the *Titanic* was once considered unsinkable, democracy is felt to be a Canadian tradition. Each of the bulkheads in the *Titanic* can be likened to each Canadian institution. We had the bulkhead of the Senate fill up with water a long time ago, as they did with freedom of the press and an independent judiciary, and then there was the bulkhead called the RCMP with the APEC scandal.

Adjournment Debate

●(1810)

The only bulkhead left standing to keep the ship afloat is the official opposition. Canadians deserve better and it is time to repair the good ship democracy before the government sinks our nation.

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say a few words in the debate.

Since coming to Parliament in 1997, I have endeavoured, as have all members, to raise issues on the floor of the House about my riding and my province, and to raise these issues in the media as well. We have made a little bit of progress, but there are a number of issues and a number of matters that I have to keep hammering away at in the hope that we might be able to make a little bit of progress on some of these issues.

The issue first and foremost in St. John's East, and indeed across the whole country, is health care. There was much ado about a recent meeting of the Prime Minister with the premiers, a meeting at which the new Prime Minister confirmed a \$2 billion additional payment to the provinces for health care.

I want to point out that the money is really no indication of a new fit of generosity on the part of the government. The \$2 billion in question is only a small part of the many billions of dollars cut out of health care transfers to the provinces over the last number of years.

I never cease to be amazed that health care is the primary concern of all Canadians but somehow Ottawa does not seem to get the message. Today I saw a news report out of Nova Scotia where a number of medical professionals were talking about the number of months one has to wait to see certain cancer doctors in the province of Nova Scotia. They were pointing out that it is about a 10 month waiting period.

These waiting periods are very much the same right across the country. The federal Liberals balanced the budget, but it came at a tremendous cost to the provinces. It is easy to fix the problem if all one does is pass the problem on to another level of government. This is what has been going on over the years.

Years ago Ottawa paid roughly about 50% of a province's total health care budget and today it is less than 20%. It is down to about 15% or 16%. That is one of the reasons that we have such a lineup for services and that is why it is impossible to recruit and retain nurses, doctors and other medical people in Canada. Health care in the country needs more money.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): It being 6:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Pursuant to order made on Thursday, February 12, the recorded division is deferred until Tuesday, February 17, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

●(1815)

[*English*]

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I wish to congratulate you in your new role.

I am making this intervention following a question that I put to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food on February 5. I asked if he would reject Monsanto's application to release genetically modified wheat in Canada, given the growing opposition by farmers and groups because of a potential loss of premium markets?

The minister's reply did not really answer my question on the economic impact of releasing genetically modified wheat. It seems to me that this matter needs to be pursued and that Monsanto's application should be rejected for the following reasons.

First, according to scientific studies, GM crops cross easily with non-genetically modified crops of the same species growing nearby.

In 2000, non-genetically modified rapeseed imported by Advanta into Europe from Canada was found to have been contaminated by genetically modified rape grown over four kilometres away. As a result, the organic growers of Saskatchewan can no longer export their supposedly genetically modified-free canola to Europe because it has been contaminated by genetically modified canola grown nearby.

Evidently, segregating GM free wheat from genetically modified wheat is not possible. Therefore, why do we want to tamper with a premium export? Cross-contamination is inevitable and, therefore, the European Union will likely ban the import of all Canadian wheat if genetically modified wheat is released in Canada.

Adjournment Debate

Second, the Canadian Wheat Board does not favour genetically modified wheat because it does not want to lose exports worth approximately \$4 billion. Apparently, 82% of Wheat Board customers do not want the genetically modified wheat.

Third, health and scientific authorities have identified possible health risks associated with the genetically modified food.

We are told these possible health risks might be exacerbated with the introduction of genetically modified wheat into the food supply, since wheat is so widely consumed globally, often in a minimally processed form. Therefore, as a minimum, all GM food should be labelled so that consumers can make a choice and avoid food produced with genetically modified ingredients if they so wish.

Perhaps the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food can tell us whether the decision to allow Monsanto's application will be reconsidered?

The prudent course of action would be to turn down the application, protect the economic well-being of Canadian farmers, take care of the long term interests of the Canadian Wheat Board, and ensure a healthy and viable ecosystem.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food (Agri-Food), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Davenport for bringing this concern to the House today. He not only brings concerns on food safety to the House, he also brings concerns on the environment, and we appreciate that.

All members will know, given our painful experience with BSE, it is important that we take a science based approach to these issues. Canada has established one of the most sophisticated and thorough models in the world for the stewardship of crops derived from biotechnology. Our stewardship model is guided by a simple principle: to ensure the safety, health and well-being of the Canadian public, our food supply and, of course, our environment.

The Government of Canada agrees that the introduction of new crops should be undertaken in a responsible manner that will satisfy the requirements of consumers and result in net benefits to farmers.

The Government of Canada has a rigorous science based regulatory approval process. It enables Canadians and our customers abroad to have confidence in the safety and quality of our Canadian products.

Some of our buyers are currently asking for certification that our shipments do not contain GM wheat. At present, if GM wheat were grown commercially in Canada, and given the nature of our grain production and our bulk handling system, we could not guarantee zero presence of GM wheat in non-GM grain shipments. If GM wheat were introduced today, our access to markets demanding non-GM products would likely be affected.

An application for an environmental and livestock food safety approval for GM wheat has been submitted to CFIA. A separate application was submitted to Health Canada for human consumption approval. These reviews are ongoing and thorough.

Our government has a co-ordinated regulatory approval process for general cultivation, livestock feed use and human food use of plants with traits such as GM crops. If GM wheat fails to meet the requirements in any one area, it will not be approved.

GM wheat must also be registered prior to commercialization, based on evaluation of agronomic, disease resistance and quality merits. Only once a product is approved and registered, can it be grown commercially. It is then up to the industry stakeholders to decide whether or not to commercialize a product and under what conditions. Indeed, there have been cases where a product is approved and registered and the industry stakeholders have weighed all considerations and decided not to introduce a product.

The government is also concerned about the potential impacts on innovative agricultural products. To that end we have opened up a dialogue with stakeholders on the need for an appropriate approach to manage the introduction of new agricultural products of innovation.

Our goal is to work with industry stakeholders to identify ways to work together to develop appropriate, commercialized strategies for approved products. Our government and the industry are working hard to have a common objective to ensure that any new product of innovation that is introduced in America brings benefit to Canadians and the agricultural sector as a whole.

As a farmer, I am well aware of the importance of consumer confidence in our food. I am also aware of the competitive nature of food production and the demands that our world has on feeding the hungry. We must work to strike a balance and try to accommodate all.

● (1820)

Hon. Charles Caccia: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for his comprehensive reply, but it is not exhaustive enough nor satisfactory enough, particularly his concluding remarks in which he seems to indicate that the policy his department is pursuing is one of balancing consumer confidence with the interests of stakeholders. I think that is a recipe for disaster.

The government has to give leadership and protect the consumer, therefore signal the industry as to what is acceptable and what is not.

In my opening intervention I indicated a number of reasons why the Monsanto application should be shelved, not only on environmental consideration, but on economic considerations, and they are considerable. Also the position taken by the Canadian Wheat Board and the reluctance on the part of western farmers in adopting this type of genetically modified wheat should be taken into account.

I would urge the parliamentary secretary to reconsider his reply.

Adjournment Debate

Hon. Mark Eyking: Madam Speaker, yes, we have to strike a balance. I think we can have both in this country. There are areas that could probably have non-GMO foods and probably areas that could not have them.

I will bring this up at the rural caucus tomorrow. We will discuss this issue further and determine if we are going in the right direction as a government.

●(1825)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:24 p.m.)

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

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