



CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, February 25, 2004

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 25, 2004

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[English]

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

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

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

SEE JANE RUN

Mrs. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I hosted a spectacular event in my riding of Kitchener Centre called See Jane Run.

See Jane Run is a venue that brings women together to help each other: women helping women sit on more boards, to feel empowered within our community, to succeed in corporate life and to become leaders in whatever their realm of interest is.

Women from all age groups have said that there is a need for these kinds of opportunities, to share their knowledge and experiences so that the next generation of Canadian women can continue to benefit and to create new opportunities, not only for women but for all Canadians.

One hundred and forty women participated in this year's event. They came to listen to a dynamic speaker, Marion Thomson Howell, and to learn from each other. We were left with one message at the end of the day. This must continue.

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• (1405)

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been 10 months since the borders were shut to Canadian beef and the government has not gotten the borders re-opened. Not only that, the government is expecting producers to rely on the CAIS program, of which details have not been finalized.

Realized net income is the worst it has been since statistics were kept in the 1920s.

The Liberal government has been responsible for the viability of the agriculture sector since 1993 and it has done a poor job. The agriculture minister claims to be in charge but has failed miserably at getting the borders re-opened. He has not even completed the necessary regulatory changes that need to be made before the borders are re-opened.

Canadian farm families are facing bankruptcy. It is time the government stands up and takes responsibility for helping our producers and their families through these terrible times.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Julian Reed (Halton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to commend the region of Halton, as well as Burlington, Oakville and Halton Hills on their clean air initiatives.

Halton started buying biodiesel in October 2003 and now it accounts for almost 40% of their total fuel purchases. Biodiesel helps reduce smog causing emissions and air toxins from being released into the air. They also have an anti-idling engine policy.

Burlington has programs in place to encourage the use of public transit and a public awareness campaign.

Oakville reduces emission emitting activities on smog days and has reduced pesticide use.

Halton Hills has a longstanding tree planting program.

I congratulate these local governments for clearing the air, literally.

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CKCO TELEVISION

Mr. Janko Perić (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 1, 1954, CKCO Television in Kitchener began broadcasting to residents of southern Ontario.

For half a century the station has provided the very best in entertainment and information programming. It produced shows like *Polka Time*, *Romper Room*, and *Bowling for Dollars*, while its current show *Good Morning Canada* is being aired on the CTV network.

S. O. 31

CKCO's journalists are exceptional and in the last five years, the station has received seven awards from the Radio-Television News Directors Association. CKCO Television has become an institution and its journalists a trusted source of information on local, national and international events.

My colleagues from southern Ontario and I join with the House in congratulating the entire team at CKCO Television for 50 years of top-notch, award-winning programming.

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JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT MONTH

Mr. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February is Junior Achievement Month in Canada and I would like to congratulate the organization for the tremendous work it does on behalf of youth in Atlantic Canada.

The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency has enjoyed a long and productive partnership with Junior Achievement. They both recognize the importance of exposing young people to entrepreneurship at a stage in their lives when they are making decisions about what to do and where to live.

In my riding, Junior Achievement provides programs to school children, and 20 teenagers from Bouctouche benefit from a company program offered at École Clément-Cormier.

[Translation]

The ACOA has undertaken a number of activities to raise young people's awareness of the benefits of entrepreneurship.

One of them, the Youth Ventures Program, resulted in 260 new summer businesses and 400 new jobs.

It is clear that the partnership between the ACOA and Junior Achievement has been very productive.

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•(1410)

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is a country blessed with great natural resources. The proper development of these resources could create an economy which could care for all of our needs.

If we maximized every bit of potential from our non-renewable resources and if we carefully managed our renewable resources, all our provinces would have stable economies. The problem is that we are not getting maximum benefits from resource development. We are not protecting or enhancing our agriculture, our fisheries, our forestry and our environment generally.

The lead here is in government hands. The example should be set by the federal government. Regrettably, in this regard, the Liberal government has been an abysmal failure.

ELIZABETH BEATON

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize a remarkable Cape Bretoner who touched many lives in her 85 years.

Elizabeth Beaton was born in New Waterford, Cape Breton in March 1918. At 15, she found her true calling in life, joined the Ursuline order and became Sister Bess Beaton. Though she would spend the next 70 years working in Edmonton as a dedicated teacher, she found time to occasionally return to her beloved Cape Breton.

In addition to teaching, she was also an avid athlete in her younger days. That interest in sports was recognized by the basketball team at Edmonton's Archbishop Jordan High School, which made her an honorary member, complete with her own team jersey.

Her death in January of this year has left the world and the many people she touched a little poorer, but when she was here she made our lives a lot richer.

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[Translation]

WORLD CUP OF DIVING

Ms. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last weekend, Quebec athletes performed brilliantly at the 49-nation FINA World Cup of Diving.

Two young men from Laval, Alexandre Despatie and Philippe Comtois, won the bronze medal for the synchronized 10-metre platform dive, thus qualifying for the Olympic Games in Athens this summer. It is especially exciting since synchronized diving will be included as an Olympic sport for the first time.

Alexandre Despatie also won a gold medal in the 3-metre springboard and a bronze medal in the 10-metre platform competition. He had already qualified for the Athens Games in these two events.

Along with the people of Laval and all of Quebec, I am very proud of the achievements of these two young men; personally, and on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I wish them the best of luck in Athens.

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[English]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Sarmite Bulte (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to commemorate International Women's Day, on March 8 I will be hosting my sixth annual breakfast in my riding to acknowledge the accomplishments of the women of Parkdale—High Park.

This year we will celebrate the successes of the following women: Jane Bunnnett, award winning musician; Heather Haldane, producer, Tapestry Pictures Inc.; Kathy Kennedy, business executive and community activist; Aurora Meliton, advocate for seniors; Dr. Barbara Sharratt, teacher, literary critic, political and social activist and journalist; and Pat Schnurr, artist and entrepreneur.

The theme for 2004 International Women's Day is "She's on a Role!" Many Canadian women, from athletes to social activists, have accomplished great things in their community, country and around the world. Some of these women receive little recognition for their efforts, yet provide shining examples for Canadians and Canadian youth by having followed their dreams no matter what barriers or opposition they may face.

International Women's Day is a special day to honour the variety and accomplishments made by women throughout all of our communities.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House sent Bill C-3 to committee before second reading because the Minister responsible for Democratic Reform led us to believe he wanted meaningful input on the legislation.

However, during my questioning of the minister at committee yesterday, he admitted that he had never bothered to contact any of the parties affected by the bill. Not only that, the minister also told us that nobody affected by the bill even knew that it had been introduced.

As if that was not bad enough, the minister used his Liberal members on the committee to block the appearance of any witnesses. Not even the Chief Electoral Officer, who must administer the bill, is allowed to attend.

We foolishly believed that the democratic reforms promised by the minister meant that things would be more democratic around this place. However, it is worse, much worse than it was under the previous minister. The new minister's reforms simply mean that now there is no democracy at all.

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[Translation]

EXPORT DEVELOPMENT CANADA

Mr. Gérard Binet (Frontenac—Mégantic, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday evening the Auditor General presented Export Development Canada with the Award for Excellence in Annual Reporting in the category of large crown corporations. This is the sixth time that EDC has received this award since its inception in 1994.

This award demonstrates EDC's dedication to the principles of transparency and accountability. It also recognizes the excellence of EDC as an organization that has succeeded in balancing a business-like approach with the implementation of major public policy projects.

We should also point out that, for the first time, the Canadian Commercial Corporation won the Award for Excellence in Annual Reporting in the category of small crown corporations.

The Minister for International Trade is privileged to be responsible for these two crown corporations that have won the Auditor General's award this year.

S. O. 31

● (1415)

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with every day that passes under a Liberal government, the situation facing women gets worse. We are losing, not gaining ground.

Let us look at the evidence.

Oxfam reported recently that half the women working in Canada earn less than \$20,000 a year. This is precarious work and it is on the rise.

Then the Prairie Women's Health Centre in Manitoba reported that almost half of Canadian households with core housing needs are headed by women. That means they live in desperate housing conditions and they are invisible to the government.

Now today the Canadian Institutes of Health Research confirms that wealth means health, that one-third of women-headed single parent families are poor and that without a national child care program, low income children face a lifetime health and learning disadvantage.

Where is the federal government in all this? It is AWOL, missing in action, obsessed with filling their corporate pals' pockets, with turning huge surpluses over to tax cuts and paying off bankers while more than 50% of the population falls further and further behind.

When will the government wake up and stand up for Canadian—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Verchères—Les-Patriotes.

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[Translation]

ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, I sent my constituents a householder denouncing the U.S. Army's plan to widen the St. Lawrence Seaway, a plan the Government of Canada obviously supports since a feasibility study is already underway.

In the riding of Verchères—Les-Patriotes alone, more than 800 people have already reacted by sending me a reply coupon expressing their strong opposition to this plan, which will have a catastrophic impact on Quebec's economy and environment.

Big ships—many more of which would be able to sail between the ocean and the Great Lakes—would stop unloading their cargoes in Quebec ports since they would be able to go directly to ports in the U.S. and Ontario. Moreover, this plan would increase shoreline erosion and wreak havoc on fragile ecosystems.

I am demanding that the federal government take a stand with the Bush administration and ensure that the plan to widen the St. Lawrence Seaway never sees the light of day, period.

Oral Questions

[English]

OIL INDUSTRY

Hon. Roger Gallaway (Sarnia—Lambton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many Canadians believe that our commercial oil industry was born in Alberta.

Next Saturday at the Oil Museum of Canada in the village of Oil Springs, the site of Canada's first commercial oil well, author Patricia McGee will launch her new book entitled, *The Story of Fairbank Oil*, a chronicle of the Ontario birth of Canadian and world production of crude oil.

The oil business was born in Lambton County in southwestern Ontario in the 1850s. The technology and manpower of that time were exported to a country then called Persia where Lambton County residents opened these oil fields.

Ms. McGee's book traces the story of the Fairbank family which for 124 consecutive years has sold Lambton County crude to Imperial Oil, a company also founded in Lambton County.

One hundred and thirty-nine years after its founding, the Van Tuyl and Fairbank hardware store in Petrolia is poised to become a national historic site, a fitting recognition of the importance of the Fairbank family in the world oil—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lethbridge.

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HEALTH

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Canadian Medical Association launched its national health access campaign, calling on governments to act now to ensure Canadians have timely access to quality health care.

CMA president, Dr. Sunil Patel, noted that one of the easiest ways for the federal government to relieve the pressure on an overstretched system would be to fully reimburse or zero-rate the GST now paid for health care services. Correcting this historic oversight was the reason I presented a private member's bill addressing this issue.

Zero-rating health care services will help hospitals and other health care institutions groaning under the weight of ever increasing capital costs. Currently, the GST paid by hospitals alone would fund the purchase of some 25 MRI machines. Zero-rating all health care services would result in an infusion of \$210 million per year, reducing waiting times for needed care.

The CMA points out that this is in keeping with the recent announcement regarding the GST and the new deal for cities. Now is the time for a new deal for health.

* * *

• (1420)

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today in honour of Black History Month.

This is a time to celebrate the many achievements and contributions of black Canadians who, throughout history, have done so much to make Canada the culturally diverse, compassionate, and prosperous nation we know today.

It is also an opportunity for the majority of Canadians to learn about the experiences of black Canadians in our society and the vital role this community has played throughout our shared history.

The Brampton library celebrates Black History Month with special displays at all four library branches. As well, local students will also take part in a variety of Black History Month activities. For instance, secondary students from across the region of Peel will gather at the Peel board's HJA Brown Education Centre today to take part in overcoming obstacles, a forum celebrating Black History Month.

I therefore invite all my colleagues in the House to join me in recognizing the black community's contributions to Canadian society.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Hon. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal sponsorship mess did not become a government program until December 2002, when Liberals were caught by the Auditor General. Before that time it was a secret Liberal slush fund.

Why was this fund used to benefit Liberal friends and ad companies?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's review that commenced in March 2002 was referred to her by the government to look into the program.

I would like to quote from a letter from the member of Parliament for Red Deer on December 12, 2001, to the minister at the time, Mr. Gagliano, asking for support for a program in his riding at that time. Six months before the member said there was no program, he wrote to the minister.

Hon. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister who makes this claim, let me quote the Privy Council Secretary who said this under oath. Kathy O'Hara said, "The sponsorship program actually wasn't a program until December 2002". That is her quote, the PCO Secretary.

How many cabinet ministers accessed this fund before December 2002?

Oral Questions

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that many MPs in the House, from all parties, have referred constituents to this program. Whether it was a formal program, whether it was an informal program, it was operating and representations were made to it by members of Parliament. We also know that many valid important festivals were funded through this program in many of our ridings.

The problem is in the middle, in the passage of the funds and the taking of commissions. It is not that any member of Parliament might make representations on the part of a constituent—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is the way the slush fund worked. No application was necessary. Only Liberal friends need to apply and no commission payable, it has already been skimmed.

Do members know what they tried to do? They put \$5,000 into my own riding. The difference is I did not get a kickback. Why did Liberals get kickbacks?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government, through the Prime Minister, in December of last year cancelled the sponsorship program. The first act of the former minister of public works in May 2000 was to cancel the program, put a moratorium on it, until the commission problem was fixed.

We have valid festivals often being funded. We have valid representations by members of Parliament from all parties. We had a problem in the middle and that is why we have a public inquiry.

• (1425)

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are not talking about the merit of those who received the money. We are talking about the process of how they got it. It was corrupted.

The government's line that this slush fund—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough has the floor. We have to be able to hear the question. How can the minister respond if he cannot hear the question?

Mr. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, my reference is the government decides who gets the money. The Liberals line that the slush fund was available to all Canadians is nonsense, as is the assertion that it followed a normal practice. When Jamie Kelley applied for his \$50,000 grant the program did not exist, according to government officials.

Would the Prime Minister then tell us how \$50,000 made it into the hands of a supporter of the Liberal Party from a program that did not exist and how—

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

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course there was a program. Whether it was registered in some way or described in some way,

there was a program. Many members of the opposition applied to the program, including the member for Red Deer.

Yesterday, we heard an accusation about the member from Victoria third-hand. We find in the newspapers this morning that in fact the person three steps back was only joking. The person two steps back was not sure what he heard. Then we get the newspaper and this is their accusation. Take it to the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, speaking of steps, here are the steps. Mr. Kelley visits the Minister of the Environment's office looking for a grant. His staffers tell him there is a secret slush fund available.

Mr. Kelley sends a letter to the public works department. Media IDA Vision then sends him two cheques for \$50,000. No checks or balances, just big, fat cheques.

Why did Media IDA Vision, a disgraced ad agency fingered in the Auditor General's report, inform Mr. Kelley about this grant and not the public works department? Membership has its privileges.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am quite surprised that the hon. member, having been a prosecutor in a former career, does not know the difference between evidence and hearsay, and in fact, hearsay three steps removed. He comes into the House and he puts forward as evidence in a condemning way information that is hearsay two times removed. Now let him come before a public inquiry, under oath, and give that evidence. That is great. That is where he should be.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to the *National Post*, cabinet documents show that, in June 2002, after the release of the Auditor General's damning report on Groupaction, when everyone knew about the sponsorship scandal, an unidentified minister continued to defend the firms that were friends of the Liberal Party.

Can the Prime Minister, who claims to be totally transparent, tell us which minister of the cabinet's communication committee persisted, despite all the abuse, in defending the firms that were friends of the Liberal Party?

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think that, at the time, the current Prime Minister was no longer a member of the cabinet.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I did not say that it was him. However, I would like to know who this minister was.

Oral Questions

The Prime Minister, who told us that, in May 2002, he noticed that this may possibly have been criminal behaviour, cannot now remain silent. He must—with all his talk about transparency—have the decency to tell us who, among the President of the Privy Council, the former minister of intergovernmental affairs and the other ministers on the cabinet's communication committee, continued to defend the firms that were friends of the Liberal Party. He can tell us, because these are cabinet documents.

Perhaps it was not him—

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

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is referring to cabinet documents that were tabled at the public accounts committee, I believe those are embargoed. I have not had access to them. In any event, I am not sure how we can answer that question without access to them and those of course have not been made public.

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister suspended the Business Development Bank of Canada's Michel Vennat for his role in the Auberge Grand-Mère affair.

Since the Prime Minister is asking Michel Vennat to take a week to reflect about how to explain his role in the Auberge Grand-Mère affair, why not also ask him to think about how to explain what happened to the \$4.8 million that disappeared from Option Canada in 1996, when he was chairman of the board?

We would be interested in knowing what happened to the money.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have made public our decision with regard to certain crown corporations. The decisions concerning Mr. Vennat are directly connected with the Quebec Superior Court ruling by Justice Denis, and have absolutely no connection with anything else.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as long as they are cleaning house, they should do it properly.

In 1996, Michel Vennat was the chairman of the board of Option Canada, the predecessor of the sponsorship program. Some \$4.8 million has totally disappeared. The Auditor General could find no trace of it. We are talking about \$4.8 million here.

Would it not be in the public interest to shed light on what these people did with \$4.8 million from the program that preceded the sponsorship program? This is the same Michel Vennat. Perhaps he could reflect long enough to provide us with some answers.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the Business Development Bank of Canada, there were two totally separate matters.

On the one hand, there is the Auditor General's report on the sponsorship program and, on the other hand, there is the ruling by Superior Court Justice Denis.

In the sponsorship matter, the Auditor General met with Mr. Ritchie, the chairman of the board, herself. The Auditor General's analyst met with all the board members. The Auditor General said she was satisfied with the answers she received from the BDC.

* * *

[*English*]

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAY

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

For a week now Canadian National Railway has been importing Americans to do the work of striking Canadian railroaders and yet the Prime Minister and his government have said nothing at all about this.

I want to know from the Prime Minister whether there is any connection between this silence and the fact that one of his cronies is working for CN. John Duffy sat on the Prime Minister's transition team, and on February 6 he started representing CN as a corporate lobbyist, a cozy revolving door for the Prime Minister's corporate cronies. Why is there nothing to prevent a crony from working for him one day and working for CN the next?

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour and Minister responsible for Homelessness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that under part I of the Canada Labour Code if employees feel that somebody is out there doing their work, they can bring their complaint to the Canada Industrial Relations Board.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, where is the Prime Minister when Americans are being imported to do the work of striking Canadian workers? I ask him again, is this silence related to the fact that one of his cronies, John Duffy, is now a registered lobbyist for CN? Is this the explanation for the silence and for the pathetic answer of the Minister of Labour?

I ask the Prime Minister to get on his feet and either defend Mr. Duffy or tell us he is going to do something about this revolving cronyism between the Liberal Party, the PMO and corporate Canada.

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour and Minister responsible for Homelessness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will stand up as Minister of Labour and defend the Canada Labour Code any time because it was done by the employees and the employers and this part of the House is very proud of that.

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SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Jamie Kelley, a friend of the Minister of the Environment from Victoria, said, "Political parties by their nature support and advocate their supporters and I don't think there is anything inherently wrong with that. That's just the way it is, and that's just the way life works".

Oral Questions

It is no wonder that this gentleman was of course courted to be a Liberal candidate with this kind of mentality.

I want to know philosophically from the Liberal government, do these Liberals and this Prime Minister really believe that it is the role of government to advocate specifically on behalf of their friends and to give them money ahead of other people? Is that the government's agenda?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member did not introduce the question, but I assume he is speaking about the fourth-hand information that was presented yesterday and that since has been either varied or denied in the interim by people in the press.

In any event, it is the appropriate role for any member of the House to make representations on behalf of constituents by referring them to an opportunity for funding of local events through the federal government. That is something that we all do, I am sure, and I am sure the member opposite has.

• (1435)

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is not appropriate is the whole point of this scandal. What is not appropriate is for somebody to come forward and say “give me money”, and the government then to give money to this person through a Liberal ad firm for the money then to be kicked back to the Liberal Party.

What is it about this system of money going through this circle and going back to the Liberal Party that this minister does not seem to understand?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this minister sees very clearly that there was a problem in the flow of money between legitimate representations by constituents and their MPs and the festivals or whatever other activity was being funded. There is a major problem in the flow of the money. That is why we have a public inquiry. That is why the public accounts committee is studying it. That is why we have a special counsel appointed to recover money wherever possible. That is why we have 18 RCMP investigations.

We are getting to the bottom of it: come and help us do it.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a tangled web we weave. It turns out that the current industry minister, the former president of the Treasury Board, in the year prior to the approval—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. We have to be able to hear the question from the hon. member for Calgary Southeast or the minister will not be able to give an answer.

Mr. Jason Kenney: I guess the slush fund junkies are in rehab, Mr. Speaker.

It turns out that the Minister of Industry, when she was the president of the Treasury Board, in the year prior to the formal approval of this program, received or was attributed as having received, according to the government, 28 sponsorship grants worth over \$3 million, grants that went through no formal process, that totally violated all of the Treasury Board guidelines.

I want to know, how did the Treasury Board president allow this to happen under her own nose?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote something the member for St. Albert said yesterday: “...people please respect the confidentiality of these documents until the meeting commences on Thursday morning”. He asked that of all members. The documents that are being referenced are ones that have leaked out of that committee. It undermines the respect of the process. On this side we will respect the request of the chair until such time as the documents are published.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is based on a document that he tabled. This minister does not know what he is talking about. The point is that the former president of the Treasury Board was in this right up to her neck, watching 28 grants get attributed to her to get political advantage.

I would like to know how many tax dollars were stolen by Liberal ad firms in commissions for the grants that were attributed to the former minister of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all the grants from this program are on the government website so that members opposite have the opportunity to see them, for their own ridings as well as others.

Political donations in this country are public. They are on the website.

The Liberal Party of Canada has offered to engage and is engaging an independent forensic auditor to look into the books of the Liberal Party of Canada and of Quebec.

This side is being perfectly open with what happened in this program and we have various processes to get to the bottom of it. Instead of carrying on with accusations in this House, why do we not talk about missile defence or—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve.

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[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Premier of Quebec said yesterday that the current health care system may not survive the decade because the federal government is not providing its share of the funding. We think the system will collapse in far less than 10 years.

Will the Prime Minister finally understand that the highest priority for all Quebecers is to have access to the best quality health care and that this is only possible if the federal government admits it has to provide its fair share of funding, and not a penny less?

Oral Questions

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Health, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course, the Canadian health care system is the number one priority for all Canadians. Obviously, this is reflected by our own government. Barely two months after becoming the Prime Minister of Canada, the latter held a federal-provincial meeting with the provincial premiers, where most of the discussion focussed on health.

We are committed to the values of the Canadian health care system. This is our priority. The finance ministers talked about it last week. We will be holding another federal-provincial conference on the health care system this summer.

• (1440)

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Premier of Quebec differed with the Prime Minister on three counts. First, he said that the surplus will be larger than anticipated; second, that there has already been a sharp drop in equalization payments; and finally, that the Speech from the Throne was heavy on intrusion. These statements echo those made by the premiers of the other provinces. The Premier of Quebec concluded by saying that no one knows where the federal government is headed with this.

Will the Prime Minister tell this House where he is going with the health care system?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Health, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in any event, one thing is certain: the Bloc is going down in the polls. It has lost nine points in one week. We do know where the Bloc is going.

As for health care, our government has made a very strong commitment to make it our priority. The next federal-provincial conference, which the Prime Minister has promised to hold this summer with the premiers, will follow a meeting of finance ministers and a meeting of health ministers on the matter. We are going to ensure the long-term sustainability of our health care system in Canada.

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EQUALIZATION

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, federal government spending estimates are reaching new heights and will increase by \$10 billion next year. Increases of 20% are forecast in the Privy Council Office, for example. Another hundred million dollars or so will go to the gun registry. As if that were not enough, these increases are on top of the expected 39% increase in operating expenses over five years.

How can the federal government explain to the public that it is as generous toward its own bureaucracy as it is stingy toward Quebecers?

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the main estimates that were tabled yesterday are the consolidation of the A-bases plus all new spending this year where none of the budgetary decisions are taken. They are simply the

reconciliation of current expenditures, reflecting changes in the structure of government.

It is true that this Prime Minister has adopted a very aggressive and activist policy. He has taken into his office some important initiatives—support the cities, support the aboriginals—and we are delivering on them. That is what this document tells us.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the federal government tells us, this year, the surplus will be between \$7 billion and \$8 billion. At the same time, the government is reducing its equalization payments and promising in the throne speech that it will encroach on all of Quebec's areas of jurisdiction.

Does the Prime Minister realize that, if no announcement is made in the health issue before March 31—and that is quite soon—the surplus will all go to repaying the debt, and there will be absolutely nothing for health?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have already made the commitment that the first \$2 billion from the surplus will indeed go to health care. We have the legislation before the House right now that will ensure that the provinces can take that money in the fiscal year in which they wish to receive it.

We have established a process agreed to by all first ministers to work on health care sustainability over this spring and summer leading to further conclusions later on this year. The process is already in place and should not be pre-empted.

* * *

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, based upon the information tabled by the current President of the Treasury Board, we know that the current industry minister received 28 grants totalling over \$3 million between 2001-02. The industry minister must stand up and defend herself on this fact.

Of the \$3 million given, how much of this total went to Liberal-friendly advertising firms?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has questions about the flow of money as well. That is the very reason we have set up a public inquiry. We are participating with the public accounts committee to look into these issues. We have hired a special counsel to go after financial recovery and we have made referrals to the RCMP.

I ask hon. members to join with us in this inquiry to get the answers to these very questions.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question was for the current industry minister. Does the current industry minister think it was acceptable for her to receive \$3 million between 2001-02? Does she even have any compunction about this whatsoever?

Oral Questions

She should be standing up and demanding accountability on 28 grants totalling over \$3 million in her riding in one and a half fiscal years. That is completely unacceptable.

How much of this money went to Liberal-friendly advertising firms?

• (1445)

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the whole government is standing up together and asking to get to the bottom of this by the inquiries and the other processes that we have established. We know there was a problem with this program. Funds were missing and that is what we are looking for. Please assist us in that task and then we will all be the wiser for it.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the front organizations change but the Liberal money laundering scam just goes on and on. In 2001 the environment minister's riding office basically doubled as a branch office for Media IDA Vision.

Why were the minister's political aides funnelling Jamie Kelley's request and laundering all kinds of cash through Media IDA Vision? Why were they doing that?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only information that any of us have to go on, that we know is the truth, is that, through the Minister of the Environment's constituency office, the festival organizer in his riding was directed to write to the minister of the program at the Ministry of Public Works and Government Services. That is what happened.

The money was received by the festival organizers. The festival was a great success. I will be tabling documents after question period to attest to the success of the program. However, the money flow in the middle is exactly what our inquiry is looking into. As I say, please join us in that inquiry.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously the ad scam morphed into the program scam, but the problem is that the money still washed through all kinds of Liberal ad agencies and it still took the secret Liberal handshake to open up the vault. The member for Red Deer received no money from this thing whereas the Minister of Industry received \$3 million. What a joke.

Why were the environment minister's political aides funnelling Jamie Kelley's request through a dirty Liberal ad agency? That is what we want to know.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we seem to be going over this ground over and over. We have processes to get to the bottom of this. Members of Parliament and their offices appropriately make representations on behalf of constituents allowing them to apply for programs. Many members of this House have done exactly the same. Many festivals are put on very successfully with the money.

The transition and flow of the money from public works to the festival is exactly what we are looking into. The members opposite and the public accounts committee, chaired by their member, are helping us do that.

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAY

Hon. Gilbert Normand (Bellechasse—Etchemins—Montmagny—L'Islet, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Labour. Nearly 5,000 Canadian National employees have been on strike since last Thursday.

What measures is the minister planning to take to send the employees back to work? Did she even consider using special legislation to send them back to work?

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour and Minister responsible for Homelessness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is not considering using back to work legislation. Federal mediators who have been working with the parties since last week have asked the parties to return to mediation, and they will do so later today.

I invite employees and management to come to the table and negotiate a new positive collective agreement.

* * *

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): As you are well aware, Mr. Speaker, having been forced to cancel your own visit to Halifax Metro, our constituents are digging out from 95 centimetres of snow. They barely had time to recover from hurricane Juan. It could cost \$5 million for Halifax to complete snow removal, yet the municipality may not qualify for federal funds because of the disaster relief assistance criteria.

Given the federal government's new-found commitment to support cities, will the government offer assistance to the Halifax Regional Municipality if it is needed?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to speak with my provincial counterparts in relation to this matter. We are all aware of the Herculean task that those in the Province of Nova Scotia face in relation to digging out from this latest snowstorm.

My officials are in discussions with provincial officials and it is possible that the DFAA could apply in these circumstances. Those discussions are ongoing.

Oral Questions

• (1450)

[Translation]

EQUALIZATION

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the federal government has cut equalization payments to the provinces, endangering the public services available to Canadians and ignoring the Romanow report recommendations. The provincial premiers say it is a tragedy to see the health system fall apart when the federal government is sitting on a multi-billion dollar surplus.

My question is for the Minister of Finance. Will the Liberal government stop giving with one hand, by transferring \$2 billion to the provinces, and taking with the other, by cutting equalization payments by \$2.2 billion?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are in the last year of a five year period for equalization. The new period begins on April 1. There is legislation before the House at the moment to extend the present arrangement. I am in discussions with provinces and others about the renewal formula.

When the renewal is in place, it will provide over the next five years something in the order of \$1.3 billion or more to the receiving provinces, on top of the basic entitlement.

* * *

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister said he was going to take the guillotine to the heads wearing the crowns. Instead, the government has suspended three crown corporation bosses without releasing the review done by the President of the Treasury Board.

When will the government release the evidence against and the defences made by these Liberal appointees?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member uses terms like evidence as though this is some sort of court of law prosecution. This was an examination of the actions of the various crowns based on the information that is already in the public domain and was given by the Auditor General.

We had further conversations with the principals of the Auditor General who reinforced the information we were given. I am quite willing to sit down with the member and point to the sections of the Auditor General's report that detail that.

I then presented my findings and beliefs about the confidence that the government could have in the 11 agencies. I was pleased to report confidence in 8 of them. I had some concerns with 3 of them and we acted on that.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that evidence should be made public in this place so that we can do our work here in Parliament.

For André Ouellet, the former cabinet colleague of the Prime Minister, his suspension amounts to a \$10,000 paid vacation. He is the highest paid bureaucrat in Canada, running Canada Post, a crown corporation responsible for the misdirecting of millions of dollars.

Yet, as a Liberal friend of the Prime Minister, Mr. Ouellet continues to collect a salary.

Why is André Ouellet the only one involved in this scandal who continues to collect his paycheque?

Hon. Stan Keyes (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Sport), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that question goes right to decisiveness and I think the Prime Minister and the government has been very decisive on the crown corporations.

It goes to a question of fairness. To that end, it also goes to the question of what Canadians feel and the encouragement they have for Canada Post.

Quite frankly, we must understand that on the Auditor General's suggestion, we acted quickly. I spoke with the chair of the board of the Canada Post Corporation. There is an independent audit being done. Concurrently, there is an audit being done on the internal management practices. We will have a report from those audits in 90 days.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Lester Pearson used to call the official opposition the detergents of democracy, which is pretty ironic given the Prime Minister's recent failed attempts to clean up his own mess. One cannot clean up a dirty wardrobe by hiding it in the closet and one certainly cannot clean up by sending a few suits out to the cleaners.

What is the Prime Minister hiding? Whitewashes and cover-ups do not change the fact that there is still dirt underneath.

Will the Prime Minister commit to letting the public know and see the defences filed by the heads of the crown corporations?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is an action that is comparable to a staff employee action. People who serve in positions of public trust are expected to meet certain values and certain actions. Those actions were evaluated based on information provided by the Auditor General that is public information.

We are dealing with our employees and we will deal with them in an appropriate and fair manner, but we will also deal with them in a manner that respects their privacy.

• (1455)

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister talks about transparency.

What is transparent is the Prime Minister's willingness to stay glued in his seat and play dodge ball with this issue, simply unwilling to take accountability for the real openness that should occur, and deferring to other people to answer these questions.

Oral Questions

Whatever happened to doctor democratic deficit? What ever happened to accountability? What ever happened to leadership? Why is the Prime Minister hiding? No one's best interests are served by secrecy here.

Will the Prime Minister commit to releasing the statements of the crown corporations offered in their defence?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the current Prime Minister was the finance minister and first put in that position in 1993, he had a very tough job to do. It was called getting the deficit down and balancing the books.

Now, as the Prime Minister, he has another very tough job to do. I guarantee the House that he will do it.

* * *

[Translation]

ROYAL CANADIAN MINT

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that a vice-president of the Royal Canadian Mint may have fraudulently claimed to be living in Ottawa to avoid paying taxes in Quebec. Today, we are finding out that senior officials at the Royal Canadian Mint made a lot of money, literally, since their maximum salary level has increased by 45%.

Does the Minister of Finance, who would have us believe that he is scraping the bottom of the barrel to balance his budget, find it normal that a bunch of friends of the Liberal Party can put that kind of money into their pockets, considering that, in 2002, the Royal Canadian Mint lost \$6.6 million?

[English]

Hon. Stan Keyes (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Sport), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a private matter between the individual in question and the Government of Quebec on provincial taxation. We are not prepared to comment on that at this time.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how can the Prime Minister agree to make cuts the way he did in health and at the same time condone the internal management practices at the Royal Canadian Mint, which not only lost \$6.6 million in 2002, but also found a way to increase the maximum salary level of its senior officials by 45%?

[English]

Hon. Stan Keyes (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Sport), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the salary of the president of the Canadian Mint is established by Treasury Board guidelines. The salaries of those individuals in the executive positions at the Mint are guided by the board of directors at the Canadian Mint.

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LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is another Liberal scandal in B.C. that has deep roots leading right to the Prime Minister's front door. The Prime Minister's chief B.C. organizer, David Basi, is under police investigation related to

allegations of money laundering and proceeds of crime. The Prime Minister does not deny his connections to David Basi.

How can anyone expect the Prime Minister to have any credibility to clean up the scandal surrounding him, when his own B.C. organizer is under police investigation?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again we see a continuation of the innuendo, the slurs, the guilt by association.

The Prime Minister's chief organizer in the province of British Columbia was not the gentleman questioned. We need to correct the record on that. In fact, as we have said over and over again, if members have specific information to table, evidence of the claims that they make, they should put it on the table.

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess the Prime Minister is taking the fifth amendment today.

The fact is that the police raided David Basi's home in connection with allegations of money laundering and proceeds of crime. The fact is David Basi sold thousands of Liberal memberships for the Prime Minister. The fact is that the Prime Minister's senior B.C. minister got caught doling out cash from sponsorship funds to Liberal friends.

How does the Prime Minister expect Canadians to believe that he is going to clean up the culture of corruption in his own government when these scandals are so closely linked to him?

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this question is not acceptable. It is not about government accountability. This question should not be accepted in the first place.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Eugène Bellemare (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask the President of the Treasury Board a two-pronged question regarding the public service.

First, when does the President of the Treasury Board intend to lift the freeze on the reclassification of positions and second, is the government planning a program review?

• (1500)

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must say the member for Ottawa—Orléans has been on both myself and the President of the Queen's Privy Council continuously on this question.

As far as the second part of the question goes, the government is undertaking an expenditure review. We are not recreating program review. However, on the question about the freeze on reclassifications, I am pleased to announce that effective today, the freeze has been lifted.

*Business of the House***SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM**

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is really not acceptable is stealing money from the taxpayers for the Liberal Party. This is really embarrassing to the people in British Columbia. The Minister of the Environment from Victoria—

The Speaker: That is the second time today there has been some mention of stealing. The hon. member knows that language like that in relation to members of the House is inappropriate and indeed out of order, and I would invite him to rephrase his question in a way that is acceptable.

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Speaker, how do I make that acceptable?

It is really getting embarrassing in British Columbia, quite frankly. The Minister of the Environment from Victoria doles out \$50,000 to one of his Liberal associates with no legitimate substantiation and the Prime Minister's main B.C. organizer in his leadership bid is under investigation.

Would the Prime Minister mind telling us why he failed to incorporate financial integrity among his B.C. ministers and their administration?

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment is a man of integrity and he is not supposed to be accused of any wrongdoing. Why do they talk about mud? Why are they not concerned about what is happening to municipalities? Why are they not concerned about health? Why are they not concerned about the environment, about medical help to Africa, about the protection of children, about the fight against terrorism, about the reform of democracy, about the problems of farmers? They like to be in mud, and we will leave them alone in the mud.

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us not try to divert the fact that the government has a problem with integrity in this country and how money got into the Liberal Party. That is what this country is concerned about.

What the government is using for an excuse is that all members of Parliament know about the sponsorship program and that is to justify the theft of money for the Liberal Party. I wonder if the Prime Minister knows the difference between knowing about a program and abusing a program. Does he know the difference?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maybe we can deal with this right now. I have repeatedly asked members of the opposition to put facts on the table or stop the slander. If the member has that accusation to make, he should do one of two things: put a fact on the table, or say it out there.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 3, I put before the House a motion to the effect that the government should modify the Employment Insurance program to establish specific status for seasonal workers, regardless of the EI economic region in which they live.

Does the government intend to improve the EI program by recognizing a specific status for seasonal workers, who suffer through a spring gap every year, by relaxing eligibility criteria and increasing the number of benefit weeks?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have already told the House several times that the government is reviewing the situation as it exists in the hon. member's riding and in all the provinces where there is a problem that needs to be looked into. A further consideration is that the regional and provincial authorities and private sector partners all have roles to play in solving this problem.

* * *

• (1505)

[English]

LANDMINES

Ms. Paddy Torsney (Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada led the way internationally to ban landmines. The Ottawa convention is binding international law and this year it celebrates its fifth anniversary. Next week Canadians will celebrate Canada Landmines Awareness Week beginning March 1, Canadian Landmines Awareness Day.

Could the Minister of Foreign Affairs please update the House on progress on the convention, and what we can all do to familiarize ourselves with it?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's question. I also appreciate the fact that she has been a leader in recognizing that the banning of landmines around the world is an extremely important measure that this country has undertaken for years.

Throughout the country during the week of March 1, we will be celebrating Canadian Landmines Awareness Week. I know that many church groups, many schools and others will be having dinners to raise money to help people in countries that are affected by this scourge.

As a government, we are committed to ridding the world of landmines. As a people, we are committed to helping other people who suffer under this scourge.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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

That the government reallocate its resources from wasteful and unnecessary programs such as the gun registry and the sponsorship program to address the agricultural crisis at the farm gate across Canada.

[Translation]

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

Copies of the motion are available at the table.

Privilege

[English]

PRIVILEGE

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on February 12, 2004 by the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby concerning misleading statements contained in the 1999-2000 “Report on Plans and Priorities” of the Department of Public Works and Government Services.

I would like to thank the hon. member for having raised this important matter, as well as the hon. member for St. John's West, the hon. deputy House leader of the government and the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader for their comments.

In drawing this issue to the attention of the House, the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby cited three paragraphs from the Auditor General's 2003 annual report in which the Auditor General states that Parliament was misinformed by the 1999-2000 “Report on Plans and Priorities” of the Department of Public Works and Government Services. The “Report on Plans and Priorities” was tabled on March 25, 1999 as recorded in the *Journals* of that date at page 1673. The hon. member quoted paragraph 3.100 of the Auditor General's report which reads:

Not only was Parliament not informed about the real objectives of the Sponsorship Program, it was misinformed about how the program was being managed. The parliamentary process was bypassed to transfer funds to Crown corporations. Funds appropriated by Parliament to PWGSC were used to fund the operations of Crown corporations and of the RCMP.

[Translation]

In their remarks, both the deputy government House leader and the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader pointed out that the Auditor General's report stands referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The public accounts committee is actively pursuing a study of the difficulties with the sponsorship program detailed in the Auditor General's report.

• (1510)

[English]

The Chair views this question as one of utmost importance. Evidence of its seriousness is clear in the language used by the Auditor General. She speaks of Parliament being “misinformed” and “bypassed” with respect to its fundamental duty to oversee and approve government expenditures. Any attempt to subvert or obstruct the House in fulfilling its constitutional obligation is one which all members must view as an attack not only on the House but on Canada's system of responsible government.

There has not been any suggestion that the findings of the Auditor General are inaccurate. I share the concern of all hon. members regarding the present situation as this House cannot carry out its responsibilities unless it is presented with accurate and complete information by the government.

At the same time, there has been nothing presented to the Chair that indicates the source of the misleading information. In raising this issue, the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby did not state that either the minister or the deputy minister

knew that the “Report on Plans and Priorities” was misleading when they signed their names to it.

[Translation]

It is not, of course, absolutely necessary that the minister be aware that a document is misleading in order for a contempt to occur. In describing the 1978 case cited by the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, where contempt was found to have taken place despite the lack of any intent on a minister's part, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, p. 87, states:

On December 6, 1978, in finding that a prima facie contempt of the House existed, Speaker Jerome ruled that a government official, by deliberately misleading a Minister, had impeded a Member in the performance of his duties and consequently obstructed the House itself.

[English]

In the case before us today, no evidence has been brought forth to show that, in preparing the report on plans and priorities, departmental officials deliberately intended to deceive their superiors and so obstruct hon. members in the performance of their duties.

I must conclude that the requirements for showing that a prima facie breach of privilege has occurred have not yet been met in the present case.

As I mentioned earlier, this matter is currently the subject of a study being carried out by the public accounts committee. The investigation of issues raised by the Auditor General in her reports forms a key part of the mandate of that committee as set out in Standing Order 108(3)(g).

A report from the public accounts committee may present the House with evidence that certain individuals provided information in a deliberate attempt to mislead the House. If that proves to be the case, it would certainly constitute grounds for the raising of a question of privilege at which point it would be possible for hon. members to deliberate in full possession of the committee's findings.

I remind the House that a determination that a breach of privilege is not prima facie at this time in no way interferes with the right of any hon. member to raise a new question of privilege following the tabling of a committee report or the disclosure of pertinent information from any other source.

While I recognize the importance of the issue raised by the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, I am not persuaded that a prima facie breach of privilege exists at present. As I have indicated, I remain fully open to considering the question should further evidence be brought to the attention of the House.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. During question period the Minister of Public Works and Government Services implied a number of things.

Routine Proceedings

He often lectures us about the truth and makes sure that statements in the House are factual. In his answer in reply to a question he implied, first, that I wrote a letter to Mr. Gagliano on behalf of my constituents. That could well be but I have been unable to find it in the last half hour or so. However when my constituents approach me and ask whether there are government ministers or departments that can help them with whatever project, of course we forward that on to the minister.

However the implication that the minister gave was that there was something sleazy or wrong about that.

Second, he implied that I used the term sponsorship slush fund in my request; that I thus knew about the slush fund, much as my colleague, the Minister of the Environment, might have known, and that I was trying to take advantage of that.

Third, he implied that I got money from the slush fund. When I checked the record just now I found that in that period of time my riding received absolutely nothing. I can only conclude that the reason for that is because I am not a Liberal and probably me sending letters to ministers is the wrong thing to do because that means I do not get the money.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking for an apology from the minister and, more important, that he table that letter so that the truth, which he always talks about, is available to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the House.

● (1515)

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to respond to the concern raised by the hon. member for Red Deer.

My answer to a question from the opposition was to deal with the issue of the appropriateness of members of Parliament making representations to government on behalf of a constituent. I was merely trying to suggest that the member for Red Deer had also written to, in this case, the minister of public works and government services at the time, Mr. Gagliano, on behalf of a constituent. That was on Dec. 12, 2001. I would be happy to table this or give a copy to my friend if he has lost it.

Please, Mr. Speaker, through you, I would remind the hon. member that I did not use the term slush fund in my answer. I have never used that term in the House. In fact, I consider it a completely inappropriate term to be used in the House for a program.

What there is and what is very clear is not improper representations. I was doing quite the contrary of criticism. I was endorsing the hon. member for his representation on behalf of his constituent to the minister of public works in the way that the constituency office of the Minister of the Environment had.

No more was being suggested than that, but certainly I am happy to provide the member with a copy of his letter.

The Speaker: I think we will consider the matter closed. I do not think even the hon. member for Red Deer, at the conclusion of his remarks, was suggesting that there was a privilege problem there.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of tabling, in both official languages, a copy of the letter to the acting executive director of the sponsorship program, dated February 19, 2001, from the constituent of the Minister of the Environment, which I referred to in answer to a question yesterday.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons I am pleased to table in Parliament, in both official languages, the government's response to the 20th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on chapter 6 of the April 2003 report of the Auditor General.

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ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under the provisions of Standing Order 32(2) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a copy of the 2003 annual report of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the November 2003 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

The report deals with the fact that the President of the Treasury Board appeared before the committee on Tuesday, February 17 and indicated that he would be introducing whistleblowing legislation no later than March 31, 2004, and, on a motion by the member for Winnipeg North Centre I believe, who asked that the committee request that this legislation be brought forth at the earliest opportunity, and that is the contents of the report.

* * *

● (1520)

PETITIONS

MARRIAGE

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to be able to present these petitions in the House dealing with the issue of marriage.

The residents of Canada, the majority of them from my riding, say that the disintegration of the family will bring upon our citizens, our communities and our nation the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets, that marriage is between a man and a woman and was designed that way by God from the beginning.

Therefore the petitioners call upon Parliament to use the time and resources necessary to ensure that the institution of marriage remains confined to the union of one man and one woman.

The second petition, which is very much along the same lines, consists of 476 names and calls upon Parliament to maintain the current definition of marriage in law and perpetuity and to prevent any court from overturning or amending that definition.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Janko Perić (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 it is my privilege to present to the House a petition signed by 110 concerned constituents of my riding of Cambridge.

The petitioners underscore that complete information on the health risks of abortions should be provided to women.

The petitioners also hold that physicians who perform abortions without the informed consent of the mother or perform abortions that are not medically necessary should face penalties.

Therefore the petitioners request that Parliament support legislation calling for a woman's right to know.

MARRIAGE

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to present.

The first petition has 326 signatures and they are from all across the country. It deals with the definition of marriage.

It states that whereas marriage, as the lasting union of a man and woman to the exclusion of others, cannot and should not be modified by a legislative act or a court of law, and whereas the recent rulings of the appeal courts of Ontario and B.C. redefining marriage to include same sex partners destroys traditional marriage in law and endangers Canada's social stability and future viability and health, we request that Parliament take whatever action is necessary to maintain the current definition of marriage in law and perpetuity and to prevent any court from overturning or amending that definition.

The second petition, with another 100 signatures, comes from out west to Ontario and into the maritime provinces. It contains the same statement with regard to marriage.

The third petition, with another 96 signatures, also calls upon Parliament to take whatever action is required to maintain the current definition of marriage in law and perpetuity and to prevent any court from overturning or amending that definition.

Mr. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present a petition signed by a number of members who adhere to St. Andrew's Humber Heights Presbyterian Church in my riding of Etobicoke North.

Routine Proceedings

The signatories ask that Parliament pass legislation to recognize the institution of marriage in federal law as being a lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition that calls on Parliament to maintain the current definition of marriage and to prevent any court from overturning that definition by using the amending formula.

Ms. Paddy Torsney (Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too am presenting petitions on behalf of some 135 Burlington and area residents who are asking Parliament to recognize the institution of marriage in federal law as being a lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

[Translation]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am tabling a petition signed by 330 people and dealing with the budget cuts imposed on CBC's radio station CBSI, in Sept-Îles.

The petitioners are asking Parliament to see that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation give back to North Shore residents the full service provided by CBSI before August 2003, and that the CBC allocate the necessary funds to produce and broadcast, on the radio waves and the Web, regional content, as is done everywhere else in Canada. I want to thank Louise Saint-Pierre, a constituent of mine, for giving me this petition.

● (1525)

[English]

LIBRARIES

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have several petitions signed by more than 5,000 individuals from my riding of Vancouver Island North. The petitioners are members of the Vancouver Island Regional Library which serves more than 400,000 people.

They are asking Parliament to ensure that the Department of Canadian Heritage and Canada Post renegotiate the library book rate with no increase and that it be expanded to include all materials loaned by public libraries.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present yet another petition on behalf of the thousand farm families and thousands upon thousands of Canadians directly affected by the BSE crisis.

The petitioners point out that the Canadian beef cattle, dairy, goat and sheep industries are in a state of crisis due to the bovine spongiform encephalopathy, BSE, problem. They point out that the aid packages to the industry are inadequate because they do not deal with the disastrously low prices experienced and the imminent collapse of key sectors of the rural economy.

These citizens urge that Parliament open the border as soon as possible, develop a long term solution and provide economic relief that is fair and reflects the importance of these industries in Canada.

Routine Proceedings

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a number of petitions to present this afternoon, starting with a couple of petitions signed by people in and around my riding calling on Parliament to protect the rights of Canadians to be free to share their religious beliefs without fear of prosecution.

AGE OF CONSENT

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition from people in and around my riding who are asking that Parliament protect our children by changing the age of consent laws to age 18 so that no adult can engage in sexual activity with a child under the age of 18 years of age.

MARRIAGE

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have six petitions signed by people in and around my riding, asking that marriage be protected as an institution between a man and a woman to the sole exclusion of all others.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have more petitions from people in and around my riding, calling upon Parliament to protect our children by taking all necessary steps to ensure that all materials which promote or glorify pedophilia or sado-masochistic activities involving children are outlawed.

CANADA POST

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, CPC): Finally, Mr. Speaker, I have one more petition regarding Canada Post and the rural route mail couriers, who asking that section 13(5) of the Canada Post Corporation Act be repealed to allow them a decent living.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by members of my constituency. The petitioners call upon Parliament to immediately hold a renewed debate on the definition of marriage and to take all necessary steps to preserve marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by 600 members of my constituency and several adjoining constituencies, calling upon the government to repeal the long gun firearms registry. This brings to over 12,000 the number of signatures on petitions that I have given on this subject, making it the largest subject that I have ever given petitions on.

● (1530)

HEALTH

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is on the subject of natural health products. The petitioners call upon the government to allow for greater access to natural health products and to restore freedom of choice in personal health care.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third petition, which is also signed by close to 1,000 people, in addition to many others who have signed earlier petitions on this

subject, calls upon the government to take prompt action with regard to the BSE crisis in Canada. The petitioners point out that Canadian beef is unrivalled in quality in the world and is completely safe and ask the government to provide adequate funding for public education on this subject to ensure that consumer demand for Canadian beef is maintained.

They also call upon the Minister of International Trade to renegotiate our international trade treaties to ensure that the shutting down of the border and the maintaining of shut borders for safe product cannot happen again in the future. Finally, they also call upon the federal government to ensure that relief funding is provided for agricultural producers affected by the crisis.

* * *

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.

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. On September 24, 2003, I put forward a question, No. 257 on the Order Paper, regarding halibut and sablefish aquaculture. Parliament prorogued and the question slid off the table. I asked the same question on February 2, 2004. It is now Question No. 13.

Through access to information, I got a number of documents. One of those documents, a December 4, 2004 memo from the Director of Policy, Office of Sustainable Aquaculture, stated that the response to my first question was completed and left their office three weeks ago. In a December 5, 2003 memo, Paul Lyon, Policy Analyst, Office of Sustainable Aquaculture, stated:

I understand the response to Mr. Cummins' Question 257 was completed and would like a copy. While I recognize the House has prorogued, and the response is no longer required the information could still be used to respond to future inquiries on the subject.

He further stated:

I suspect [Mr.] Cummins will raise it again. Having it ready to advance for final approvals might not be a bad idea.

It was six months ago that I asked the question. If we have open and transparent government, as the Prime Minister has suggested, I am wondering why that question I asked so long ago has not been answered.

Hon. Roger Gallaway: Mr. Speaker, the member has already acknowledged that questions would have died with prorogation. If he has filed another question, he knows there are 45 days to respond from this side. If indeed he is correct in terms of his discussion with someone, somewhere, then it will indeed come within the 45 day period and it will not be a problem.

The Speaker: Shall the remaining questions stand?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-18, an act respecting equalization and authorizing the Minister of Finance to make certain payments related to health, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

Hon. Denis Paradis (for the Minister of Finance) moved that the bill, be concurred in at report stage and read the second time.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed

Some hon. members: No

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay

The Speaker: In my opinion, the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the division be deferred until 5:15 p.m. today.

The Speaker: At the request of the Liberal Party whip, the division is deferred until 5:15 p.m. today.

* * *

• (1535)

CUSTOMS TARIFF

Bill C-21. On the Order: Government Orders

February 24, 2004—The Minister of Finance—Second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Finance of Bill C-21, an act to amend the Customs Tariff.

Hon. Denis Paradis (for the Minister of Finance) moved:

Government Orders

That Bill C-21, an act to amend the Customs Tariff, be referred forthwith to the Standing Committee on Finance.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak today about Bill C-21, an act to amend the Customs Tariff. I also welcome the opportunity to support the motion that this legislation be referred to committee.

Briefly, this bill provides for the continuation of a longstanding policy of providing preferential tariff treatment to developing and least developed countries.

The two tariff programs in question—the General Preferential Tariff (GPT) and the Least Developed Country Tariff (LDCT)—are implemented through the Customs Tariff Act and are set to expire on June 30, 2004.

This bill proposes that the programs be extended for another 10 years, from July 1, 2004, to June 30, 2014, as per past practice.

Before discussing the bill, I first want to provide some background, which will help to put these measures in context.

[*English*]

During the mid-1960s there was a growing recognition that preferential trade treatment for developing countries was a means of fostering growth and the well-being of poorer nations.

Following a recommendation by a United Nations conference on trade and development, developed countries implemented unilateral tariff preferences for goods originating from developing countries in order to help them increase their export earnings and stimulate their economic growth.

Canada's general preferential tariffs program, the GPT, was implemented on July 1, 1974, for a 10 year period and has been renewed twice since then, in 1984 and 1994. As indicated, it is now set to expire on June 30, 2004.

Under the GPT, more than 180 countries and territories are entitled to zero or low tariffs on a range of products that are covered under the customs tariff, with the exception of some agricultural products, refined sugar and most textiles, apparel and footwear.

In 2003, Canadian imports under the GPT were valued at \$9.3 billion and accounted for 2.8% of total Canadian imports.

[*Translation*]

In 1983, Canada introduced the Least Developed Country Tariff—or LDCT—in an effort to provide even more generous preferential tariff treatment to goods from the world's poorest countries, as designated by the United Nations based on a number of criteria such as national income, health and education. This program also expires on June 30, 2004, as I stated before.

Since January 2003, the government, acting on a commitment made at the 2002 G-8 Summit in Kananaskis, provides complete duty-free access under this program to all imports from 48 least developed countries, except for certain agricultural goods such as dairy, poultry and eggs.

In 2003, Canadian imports under the LDCT were valued at \$408 million, accounting for 0.12% of total Canadian imports.

Government Orders

I have provided some background to these two programs. Now, I would like to explain why they should be extended.

To begin, extending the GPT and LDCT for another 10 years reaffirms the government's commitment to promoting the export capability and economic growth of developing and least developed countries—the main reason these programs were initially established.

It also provides a predictable business environment to traders using these programs, both in the developing world and here in Canada. As well, an extension would be consistent with the practice of other developed countries, such as the United States, members of the European Union and Japan, who also continue to have similar programs.

Further, continuing these two longstanding unilateral preferential tariff programs sends a positive message to beneficiary countries who see such programs as an important factor in encouraging their development.

[*English*]

The decision on whether to extend the GPT and the LDCT affects a number of stakeholders.

First, it affects the exporters in developing and least developed countries that benefit from the preferential access provided by the two programs. The premise that originally led to the establishment of preferential tariff programs—that they would encourage and increase exports from developing and least developed countries and hence stimulate economic growth—still holds today.

Various studies by international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank support the principle that export expansion contributes to economic growth.

While these programs clearly benefit developing and least developed countries, Canadians also benefit from them. As a result of lower tariffs on goods from the developing world, Canadian consumers enjoy access to imported goods at competitive prices and will continue to do so if these programs are extended.

In addition, Canadian producers will continue to benefit from the reduced tariffs on inputs they import from the developing world and use in production of goods in Canada, which ultimately increases the competitiveness of Canadian industry.

If these programs were not extended, the increased duty costs incurred by Canadian importers and consumers would be approximately \$272.8 million. Not continuing these programs would also raise questions about Canada's commitments to international development.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

As noted earlier, all other major industrialized countries provide preferential access for developing and least developed countries, and some, such as the United States, Japan and the European Union, have extended similar programs in recent years. As such, not extending the GPT and LDCT would isolate Canada internationally.

Continuing these programs would also be consistent with our commitments to assist developing and least developed countries. These commitments have been reiterated on many occasions in fora such as the G-8, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. Clearly, letting these programs expire could negatively affect Canada's image internationally.

The reasons that justified the introduction of the GPT and the LDCT decades ago still remain.

The economies of many developing countries have still to make great strides if their citizens are to attain acceptable income levels. This bill constitutes one substantive measure Canada can take to continue to assist the developing world in achieving this goal, and continues Canada's tradition of assisting the developing world.

In considering this bill, I encourage hon. members to keep in mind that Canada stands with all other major industrialized nations—the United States, Japan and the European Union—in supporting the developing world through such programs.

Before closing, let me review the advantages of extending the GPT and LDCT for an additional 10 years.

First, Canada would continue a longstanding international practice of providing preferential tariff treatment to goods from the world's poorer nations.

Second, continuing the programs for a fixed period of 10 years will provide certainty and predictability to traders using them in Canada and in the developing and least developed countries.

Third, continuing the programs complements Canada's foreign aid policies.

Finally, while these programs were mostly conceived as an economic assistance measure for developing and least developed countries, they also benefit Canadians by providing them with goods that are subject to lower rates of duty.

[*English*]

A 10 year extension of these programs is consistent with past practice, provides a predictable business environment to traders and reaffirms the government's long term commitment to international development.

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, the government is aware of the situation in the clothing and textile industry and is currently looking at additional measures to support the industry.

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to Bill C-21, an act to amend the customs tariff.

The minister of state articulated the need to extend this program, which has been in existence for some time and will come to an end on June 30, 2004. He gave his Liberal spin on it, indicating that it would help everybody in the Third World developing countries. He said that we should continue with it.

We in the Conservative Party agree with the minister and will support the bill because of another aspect. If we do not support the bill, then there could be the possibility of no tariffs and this would result in our markets being flooded by uncontrolled goods coming into the country, which would impact Canadian jobs.

We need a regime of controlled access, giving preferential treatment to developing countries and the least developed countries as well as ensuring that our markets open up slowly to foreign goods, while at the same time taking advantage of it.

We are more in line with having what we call free trade agreements. In light of the fact that the WTO talks in Cancun collapsed, it becomes more important for the world trading regime to consider what to do about tariffs. That is critically important because, in globalization, all studies have indicated that a reduction of tariffs in foreign trade is beneficial to everybody, including Canada.

I will be splitting my time, Madam Speaker, with my colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona.

It is important to understand that a country like Canada, which is based on exports and has a GDP of 48%, now close to 45%, has a regime that regulates international trade. We would like to see this being done under the guise of free trade agreements or special agreements with other countries that would benefit our exporters, benefit other consumers and benefit other countries as well as, with lower tariffs thereby giving an advantage to everyone.

As things stand right now, due to the collapse of the WTO talks in Cancun, we do not know where the world trading regime will go. For that reason, we will support this bill because we need a regime that will control the flow of goods until we know the outcome of the WTO talks, should they carry on and what agreements will come into play.

We are talking about two tariffs, the GPT, or the general preferential tariff, and the least developed country tariff.

I think I have articulated the reasons why we will support the bill. In short, until the outcome of the WTO talks and other tariff regimes on controlling the flow of goods come into play, will support the bill.

• (1545)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): The hon. member indicated two or three minutes into his speech that he wanted to split his time with the member for Edmonton—Strathcona, but in a 10 minute speech splitting is not allowed. The member can continue on for the remainder of the time, unless he gets unanimous consent, and he can certainly ask for that if he wishes.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Madam Speaker, I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to split my time with the member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Is there unanimous consent for the member to split his time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Madam Speaker, there has been some confusion and we will not be splitting our time now. He will get his own spot.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): The member for Verchères—Les-Patriotes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, unless I am mistaken, you asked for the unanimous consent of the House to allow the hon. member to split his time and you obtained that consent. How is it that a decision of the House is being reconsidered? I seem to be missing something here. I would appreciate it if you could clarify this, for my benefit and the benefit of all the members of this House. I thought we had agreed to allow the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona to continue for the time remaining.

• (1550)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): The House did give unanimous consent and then the member withdrew his request to split the time.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Madam Speaker, I would like to now dwell on the point of preferential tariff and the least developed country tariff. We know that in order for developing countries to get out of poverty, it is more important that they engage in fair trade practices where they have access to the markets of developed countries.

I grew up in Tanzania, a country that is classified as a least developed country. We see the poverty over there on our televisions. We see Canadians helping building wells, hospitals and classrooms.

The pictures that we do not see are the people, like my family and other families who used to live over there, engaging in businesses. We never see the developed side of those countries. Now there is a huge element of development in these countries where businesses thrive and succeed.

To help them become an engine of economic growth, they need a market. For a long time the western world market was closed. It used to be one-way trade when I was there. Everything went from here to there, but nothing came from there to Canada. As a matter of fact those countries were just supplying raw products to developed countries. However, that does not create prosperity. Prosperity is when they have products growing over there, when they manufacture and make products in their own country and then they sell them.

Coming out with the general preferential tariff and the least developed country tariffs, where there is almost zero tariffs, gives this country the opportunity to access those markets, where it can help those countries. Of course, the problem now is we have to look at how we can help these countries with investment flows so they can take advantage of these tariffs. If there is no investment flowing to those countries and if they do not have an industrial base, what is the point of having preferential tariffs, if they cannot export anything to other countries?

Government Orders

I know the Prime Minister was appointed by the United Nations to look at private investment flow. As a matter of fact, I wrote to him, not in his capacity of the Prime Minister, but his capacity as a member of the United Nations panel looking into private investment flow. I gave him my input on what I thought should have been part of his report on how we could assist in sending private investment to these countries so eventually they could enjoy economic growth.

It has become quite evident and all studies suggest that because of globalization almost 200 million people have been lifted out of poverty, both in China and India. There is concrete proof out there, contrary to what my friends in the NDP would say, that globalization has not worked.

In conclusion, we are supporting the bill. Although the bill is for 10 years, there are other venues that we have to look at to ensure that we reach the objective of tariff reduction, which is to help the least developed countries and developing countries.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am informing you from the outset that I have no intention of splitting my time with anyone. I should normally use all the time that is allocated to me.

First, I want to say that the Bloc Québécois will support this legislation. Bill C-21 seeks to extend, to June 30, 2014, those sections of the Customs Tariff that allow Canada to provide preferential tariff to imports from countries that are members of the World Trade Organization, and to imports from the least developed countries.

The Bloc Québécois will support this legislation because we simply cannot disagree with it. To oppose it would be tantamount to renegeing on our international commitments, including with the World Trade Organization. This would also be tantamount to renegeing on our international commitments in the area of development assistance, particularly those made by Canada in Kananaskis regarding Africa. I will get back to this later on.

A few moments ago, my hon. colleague from the Canadian Alliance referred to the impacts of globalization. Heaven knows, globalization has many impacts, both positive and negative. As I said yesterday, in another speech, it is not about being for or against globalization. It is about benefiting from it while simultaneously trying to limit the negative impacts of the totally unavoidable phenomenon of globalization to which we must adapt.

As I also mentioned yesterday, the leader of the Bloc Québécois has repeatedly said that asking if we are for or against globalization is a bit like asking, each and every day of our lives, if we want the earth to stop turning. We must deal with this phenomenon and try to benefit from it as much as possible and to limit its negative impacts.

There are benefits to globalization, of course, both for industrialized countries like our own and for developing countries that want to use globalization as a stepping stone to gain access to the international trade network. The bill before the House will give developing countries, those less developed, easier access to the international trading network.

However, there are also negative impacts. Earlier, I heard the Secretary of State for Financial Institutions say, at the end of his speech, that he will soon be announcing adjustment or assistance measures for the soft sectors of the Canadian economy that are hard hit by globalization, like the textile, footwear and apparel industries. Good. However, I happen to remember that, when we talked about the advisability for Canada to sign NAFTA, those who were against argued that it would have a negative impact on a number of manufacturing sectors in Canada and in Quebec.

They asked, demanded and begged the government for adjustment measures, not only for the workers in such industries, but also for the industries themselves. In fact, globalization does not necessarily mean that we must write off all manufacturing operations in industrialized countries. Globalization simply means that we must change, reorient and modernize our sectors and our economic niches.

When we talk about manufacturing industries, we must remember that we benefit from a certain number of advantages, such as the presence of significant capital and of technology that can be used to manufacture high value added products.

• (1555)

Instead of producing clothes just to be producing clothes, we have the technology and the capital that we could use, for example, to produce clothing and textiles in the health or food sectors, where we could carve out niches that would be unique to Canada.

Coming back to the speech by our colleague, the Minister of State for Financial Institutions, who said, nearly two decades later, that measures are needed to support the manufacturing industry in the textile and clothing sector, we would have expected the government to have taken action well before now.

The negative impacts are already being felt in our ridings and our communities. Very recently, a business in my riding, Genfoot Lafayette, which has been operating in Contrecoeur for over 100 years and makes the famous Kamik boots, announced that it will be closing its doors at the end of this week to move its operations—at least the production that was done in Contrecoeur—to the People's Republic of China.

What did this government do? Absolutely nothing. In the meantime, businesses are closing and workers in our communities are losing their jobs. At Genfoot Lafayette, we are talking about nearly 200 workers, many of whom are women over 50 who will have great difficulty finding another job. These workers are losing their jobs, and the government has no programs in place to assist them.

Government Orders

This government withdrew from the program for older worker adjustment, thereby adding to their plight. I hope that the Minister of Human Resources Development will agree, at the request of the Quebec minister responsible for employment and social solidarity, to renew the pilot project, which is helping—although not to any great degree, but helping nonetheless—place older workers in new jobs. There is still no news from the government in this regard.

Given the almost total lack of measures to help workers in soft sectors such as textile, apparel and footwear manufacturing, for example, the government must, at the very least, commit to rapidly renewing POWA to help the older workers at Contrecoeur who will lose their jobs by the end of this week.

It goes on. A company in Drummondville has closed its doors. It was not a Mickey Mouse operation. We are talking about a company that makes designer jeans closing its doors. Several hundred employees in Drummondville are going to lose their jobs.

What does this government do? It tells us that it will eventually come up with assistance measures for the textile, apparel and footwear industries. They should have thought about that in 1988, 1989 and 1990. It is now 2004, and the government is saying it still needs to think about it. In the meantime, jobs are being lost.

Of course, there are negative impacts from globalization, but there are, as I mentioned earlier, positive ones as well. We have to be consistent in honouring our international commitments with members of the World Trade Organization, and also in our relationship with a number of least developed countries and the 49 least developed countries on the UN list, including 34 African countries. We all know about Canada's commitment to African countries. We must therefore support this legislation.

I have statistics that were quoted in 1994 by my colleague Philippe Paré, who was the member for Louis-Hébert at the time. I must say this is a step back in time for me because, in 1994, I spoke to the bill for renewing preferential tariffs until the end of June 2004. My point is that the amount of money developing countries are losing because of protectionism in industrialized countries is much greater than any development aid.

This is an important and positive measure for developing countries. We have to vote in favour of this legislation.

● (1600)

[*English*]

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Madam Speaker, I believe that if you seek it you would find unanimous consent that the motion standing on the Order Paper for the Conservative opposition day tomorrow, February 26, 2004, be replaced with the following:

That the government reallocate its resources from wasteful and unnecessary programs such as the sponsorship program, or badly managed programs such as the gun registry, to address the agricultural crisis at the farm gate across Canada.

● (1605)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Does the member for Edmonton—Strathcona have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, let the record show that it was a Liberal who said no to that suggested amendment by the official opposition.

I am not here to speak to that at the moment. I am here to speak to Bill C-21, an act to amend the Customs Tariff. As has already been said by previous speakers, this bill would extend the general preferential tariff and the least developed country tariff for another 10 years as they were both due to expire in June 2004.

These regulations would allow for products imported from a list of 48 least developed countries and from other countries which have preferred trading partner status to be brought into Canada without having to pay customs duties.

Originally the list of products that could be imported from least developed countries was relatively limited, but as a result of the least developed countries initiative announced by the Canadian government after the 2002 G-8 meetings in Kananaskis, the list of eligible products includes everything other than certain agricultural products.

While it might be laudable to open the Canadian market to products from developing countries, the problem with this legislation—and we do not oppose it, but we do want to point out this problem—is that it reinforces the system that currently exists in which North American retailers can get cheaper products, especially apparel from developing countries. These are countries without labour codes, minimum wage or environmental standards.

Though it is important that developing countries be able to export goods to Canada, the Canadian government must take a much more active role than it ever has in ensuring that these products are produced in unionized and fair workplaces, a concern that is not reflected in the least developed country tariff.

We all agree that our markets should be more open to least developed countries because we know that to some degree this is key to economic growth for them. Although I must say that I think the model by which countries are expected to grow and develop their economies by an overemphasis on export markets can also be destructive, where stable and sustainable local economies have often been destroyed in the name of creating export markets. This has often had a terrible effect on the environment and on the sustainable way of life of peoples in these various countries.

We should not take for granted that the only way to development in the least developed countries is through this overemphasis on export markets. To the extent that export markets play a role in the development of the least developing countries, developed countries have a responsibility to open their markets. However, do we have a responsibility to open our markets for the products that then flow from these least developed countries without regard for how they are produced?

Routine Proceedings

If the products flowing into our country, as a result of the reduction in tariffs, are products that are produced in sweatshops or are produced in workplaces that not only are not unionized but cannot be unionized because of no recognition or poor labour standards in particular countries, is this what we call a fair trading regime? Not at all. This is at the root of many of the objections to the current model of globalization, which everybody has been singing the praises of for the last 20 years.

We are not suggesting that any particular least developed country should adopt the same labour standards which we enjoy here in Canada. Sometimes I wonder whether we enjoy them any more, when we see that the CNR is able to import American scabs with impunity into the current rail strike. But let us believe our own mythology for a minute and say that Canada has good labour standards.

We have been persistently—in all the forums in which I have spoken as NDP trade critic and many other New Democrats and social democrats around the world have spoken—asked that core labour standards be recognized and enforced.

● (1610)

What are core labour standards? Core labour standards are basically the right to form a trade union, the right to organize collectively, the right not to be a victim of slave labour. These are very basic rights. If even these rights were recognized and enforced around the world, we would move closer to what everyone says they want, which is a level playing field, but it is not a level playing field.

It may be a level playing field for the corporations in some way or another, but it is not a level playing field for Canadian workers. It is not a level playing field when they have to compete with workers in other countries who do not even have core labour standards, who cannot organize, who cannot defend themselves without ending up in the river or the victim of some death squad or losing their job, or whatever the various levels of punishment are depending on the country. That is not a level playing field.

This is the big lie that is at the root of the current globalization model, that somehow we are all moving toward this great level playing field where the competitive will thrive and those who are not competitive will fall by the wayside. There is nothing competitive in the best sense of the word competitive about exploitation.

What we now have is a global economic system that rewards countries on the basis of how much they persecute their workers. I do not call that competition. I do not think exploitation of workers should be a comparative advantage, to use a traditional economic theoretical term. I do not think exploitation is a comparative advantage or should be regarded as one in the global trading system.

That is why in the House back in 1994 when the legislation was brought in to implement the World Trade Organization, I moved amendments to the implementing legislation for the World Trade Organization that called on the government to prohibit imports from countries that were engaged in child labour.

Another element of what it means to have core labour standards is no child labour. Is this some kind of radical socialist idea, no child labour?

What we are saying is that when it comes to the global trading system, there should be the same zeal for enforcing a level playing field as there is when it comes to investors' rights. Right now we have this perverse moral hierarchy whereby for investors or a transnational corporation, their property rights and their investor rights have to be protected because that is a sacred thing.

However, a working person's job can disappear overnight if the owner can find a group of people to make it cheaper under more exploitive conditions somewhere else in the world. That is what is happening to manufacturing jobs here in Canada, in the United States and now even in Mexico because this capital keeps seeking the lowest common denominator. Therefore jobs disappear out of Canada into the United States, from the United States into Mexico, and now they are being lost out of Mexico to China, where we have the worst of all possible worlds.

In China we have the worst of capitalism and the worst of communism; a single party state running a capitalist economy. Yet our government is so far up the rear end of the Chinese market that we cannot even find it. It will not say anything critical of China because that might damage our opportunities for penetrating the Chinese market.

I was on one of the trips to China. It was disgusting to watch how uncritical the Canadian corporate elite and the Canadian government were when it came to China. Talk about the wilful blindness that the government has with respect to the sponsorship scandal. It pales in comparison to the wilful blindness that the whole world has right now about China.

What if everything could be made in China? What would the rest of us do?

These are just some of the concerns that we bring to this kind of legislation. We understand the intent but in the absence of recognition and enforcement of core labour standards, this kind of legislation is going nowhere. It is a recipe for exploitation and it is not going to solve the world's economic problems.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1615)

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Ms. Diane St-Jacques (Shefford, Lib.): Madam Speaker, discussions have taken place among all parties and you will find that there is unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, concerning the membership and associate membership of committees, be deemed tabled and concurred in.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Seeing that it is getting late in the day, I think there is even more spirit of cooperation and I believe that you would find there is unanimous consent for the following:

That the motion standing on the Order Paper for the Conservative opposition day tomorrow, February 26, 2004, be replaced with the following:

That the government reallocate its resources from wasteful and unnecessary programs such as the sponsorship program, or badly managed programs, such as the gun registry, to address the agricultural crisis at the farm gate across Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Is that agreed to?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CUSTOMS TARIFF

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Madam Speaker, I too want to address Bill C-21, an act to amend the customs tariff.

I want to chat about some of the things specifically to do with where we in the Conservative Party are coming from and maybe take the opportunity to respond to some of the concerns of my colleague from the New Democratic Party. He spoke quite eloquently about the concerns Canada should have in trading with developing countries and some of the concerns we may have with labour standards and those sorts of issues with which I think all Canadians are definitely concerned.

Bill C-21 amends two sections of the customs tariff, just so people are clear on what exactly the bill is doing. Specifically, the general preferential tariff and the least developed country tariff are being proposed to be extended for another 10 years until June 30, 2014. Currently the legislation expires on June 30, 2004.

Some colleagues on all sides of the House have said that one of the challenges if this does expire without being checked is that Canada could be flooded with goods from all around the world. This could really put our own companies and industries at a huge disadvantage, especially when we look at some of the tariffs that are in place outside.

In some areas we have seen the process and the way the legislation works. Orders in council for certain countries can reduce that overall tariff. There are three different sections of countries that Canada recognizes. There is the most favoured nations tariff, the general preferential tariff and the least developed country tariff.

Even though our tariff rate is currently set at 35%, and it should not be any higher, orders in council normally go through the process

Government Orders

of reducing those tariffs for specific countries, depending on our trading relationships with those countries or on some of our foreign aid strategies in trying to help stimulate the economies of many of those countries. One of the things that happens is that through the process of orders in council, that tariff is often reduced with regard to some countries.

Clearly from our point of view, this has to be done over a period of time. I do not think we can drop that tariff, especially if there are other countries which have tariffs that are higher with regard to many of the Canadian products being exported to those particular countries. It would really put us at a disadvantage here in Canada if we dropped those tariffs overnight.

The Conservative Party of Canada does support free trade and the engaging of developing countries to encourage their development and, it is hoped, to have an evolution of an economy similar to that of industrialized countries. We want to encourage the ability of those countries to export their products and obviously create more wealth at home in those particular countries. Overall, we would like to see that tariff reduced when it comes to countries around the world, but we clearly understand that it may have to be managed carefully. It is hoped that in the future, as we continue to deal with many of these countries in developing free trade agreements, that we would see that tariff reduced completely with many of those countries, or at least reduced over time.

My colleague from the New Democratic Party spoke quite passionately about the problems in many of the countries we deal with in the third world and what sorts of standards they may have in place. Here in Canada, even though sometimes we have challenges within our own standards for labour and in reaching agreements between companies and workers, overall, people would say the standards in this country are quite high, especially when we compare them to some of the third world countries. I would make the argument that many countries that may have questionable labour practices are going through a process because they are diversifying, they are creating the ability for their economy to evolve, and it takes time before some of these economies evolve as far as those of some of the industrialized countries.

We need to help that process. It does not mean that we support the practice of child labour or that we support the persecution of any group. We need to continue to help those countries develop a middle class and continue to create wealth in those countries so that there can be that evolution of those standards.

• (1620)

We have all gone through that in our history. If we look at the industrial revolution here in the west and at some of the standards that existed and the creation of wealth, we were able to improve those labour standards. We improved the conditions for our workers. As I said, they may not be perfect but they have come a long way when we think back to the time of the industrial revolution.

Government Orders

I can speak from the experience of my own family coming from Africa. My family fled Africa in the early 1970s as refugees and came to this country. The working class in Africa was going through a transformation. Many of the families that lived in those countries, such as my own family, were involved with industrial activities. We were manufacturers, retailers, importers. There was a whole host of opportunities for which many people who emigrated to east Africa took advantage.

At that time there were obvious challenges. Many of the working class were not very well off. They were challenged in trying to look for opportunities for themselves to improve their conditions. Often many of the people who were moving there from India, as my family had generations ago, created working environments and created opportunities for many of the workers to improve their lives. The conditions that they worked in were often quite good. Slowly that changed as competition evolved in those countries and opportunities continued to grow.

It did not happen overnight, and we know it did not happen overnight here, but we cannot close the door on some of these countries that may not have the best practices. In the long run, by creating opportunities and by creating competition and giving them the ability to export some of their products helps to create the middle class and the wealth in those countries that then can change those standards.

It would be highly irresponsible if we went down the road that my NDP colleague suggested, which was to shut the door on many of those countries that are going through those challenges.

We can use that tariff in many cases as leverage. Due to the current process, as I outlined, if we do change any of those particular tariffs that come by orders in council of the government, those countries with which we have problems could be targeted specifically and it could encourage them to improve their conditions. Therefore if we were to reduce those tariffs in their favour, they could continue to build wealth in their home nations.

Overall, the key is to balance the growth and the continuous evolution of our industries here in Canada with the developing world. We know Canadians are very much in tune with foreign aid and trying to help many of these countries around the world. What better way to help them help themselves than by allowing them to produce products at home and then be able to export them to countries that are willing to purchase them, such as Canada.

On this side of the House we do realize the importance of Bill C-21 that is in front of the House. We do understand that the process of extending the tariffs for another 10 years is something that has to happen in order to evolve and to balance the trade of our own industries here in Canada.

However we also want to make sure that in committee, as we continue to discuss the bill, that we look to the future to see how we can perhaps reduce those particular tariffs so that in the end we can help many of these developing countries. Hopefully we would have most of these countries not in these three different categories that we currently recognize them, but as preferential trading partners around the world. That is the direction in which I would prefer to see the bill go. We will be supporting the bill as it stands.

• (1625)

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.

An hon. member: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

(Motion agreed to and bill referred to a committee)

* * *

CONTRAVENTIONS ACT

Hon. Reg Alcock (for Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada) moved that Bill C-10, an act to amend the Contraventions Act and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am a little surprised that I am in here speaking to the third reading stage of this legislation, the marijuana bill. I am very disappointed.

I do not think the government recognizes what it is dealing with here. In fact, the Prime Minister indicated to the country that he would make some substantive amendments to the bill from the previous prime minister's position but he did not do that.

Two days ago here in the House I had asked the Prime Minister about that. Basically he just smiled, shrugged his shoulders and put it off. It is ironic how one changes one's position on something, one's promises and commitments to a nation, once one becomes Prime Minister.

I will take my time going through what is wrong with the bill but, first, I must say to all people in Canada that we have studied the drug problems for about 18 months. We had about 41 substantive recommendations. Many of them were fairly good recommendations that would curb the problems with ecstasy, crystal meth, cocaine, heroin and so on.

However, when the government realized that those recommendations were somewhat conservative in nature, it moved right ahead and threw in this decriminalization of marijuana, got everybody else off the agenda of that, and went on with the bill here.

Government Orders

That was really quite irresponsible because the problems with drugs do not end with the decriminalization of marijuana. That is the real issue here. What the country does not have at this point is a national drug strategy. People are dying every day from drug overdoses and from addictions to all sorts of drugs, whether they are prescription drugs or crack, heroin or crystal meth. It is absurd to think that we are here talking about the decriminalization of marijuana when there is no drug strategy in place. That is the real problem.

I will go through the bill. We are talking about drugs. The Liberals have a hard time with this kind of issue. They are trying to find out what I am talking about, if members can believe it. I will go through the amendments that are not in this bill and the problems that have not dealt with in the bill.

I know I should not say anything about Liberals not being in the House when I am talking about this, but it is amazing when I am standing here speaking to such a precedent bill and there is nobody from the Liberals to listen.

First, the government is telling the country that it will get tough on marijuana, so it puts in maximum penalties for grow ops. It has said that it is really going to push hard on the grow op side of it, that four to 25 plants would constitute an offence punishable by up to \$25,000 and/or 18 months in jail on summary conviction. Well that is fine, but where I come from in British Columbia, and in many parts of this country, telling a judge there is a maximum \$25,000 fine for a grow op is laughable. The person would likely come out of there with a \$500 fine at best. In most cases they would come out with a slap on the hand and told not to do it again. They walk away and laugh, then go start another grow op, and on it goes.

Maximum fines would be all right if judges and lawyers understood the issue and applied those fines, but they do not, and it is not happening right across the country. What is required are minimum fines for such operations so that judges understand that there is a minimum penalty for these things. Giving the discretion to the courtroom is a mistake. I do not know how many times I have tell that to the government. It is not listening. When the government tells Canadians that it is getting tough on this grow op business, it is not.

• (1630)

Let us look at some of the other things the government did not address in the bill.

The government said there would be fines for minor possession. The fines are different for adults than they are for young people. When I pursued this in the justice committee and in the drug committee, the answer from the other side was that young people could not afford the fines. If they can afford the marijuana, they can afford the fines. The propensity to say that they are young and therefore the fine should be lower for them than for an adult is ridiculous. The government is sending a message to young people that it is cheaper for them to get caught. It is wrong.

Something else in conjunction with this legislation is that no resources have been provided for police to crack down on organized crime that is profiting from lax enforcement. The government says that it will put in this great program to cut down on drugs but it does

not provide the resources to the police departments. What are the police going to do? Are they going to pick up from the explosion of grow ops and the explosion of the drug trade in hard drugs? I think not. The government has to put some money where its mouth is on this issue.

Let us look at what else the government did not address in the bill.

The proceeds of crime legislation was not amended to adjust for drug seizures. It was not touched at all. In fact, I can go through a litany of cases, and I have them here, hundreds, if not thousands of cases.

• (1635)

Madam Speaker, the guy over there who proposes to be a minister does not understand the concept so he is heckling. I do not mind the heckling; I kind of enjoy it. I wish he were smart enough to understand the consequences of what they are not doing. That is the problem with this government. It sends in a few ministers who do not know what they are talking about but try to understand a system as serious as drug problems in the country.

Let me go through it. The proceeds of crime legislation has to be amended. The issues are these. In many cases in the country, for grow ops in particular, for crystal meth labs, or for the trafficking of harder drugs, the cars they are driving, the money they are making, often goes back to the individuals. In fact, I've had cases—

Hon. Reg Alcock: No, wrong.

Mr. Randy White: The minister says no, but the fact is that I have cases, many of them, which show that in the courtroom the criminals, the dealers, are getting away with the proceeds of crime more often than not. That is unfortunate.

The need to deal with the damages that are caused through grow ops, and crystal meth labs in particular, has to be dealt with somewhere along the line. Discussions have to take place between the federal and provincial governments and even the municipal governments.

More and more we are finding that young people in particular are buying houses that have been damaged through these kinds of operations. In fact, I have letter upon letter showing that young people bought a house with practically the last bottom dollar they had and they got into the house to find out that there had been severe damage done and they needed another \$80,000, \$90,000 or \$100,000 to renovate the place before they could even move into it.

Damage is caused by playing with the electricals, by mould in the walls, by dangerous odours from crystal meth labs and so on and so forth, yet no discussion on this has taken place among all three levels of government. But we take in a law like this one and deal with only a very small aspect of the drug problem.

Government Orders

No legislation has been developed to curtail financial institution funding of mortgages related to grow ops. It may seem a little surprising, but there is one particular trust company in the country that has funded many grow ops. Here is what is happening. Individuals are putting their applications forward, typically using a certain type of job, a very low paying job, and the applications just get whisked through a particular trust company and approved.

In fact, I just finished dealing with one individual who has been on welfare for all nine years that he has been in this country. He came here with no money. He has been on welfare for nine years. I found out that now not only is he dealing drugs and has particular grow ops, but he owns three houses, all financed through the same trust company. Just how does he own three houses when he has been on welfare for the total time he has been here? The fact is that the proceeds of crime legislation cannot and will not take those houses from that individual.

So we have two situations. Now we have finance companies funding grow ops because it is lucrative and the cash is there, and it is non-tax-dollars cash, and we also have proceeds of crime legislation that is failing to do its job. In addition to this, there has been no coordination whatsoever among federal, provincial or municipal agencies on the welfare issue itself. I have, through my sources, dealt with welfare agencies that are finding more and more individuals on welfare who are using the grow ops as a source of income. Their source of income is much higher than before but the coordination in catching these individuals is not there. Those are the kinds of discussions that have to take place as well before we get into just simply finding an answer and calling it decriminalization.

• (1640)

No commitment has been obtained from the judiciary to increase penalties within the limits set out in this bill or to follow the established possession guidelines, and here is the problem. People are going to go into the courtroom, for certain, when they get caught with 31 or 33 grams of marijuana. The judge is going to say that up to 30 they can get a fine and the judge will not want to call them criminals just because it is 31 or 32 or 33 grams.

We are going to be on the slippery slope again. We are going to find ourselves with the judges out there saying that maybe they should make it 50, 60 or 100 grams, and that other places have 100 so they will have 100.

There has to be an agreement with the judiciary in this country that what we say in the House of Commons for fines and penalties is what we mean to have happen. It is totally inappropriate to have the judges once again make the rules and extend the penalties based on their perception of what they think is right. That has cost us a great deal of time, money and effort in this country as it is.

We are dealing with something called decriminalization, that is, giving a fine for the minor possession of marijuana. The government says that minor possession is for from zero to 30 grams. It says that zero to 15 is a fine and 15 to 30 is a fine or a criminal charge, but more likely than not it will be zero to 30 with a fine.

We have to understand that 30 grams is approximately 45 to 50 joints. An individual can walk around the school ground with that

and get a fine. Anybody walking around with 35, 50 or 55 joints is not a recreational user. A recreational—

Hon. Reg Alcock: You don't know that.

Mr. Randy White: This ill-informed minister says I do not know that. The fact is that I do know that. The fact is that anybody with that many joints is not a recreational user. Anybody who knows the industry itself would be smart enough to understand that, and anybody who smokes marijuana would tell us that as well.

It is interesting for all the folks listening to know that I am getting badgered by a minister of the crown, but what really gets me is the amount this individual does not know and does not understand and yet he would stand in here and support a bill that is really a very poorly performing bill and will not resolve the problem anyway.

The THC component of marijuana is more or less the addictive component and gives you the buzz, the high or the low or whatever one is going to get from it. Over the years it has increased from about 3% or 4% to around 15% or 16% now. In fact, the first recorded death by smoking marijuana was two weeks ago in England. The death was certified as directly attributable to marijuana smoke. The marijuana he was smoking was from Africa. The potency and the types of marijuana weed are increasing by leaps and bounds today. As more and different strains are developed, we are finding that there is basically no control. There are no parameters on the potency of the THC itself.

So today we are dealing today with a bill that considers, for a person with 40 joints, that the THC component of those 40 joints is approximately 8% or 10%. That will not necessarily be the case tomorrow or the next day, or five months or five years from now. The government is making a presumption based on something that is incorrect and no effort whatsoever has been made to deal with that aspect.

• (1645)

I want to say this: This country needs a national drug strategy. I have been around this country more than enough times dealing with addicted individuals. I have been in Europe, the United States, Mexico and throughout Canada, so I do happen to know what I am talking about on this issue and I initiated for Parliament itself the special committee studying the illegal use of drugs.

What is really required is a way to get our young people and elderly people off drugs. I find it reprehensible, actually, that the government would consider funding a shooting-up site in Vancouver when it will not put money into rehabilitation and detox facilities throughout this land. I find that reprehensible.

In fact, in my community alone, one facility has recently shut down. We had a rehabilitation facility for young, teenaged addicted girls. I went to the previous minister of health and said that we needed some money to keep it open. We had parents lined up trying to get their kids into that place. The government beat around the bush for four or five months and nothing happened. Nothing happened and these kids are out on the street. It is disgusting. Then I find out that the government is funding, in part, a shooting-up site.

Government Orders

Consider this. People who have children on drugs—and I know people who do—go to the government and ask for help for their child. Do we want a government that says yes, it will send people's children to a shoot-up site where they can shoot up in a relatively clean facility, or do we want a government that will take our children and put them in detox and rehabilitation? There is no choice for parents. I know what they would choose.

The government has to act as a judicious parent on these issues. It has to have a national drug strategy that looks at abstinence, not permission to use. It is sad that this has come to the House. The decriminalization of marijuana is a very minor part of a drug strategy, so minor it does not even rate. I am sad to see that today this is all the government can come up with.

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was following the comments made by my hon. colleague. He mentioned that he knows of a financial agency that benefited from the proceeds of crime. My question to him is that I wonder whether he reported this situation to the police. If he has not, I wonder why he did not report it to the police.

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Speaker, I not only reported it to the police but I wrote a letter to the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, as a matter of fact. All I was told was that they could not tell me because of privacy.

I can say this. Again, I think it is reprehensible that a financial institution in this country would knowingly be funding mortgages for grow ops. That is a fact. It has been on television; I have the documents here. It is either a fact or a coincidence that over 400 mortgages have come out of that one institution. The one individual I referred to who has been on welfare for six years or so and never had any money when he came into the country has three houses and all three are mortgaged by the one institution. I would say that is not really a coincidence.

Yes, I did report it.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the member for Langley—Abbotsford for his research on the drug problems in this country and on the failure of government and government agencies to deal with this matter in an effective way. There is no question that it is a scourge on our society.

The other issue that keeps coming up time and time again, of course, is the issue of these grow operations. They bring vast amounts of dollars into organized crime, they destroy property and they feed and fuel the drug industry in a substantial way in this country, and our agencies cannot seem to get a handle on it.

On that particular point, I have a question for the member. What legislation would he like to see crafted that would deal with drug grow ops and put them out of commission for once and for all? How would the enforcement agencies actually be able to apply their strategies to knock them out?

• (1650)

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Speaker, on these grow ops and crystal meth labs, we must have minimum penalties and minimum fines. It cannot be at the discretion of the judges because they are not using it.

Facilities owned by dealers must be seized. Vehicles must be seized as proceeds of crime. This is not something where there is discretion.

I recently saw a judge use discretion and this happened in my riding in Langley. There was a drug bust. The drugs were in the same room with \$400,000 wrapped up in vacuum plastic about 10 feet away from the drugs. The police seized the drugs and took the dealers to court. The judge said that there was no proof that the money which was wrapped up 10 feet away was gained by way of drugs. He said that it could have been gained legitimately as the dealers claimed who, by the way, were previously busted. Therefore, he gave the money back to the dealers. He gave 400,000 tax free dollars back to the dealers on something he felt could not be proven. Who keeps \$400,000 cash stashed in a room? No business person does that.

That money should have been seized. It should have been given to the Crown or at least to the police agency that seized it and used for better purposes.

Hon. Sue Barnes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on third reading of Bill C-10 which will reform Canada's laws as they relate to the possession and cultivation of cannabis.

Bill C-10 is the culmination of a long process that illustrates how the House should approach a major reform of the law in a non-partisan spirit.

All parties in the House can point to parts of the bill that respond to concerns that they raised and points that they made. Of course, there are divergent views in the House as there are across the country, but Bill C-10 represents a modern made in Canada approach to dealing with the harm caused by marijuana.

Members are well aware of the major steps that led to this reform. The House in May 2001 agreed that a special committee on the non-medical use of drugs should be established. The special committee undertook extensive public hearings across Canada. Witnesses from government departments, specialists in drug issues, educators, police and concerned Canadians made their views known.

The special committee made many recommendations regarding overall drug policy. The government has responded to those recommendations by renewing Canada's national drug strategy and providing \$245 million over five years for education, prevention, law enforcement and harm reduction strategies. The special committee also recommended alternative measures for dealing with possession and cultivation of up to 30 grams of cannabis.

It is important to note that there were three minority reports. While the Canadian Alliance considered 30 grams too much, both the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Québécois supported the intent of the recommendation, although they both had concerns.

*Government Orders**[Translation]*

Bill C-38, introduced by the government in May 2003, followed up on the recommendation of the special committee. This bill was referred to the special committee before second reading.

• (1655)

[English]

At that time, the Minister of Justice said that this demonstrated that the government was listening and willing to consider amendments to ensure we got it right, and that the special committee on non-medical use of drugs was well positioned to examine this issue after the exhaustive work it did to prepare its report, which was released last December.

The special committee in turn took its responsibility seriously. At this time I would like to thank the members of that all-party committee, including the chair, the member from Burlington.

It did make important improvements to the bill. In particular, it recommended that the bill make it an offence to release personal information to foreign governments and international organizations in relation to the offences of possession or cultivation of small amounts of marijuana that are punished by a ticket. They are still offences, but it is the way of handing out the fines and the sanctions that have been adjusted.

It makes the cultivation of one to three plants for personal use punishable by a fine of \$500 for an adult and \$250 for youth. It provides that where there is an agreement between Canada and a province, the offence could be prosecuted by a ticket under the Contraventions Act. It requires that the government review the impact of the new legislation within three years. We are pleased with that addition.

[Translation]

The amendments to Bill C-38 proposed by the special committee were accepted by the government. The result of all these actions is the bill now before us, Bill C-10, which I believe meets the expectations of Canadians.

[English]

Members of the House are aware of the problems that a criminal conviction for the possession of a small amount of marijuana can cause for a person. It can close opportunities for employment and prevent travel to certain countries.

As a society, Canadians have decided that it does not make sense that a young person who makes a bad choice in life by experimenting with marijuana should receive the lasting burden of a criminal conviction and face such serious consequences.

[Translation]

The members are also aware that Canadians want stricter sanctions on large marijuana growing operations, which are both a danger to our communities and a source of revenue for organized crime.

[English]

Bill C-10 reflects what Canadians want. Marijuana remains a prohibited substance and its possession will remain a criminal

offence. This is the message that youth must understand, that there are sanctions. This is not legalization.

Bill C-10 reflects what Canadians are telling us. Marijuana remains a prohibited substance and its possession will remain a criminal offence. However, the procedure for punishing a person who is convicted of possessing a small quantity of marijuana or cannabis resin for personal use has been changed in a way that better reflects the attitudes of Canadians toward the seriousness of the crime.

• (1700)

[Translation]

Possession of 15 grams or less of marijuana will be punished by a summons or a ticket and not by summary conviction. The fine will be set at \$150 for an adult and \$100 for an adolescent, if there are no aggravating circumstances.

[English]

Police officers will retain the discretion to give a ticket or a summons to appear in criminal court for the possession of more than 15 grams of marijuana and up to 30 grams. If a summons is issued, then the maximum sentence will remain a \$1,000 fine and/or six months in jail. These fines would be higher in many cases than what offenders are getting now.

It is important to note that when a youth is facing a charge, his or her parents will be notified. We believe the punishment for possession will now be seen by Canadians as fitting the crime.

[Translation]

Bill C-10 also responds to Canadians' expectations concerning the cultivation of marijuana. It will double the maximum penalty for cultivation if the offender has more than 50 plants. In addition, it sets out a number of aggravating circumstances which would require courts to provide reasons for not imposing a prison sentence.

[English]

It is appropriate that the penalty for cultivating up to three plants be reduced. The person who is growing only three plants or less is likely to be cultivating for personal use; however, we deplore the use of marijuana. Canadians recognize that there is a difference in culpability where the person is growing for personal use as opposed to cultivating for sale to others. Bill C-10 makes that distinction.

All members are aware that Bill C-10 by itself will not solve all the problems that drugs are causing in our country. It is of course important that criminal law be modernized. Bill C-10 should lead to more uniform enforcement of the prohibition of possession of marijuana.

Currently it depends in what city, town, province or territory one lives. This hopefully will assist more police officers encountering a problem. Tickets will be issued that then will get paid. The amounts for youth will be of the amounts that they can pay and the money will not come from parents pulling dollars out of their pockets. These are sanctions for youth.

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Those sanctions will free up police officers so that they can do more important work and not be there handing out numerous charges in some areas and voice reprimands in others. It does not seem to be much of a sanction for youth if they are in a city or town where it is just a verbal warning as opposed to this ticket that is going to cost money each and every time.

Bill C-10 should lead to more uniform enforcement for the prohibition of possession of marijuana. The greater penalties for cultivation combined with the extra police resources that the government is funding under the national drug strategy should reduce the prevalence of grow ops. We all know how important it is to go after the grow ops.

However, the drug problems being experienced by our communities across Canada require a comprehensive response to address the underlying causes of drug abuse. Much of what has been done does not fall on the shoulders of the federal government. It is therefore particularly important to note that the government's commitment in renewing the national drug strategy is to work with provincial, territorial and municipal governments, addiction agencies, non-government organizations, professional organizations and associations, law enforcement agencies, the private sector and community groups to reduce the harm to individuals and to society of drug abuse.

The government is playing the leadership role that it should play in the fight against drug abuse and it is rejecting the "Ottawa knows best" attitude that in the past has hindered cooperation with our partners. Through the mechanism of a bi-annual conference, the first of which will be held this year, the government will bring all the stakeholders together to set research, health promotion and drug prevention agendas.

In that regard, the amendment made by the special committee and accepted by the government that, after three years, there must be a comprehensive review of the effects of the alternative penalties on Canadian society is to be welcomed. This was a good addition.

It is my sincere belief that when Parliament reviews the effects of Bill C-10 on Canadian society, it will find that the legislation struck the right balance, and that Bill C-10 will have played an important part along with the many individuals and initiatives who are working and being funded under the national drug strategy in reducing the harm caused by drugs to Canadians.

I want to point out to Canadians that operating a motor vehicle while impaired by any substance remains a serious criminal offence. Driving while impaired by drugs including marijuana is included in the offence under subsection 253(a) of the Criminal Code. Section 254 of the Criminal Code calls for minimum penalties for impaired driving including a mandatory minimum \$600 fine on a first offence, a 15 day minimum sentence on a second offence, and a 90 day minimum sentence on a third offence. The maximum penalty for impaired driving is five years unless someone is hurt or killed putting the maximum penalty up to 14 years.

The challenge for police dealing with drivers impaired by drugs is proving a person's impairment because as yet, no scientific screening device exists to determine the levels of impairment by drugs. The government is proceeding to deal as expeditiously as possible with

practical difficulties inherent to proving the drug impaired driving offence.

● (1705)

Consultations that were started last fall have been completed. We intend to move forward very quickly in this area. This is an important area to the government, and I do not want Canadians believing that we will let this area go. We are actively working on it right now.

I know the bill has proven to be of some difficulty for members in the House, but we are not sent here to do the easy things. I firmly believe all of us in the chamber, on every side of the House, want to improve the lives of Canadians. We want to make penalties and sanctions fit the offences in a manner that is appropriate and in a manner that will not destroy lives, but will allow in some instances, especially with our youth, them to make an error in judgment, to be sanctioned, then to move on with their lives and not carry a penalty for the rest of their lives.

Many of my colleagues have talked about pardons. Canada has a pardon mechanism. People can apply for pardons on an individual basis. Some members, who have worked very hard on the bill, wish we could wave a magic wand and erase the criminal records of people who carry these records because of a simple possession charge. There are maybe over 6,000 people in Canada who carry criminal records because of a simple possession charge.

Unfortunately, there is no mechanism to do a broad amnesty or pardon because we have to look at the specific situation of everybody's case. When examining pardons, it is a material part of that process to see what exactly is being pardoned, such as whether the original offence was a plea bargain down from a more serious offence. We should not do a retroactive blanket pardon.

There are students heading toward universities or professional schools who would make good and productive members of society, but who may have in their youth taken part in activities that are still illegal in this country. They might be unable to obtain employment, or they might be unable to take university courses, or they might be unable to work in a government office if they carry that criminal record. They may have to delay their education.

I do not think anybody excuses bad behaviour. However, we on this side of the House, with the help of those who look seriously at the bill before us and who look at what we have a chance to change in society, think there is more than ample reason to change the law today.

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Bill C-10 deserves the support in the House. Ladies and gentleman, colleagues in the chamber, it has been a long time coming. The Le Dain commission was nearly 30 years ago. I believe we should move cautiously forward. Some people advocate going immediately to legalization. Most of the time our bills move forward step by step. Law, just like anything else, is a living tree. I urge all members of the House to support Bill C-10.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today because I am really worried about what we have done in the House of Commons with regard to this bill.

I did a research paper from the University of California, Berkeley. That research paper, and others who helped me, showed that the first marijuana cigarette that a person smokes goes into the brain cells and stays there for nine days. It affects the way one thinks, the way one feels, and one's whole attitude.

Also, I had worked at a church before I came up here. There were 23 young people who came from the local high school every day at noon hour and a man gave them marijuana every day. He gave it to them until they became addicted, and it is addictive. This is something I do not think the government realizes.

I told the minister of my church that I was going to go out and tell those kids that I would buy them hot dogs and pop and that I would bring them in. However, they could not smoke up before this. If they smoked up afterwards, we would not call the police. I said that I wanted to see if we could get them out of the alleyway.

It took a few weeks, but we finally got them out of the alleyway and we were able to get them away from the man who wanted them to pay for their marijuana.

Five Christmas Eve's ago my doorbell rang back home. I went to the door and this gentleman was standing there. He said, "Mrs. Wayne, do you remember me?" I told him that his face was familiar. He told me that his mom and dad were in the car and that he had just came back from Toronto. I said, "Your Tony" and I asked him what he was doing. He told me that he was a draftsman in Toronto. He said that if I had not taken him out of that alleyway, he would be laying there now on cocaine.

If they do get caught with a small amount of marijuana, they should get a penalty, and they will be pardoned. We have been able to pardon some. I do not understand how anyone on the government side could say it is all right for them to have—

• (1710)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I am sorry to interrupt the member, but we have to give an opportunity for the hon. member to answer.

Hon. Sue Barnes: Mr. Speaker, I would answer my colleague across the House that her message that it is all right, is the wrong message. It is not all right. Every time a member in the House, who is credible—

Mrs. Elsie Wayne: We never said it's all right. What you have done is wrong.

Hon. Sue Barnes: —goes out and says that it is all right, they are giving the wrong message. The message is that it is not all right, and that is what we have to say. Contributing to the wrong message does

not solve the problem. What we have to do is comply with our international obligations.

We have the single convention on narcotic drugs, the convention on psychotropic substances and the convention against illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Canada is party to all three of these international conventions dealing with illegal drugs. These treaties require the member countries to prohibit certain activities, including the production, trafficking, import and export of drugs. Countries do and must provide adequate penalties, including imprisonment for serious drug offences.

Ms. Paddy Torsney: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to be clear. While we are sitting here having this discussion, the member opposite is accusing me of being high or using illegal substances. That is absolutely and totally inappropriate. It does not add to the debate and it is factually incorrect. She should be asked to apologize. People can have differences of opinion without being accused of doing illegal acts.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): If I could get the attention of the hon. member for Saint John, if the allegation that the hon. member for Burlington has just raised is true, on your word, on your honour, if it is true, I would like you to apologize.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne: What I did was I asked her if she was high.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): No, I am asking you, if it is true, I ask you to apologize.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne: I said, Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The hon. member for Saint John, do you want to repeat what you have just said please?

Mrs. Elsie Wayne: Do I want to repeat?

• (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Yes.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): What you just said because I did not hear you.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne: Mr. Speaker, I asked the member if she was high because she was screaming and hollering at me because of my comments, and you did not hear her comments either. There was a debate between the two of us, which I do not think anyone likes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): It is apples and oranges.

Ms. Paddy Torsney: She said, "Are you high?" That is illegal.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): That is the question I am asking the hon. member for Saint John again. Have you accused the hon. member for Burlington of being high?

Mrs. Elsie Wayne: I asked the question. I did not say she was. I asked the question, Mr. Speaker, because of the things she was saying to me.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Marceau: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

When I applauded the hon. member for Burlington at the end of her speech, the hon. member for St. John turned to me and said, "So you're high too?"

I find it totally inappropriate for the hon. member for St. John to say something like that to those among her colleagues who do not share her opinions. I think the hon. member should at least apologize to the hon. member for Burlington and myself. To accuse members of Parliament of being under the influence of illicit drugs when we are debating such a serious issue is totally inappropriate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The Chair is in a delicate position, because it will probably be impossible to check the blues to find out what exactly the hon. member for St. John said.

Since it would be extremely difficult to agree on such a thing, if both members are agreeable, we will proceed with the recorded division.

[English]

Ms. Paddy Torsney: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you review the blues and revisit this matter. In fact, when the member for Saint John stood up she said, "I did say are you high?", she has admitted that she is accusing the member opposite and myself of being intoxicated or being under the influence of illegal substances.

I want to declare right here that I am not and do not use marijuana. I think she should be asked to apologize.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The hon. member for Saint John has just left the chamber, which does not help things at all. However, I said a while ago that it would be very difficult to verify the blues. I do not know if the gentleman in the aisle has picked up anything that the hon. member for Saint John has said. We will look at it a bit further. The case will be dealt with as soon as possible.

* * *

[Translation]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): It being 5:15 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred division on the motion at report stage and second reading of Bill C-18.

Call in the members.

• (1745)

[English]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 18)

YEAS

Members

Adams	Alcock
Allard	Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
Anderson (Victoria)	Assadourian
Augustine	Bagnell
Bakopanos	Barnes (London West)
Barnes (Gander—Grand Falls)	Barrette
Bélanger	Bellemare
Bennett	Bevilacqua
Binet	Blaikie
Blondin-Andrew	Bonin
Bonwick	Boudria
Bradshaw	Breitkreuz
Brison	Brown
Bryden	Bulte
Burton	Cadman

Calder	Caplan
Carroll	Casey
Castonguay	Catterall
Cauchon	Chamberlain
Charbonneau	Comartin
Comuzzi	Cotler
Cullen	Cummins
Cuzner	Desjarlais
DeVillers	Dhaliwal
Discepola	Doyle
Dromisky	Duncan
Duplain	Easter
Efford	Eggleton
Eyking	Fontana
Forseath	Frulla
Gallant	Galloway
Godfrey	Godin
Goodale	Graham
Guarnieri	Hanger
Harvard	Harvey
Hearn	Hill (MacLeod)
Hilstrom	Hubbard
Ianno	Jackson
Jaffer	Jobin
Jordan	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Keyes	Kilger (Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh)
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)	Knutson
Kraft Sloan	Lancôt
Lastewka	LeBlanc
Lee	Leung
Lill	Lincoln
Longfield	Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)	MacAulay
MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)	Macklin
Malhi	Marcil
Marleau	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Matthews	McCallum
McCormick	McDonough
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough East)
McLellan	McNally
McTeague	Merrifield
Mills (Red Deer)	Minna
Mitchell	Murphy
Myers	Neville
Nystrom	O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)
O'Reilly	Obhrai
Owen	Pacetti
Pagtakhan	Paradis
Patry	Peric
Peterson	Pettigrew
Phinney	Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Pratt	Price
Proulx	Rajotte
Redman	Reed (Halton)
Regan	Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
Ritz	Robillard
Robinson	Saada
Savoy	Schellenberger
Scherrer	Sgro
Shepherd	Simard
Skelton	Solberg
St-Jacques	St. Denis
Steckle	Stoffer
Telegdi	Thibault (West Nova)
Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Toews	Tonks
Torsney	Ur
Valeri	Vanclief
Vellacott	Volpe
Wappel	Wasylycia-Leis
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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I declare the motion carried.

[*Translation*]

It being 5:50 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

ARMENIAN PEOPLE

Ms. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre, BQ), seconded by the members for Brampton Centre, Calgary Southeast and Halifax, moved:

That this House acknowledge the Armenian genocide of 1915 and condemn this act as a crime against humanity.

She said: Mr. Speaker, before I begin my speech, I want to thank the members of the Conservative Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party, particularly the hon. members for Calgary Southeast and Halifax, who also wanted to second my motion.

● (1750)

We are debating today a matter that has, with time, become routine in the House of Commons. However, today's debate on acknowledging the Armenian genocide of 1915 has particular force this time, since it is a votable motion, unless a premature election call puts an end to our work in Parliament.

Everyone who knows me knows that I have long been interested in this matter. They know, as I do, that it is essential to acknowledge history to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. Acknowledging the past also changes how we see and therefore analyze current and future socio-political conflicts that risk turning into genocide.

I want to review the Parliament's acknowledgement in the past of the Armenian genocide, the strategies used by the lobby denying its existence, the situation in Quebec and abroad and, in conclusion, discuss the facts and the importance of voting in favour of Motion M-380.

First, the motion reads as follows:

That this House acknowledge the Armenian genocide of 1915 and condemn this act as a crime against humanity.

Since the beginning of the 37th Parliament, in other words, since the last federal election in 2000, this is the fourth time we are debating a motion to acknowledge the Armenian genocide. Of the three motions previously debated, I had the pleasure to introduce two of them and the member for Brampton Centre put forward the other.

Although most of the speeches were in favour of acknowledging the genocide, we have not had the opportunity to put this motion to a vote because of the old rules of procedure for private members' business. This is the first time in a long time that we will have the opportunity to truly take a position in this debate.

We have to go back to 1996 for the last vote in the House of Commons on this topic. At that time, parliamentarians, including myself, unanimously supported the following motion:

That the House recognize, on the occasion of the 81st anniversary of the Armenian tragedy which claimed some 1.5 million lives on April 24, 1915, and in recognition of other crimes against humanity, the week of April 20 to 27 of each year as the week of remembrance of the inhumanity of people toward one another.

This motion put forward by the Bloc Québécois and amended by the governing party, was certainly a step in the right direction. Nonetheless, note that it did not talk about genocide, but rather a tragedy. This was not the wording originally proposed. We initially talked about an act of genocide, but it seemed to be difficult for some parliamentarians to use this term, which is how we ended up with the amendment we did.

However, there has been a lot of water under the bridge since and that is why it is all the more important to update the debate. Moreover, as surprising as it may seem in the Parliament of Canada, the Senate was the precursor to all of this.

On June 13, 2002, the Senate of Canada adopted a motion that had essentially three objectives: to recognize the events of 1915 as genocide; to condemn any attempt to deny or distort this historical truth as being anything less than genocide; and, to designate April 24 of every year as a day of remembrance of the Armenian genocide.

The Senate adopted this motion and the Earth continues to turn. This did not result in acts of violence or terrorist attacks, as certain opponents of Motion M-380 would unfortunately have us believe.

It would be useful at this point to rectify certain facts as to the pressure coming from those who agree with the denial theory. That they do not agree with my actions, I can imagine. That they do not share my viewpoint on history, no one would be surprised. By the way, we all know that history should be read with care, because it has the weakness of having been written by the victors. Still I do not approve of using a fear of terrorism to discredit the recognition of the Armenian genocide and I refuse to agree to the statement that motion M-380 is tainted with racism.

Demagoguery is certainly not the best way to enhance one's arguments. In that spirit, the various threats about peace and the deterioration of relations between Canada and Turkey do not consider the precedents for recognition of the Armenian genocide.

Private Members' Business

•(1755)

We must be clear that the House of Commons will not be creating a precedent by voting in favour of this motion. Just across the Ottawa River—and it was done in Ontario, too—the Quebec National Assembly officially recognized the genocide in 1980. More recently, on September 10, 2003, Quebec passed a law proclaiming April 24 Armenian genocide commemoration day.

Internationally, a number of states and parliaments have recognized the Armenian genocide. To name just a few: there was Argentina, Belgium, France, Russia, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, and more recently, Switzerland. Many states in the U.S.—nearly 30—have also recognized this genocide.

The case of the European states and parliaments is particularly interesting. While Turkey threatened the countries that had recognized the genocide with economic and diplomatic retaliation, it was hoping, at the same time, to get support for its entry into the European union. These threats never became reality and the Turkish ambassador in Paris, having been called home for a short time after the genocide was recognized by the French National Assembly, returned to his duties.

This recognition did not stir up any particular tension in Franco-Turkish relations, nor did it provoke acts of violence or terrorism between French people of Armenian origin and those of Turkish origin.

Those who are against the motion will argue that history is for historians and that it is not up to politicians to determine what the truth is. Where facts are concerned, many experts, scholars, historians and researchers have examined them and came to the conclusion that a genocide did indeed occur. Among those experts were professor William Schabas, a specialist in international law, Léo Kuper, a genocide expert, and Raphaël Lemkin, an eminent contributor to the development of the United Nations Convention on Genocide. They have always recognized the 1915 genocide.

Among the politicians who have acknowledged the genocide are Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George, two former British Prime Ministers, as well as Adolf Hitler, who said, and I quote:

Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?

To those who are still wondering if it is up to us to reflect on history, this should be food for thought.

At the beginning of the 20th century, 1.5 million Armenians were killed. They did not die while fighting during the first world war, but rather in the context of that war, which is quite different. Following on this argument, could we say today that the six million Jews who were killed during the second world war died on the battlefield? No, they were killed in the context of the second world war, but not because of the war, that goes without saying.

It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge today the very compassionate action taken during the 1939-45 war by the Turkish ambassador to France who saved a significant number of Jews from the Lyon area from the concentration camps and probable, if not certain, death.

Before World War I, 20% of the Turkish people were not Muslim, compared to 2.5% after the war. These figures are facts that have been recognized by a great number of historians and experts.

Why should hon. members support my initiative? Let me give an example. If a person wilfully commits a murder in front of you, if everyone knows about it, including lawyers, judges and police officers, but no one acknowledges that it is a murder, what criteria will people use in the future to distinguish what is a murder and what is not? Closing our eyes to a historic reality creates the risk of making this non-acknowledgement a form of precedent for events that are occurring now and that will occur in the future.

Planning a genocide requires well defined strategies and dynamics, and we must recognize them for what they are to understand the conditions that lead to such crimes against humanity. By acknowledging that the events of 1915 are a genocide, we will allow researchers, historians and academics to study what happened, while keeping in mind that this was indeed a genocide. These people can then compare various genocides and try to identify the similarities and the circumstances that are conducive to such acts.

•(1800)

Once we have all the tools needed to best understand how a genocide is organized, perhaps then the international community will be able to identify the signs in time to take immediate action instead of intervening too late, as happened in the Rwandan genocide, that this House just acknowledged.

The purpose of this acknowledgement is not to condemn the current Turkish government. Nor does Motion M-380 ask that it provide any reparations in terms of money or land to the Armenians. By acknowledging the Armenian genocide, Canada is not pointing a finger at the Turkish government. It is merely acknowledging history.

In closing, I want to reassure the Turkish community and tell them that this motion in no way attempts to hold them responsible for what happened in the early 20th century. What happened belongs in the past, and we must acknowledge it as such, since we are opposed to all forms of violence and the misfortunes that violence begets.

Obviously, we will not bring the victims back, but we will, at the very least, ensure that historical justice is rendered and give ourselves the tools we need to build a better world. During their lives, individuals and peoples are often wounded. The deeper the wounds, the longer it takes to heal. I truly believe that, by acknowledging the genocide perpetrated on the Armenian people, we will be helping to heal their scars and give them and the international community the desire to view the future in solidarity and with respect for our differences.

Private Members' Business

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development (Social Economy), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague. I know she is very passionate about this subject. We have had a number of opportunities to work together on this issue. I congratulate her once again on being tenacious enough to put forward her point of view once more on this subject that is very important for the Armenian community in Canada. I also congratulate her for her overview of all the very important facts.

I am very sorry, but I have to say that on this side of the House there is no unanimity. There is certainly a lot of support, it is true, and we shall prove that to her when our turn comes.

I would like to ask her a question and give her the opportunity to provide more details. In the countries where this motion has already been adopted, have there been negative consequences? That is one of the criticisms one hears everywhere; that there will be negative fallout in the countries concerned.

Ms. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comments, which I greatly appreciate.

Obviously, economic threats sometimes are sometimes effective. They are used because people think they work well. All we know, particularly in the case of France, is that neither France nor Turkey has withdrawn from any of the various contracts connecting them. I am convinced that it will be the same here.

In business, people say money is money and that we pick one country over another based on whether it is in our economic interest to do so.

Just as we think that Canada will continue to negotiate with Quebec, because Canada wants to do business with Quebec, I think that, regarding the Armenian genocide and the possibility that the Turkish government may reconsider its investments in Quebec or the rest of Canada, this is another form of pressure. But as a parliamentarian and a member of the public, I know that this kind of thing has no influence on our collective decision.

[English]

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member from the Bloc Québécois for presenting the motion.

I would ask the member for her comments on the following two questions. After the French government recently passed a motion on genocide, the Swiss government did a similar thing. Could she comment on the reaction by the Turkish government to protest the action of the Swiss government? That is my first question.

Second, we have received many letters of complaint from the Turkish point of view from the United States. Those are Americans telling us what to do. I wonder if she would comment on those two points.

• (1805)

[Translation]

Ms. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral: Mr. Speaker, I thank my dear colleague for his question. It is clear that this is an extremely sensitive matter, as much for the Armenian people as for the Turkish community. I clearly understand this.

Whether they see this as the humiliation of the Turkish community or whether they use a very powerful lobby to try to influence the parliamentarians here, I can understand that too. Nevertheless, we have not necessarily all been impressed by comments by our American friends. The recent conflict in Iraq is clear proof.

Consequently, I sincerely hope that such pressure, which is fair game, will not have the intended influence.

[English]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member, in correspondence with different members in the House, has indicated that this will have no implications in terms of land or reparations. When the NDP introduced this motion in the House, it was not always part of its motion but in its stated policy it does in fact say that there should be reparations in land and other things that go back to the Armenian people.

I have a great sadness in my heart with regard to what happened in those awful days. However I am concerned that when one country, be it any country in the world, passes that, it is then used by the various—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I am sorry to interrupt but there is no time left in questions or comments.

[Translation]

With the Speaker's indulgence, I will allow the hon. member for Laval Centre to briefly respond.

Ms. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral: Mr. Speaker, in this whole issue, reparations are not what really matters. What really matters is that the Armenian people know that their historic reality and the wounds that were inflicted on them be recognized by the international community. As far as I am concerned, this is about much more than a reparations. It is very easy to give money or a little something but, in fact, not to acknowledge anything.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to applaud the hon. members who are taking part in this debate. I would especially like to acknowledge, on our side, the tenacity of the members for Ahuntsic and Brampton Centre. This being my first time in this position, over the past few days they have provided me with a great deal of information on this issue. Now I am delivering a speech on this important topic. I would also like to thank the hon. member for Laval Centre, who put forward this motion, and the member for Verchères—Les-Patriotes.

I would also like to thank everyone taking part in this great debate on the tragic events that took place between 1915 and 1923 during the first world war and the fall of the Ottoman Empire. These events resulted in many victims in the Armenian community and other communities in the region.

Many atrocities were perpetrated during those years and all of Europe, the Middle East and Asia Minor suffered a great deal. Millions of people were forcibly displaced and, in addition to the terrible anguish of the exodus, many did not survive. As we know, our government has expressed on many occasions, in the House and elsewhere, its profound compassion for the Armenian people and others who suffered so much during that period.

Private Members' Business

I would also like to quote a passage from a personal message sent by the former prime minister to Canadians of Armenian descent on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the Armenian tragedy of 1915:

Canada recognizes and deplores the fact that a great number of Armenians were killed during the wars which marked the end of the Ottoman empire and extends its sympathy to the Armenian Community.

Following the war, numerous displaced Armenians came to Canada and their contribution, as well as that of their descendants, has greatly enriched Canadian society. It is my hope that the memories of the past will serve to remind us of the importance of tolerance and respect for the diversity of our people.

• (1810)

[*English*]

I would also like to reiterate that during the debate on the Armenian tragedy in 1996, and as mentioned earlier, the House adopted a motion recognizing the week of April 20 to 27 each year as a week of remembrance of the inhumanity of people toward one another.

Again I emphasize that on June 10, 1999, following comprehensive consultations, the position of the Government of Canada with regard to these events was clearly set out in a statement made in the House by the hon. member for Halton, speaking on behalf of the foreign affairs minister.

I would like to quote from a reply by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the House on April 18, 2002, to a question from our colleague, the member for Brampton Centre, in which the minister stated:

As [the hon. member] will recall, the government and the Prime Minister on many occasions have expressed the sympathy of our government and our people for the tragedy that occurred to the Armenian people with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

The minister of course followed that with:

We still urge that we should consider these tragic events in their historical context and remember that we must move forward and try to ensure peace and harmony among all people.

These statements make it clear that we remember the suffering caused by this painful period and attach a great deal of importance to ensuring that the memory of this human tragedy is preserved in our collective consciousness and passed on to future generations.

Canada has always been a land of hope for the millions of immigrants who have settled here and those who continue to do so in a spirit of renewal and reconciliation. It is extremely important to keep this concept in mind. Our diversity remains one of our country's greatest qualities, helping us not only to forge economic, political and cultural links with the rest of the world, but also to project and promote our ideals and values such as tolerance, respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

We are all working toward ensuring that these values are reflected in the work of international organizations and in the tools developed to prevent any recurrence of the horrors of the past to uphold human rights. We have a highly credible voice in many countries and within international fora such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in discussing the real possibility that people of different origins and cultures can live together in peace and security.

The world of course listens to us because we speak knowledgeably of our own reality. Canada has steadfastly supported the development of international instruments to promote and uphold human rights and the rule of law.

We are particularly proud of Canada's leadership role in promoting major international initiatives such as the Ottawa convention on landmines and the International Criminal Court initiatives that are an integral part of Canada's global human security agenda.

We attach great importance to establishing positive, comprehensive and of course productive relationships with and between all the countries of the region, including Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Indeed, a stable, prosperous region where reconciliation has triumphed and mutual trust reigns could generate positive developments and spin-offs beyond the immediate borders of the countries concerned.

To place this issue in the context of a European dream, one characterized by reduced tensions and increasingly successful examples of peaceful solutions to political problems, the relations between Armenia and Turkey are of major concern. Again I would like to underscore what we have learned: that both Armenia and Turkey have begun negotiations to begin a process which will hopefully lead to the normalization of their relations.

We believe firmly that it is vital to establish contact, dialogue and relations when and where we can. This is why the Minister of Foreign Affairs wrote to the foreign ministers of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey, encouraging dialogue and offering our willingness to play a supportive role. Now is not the time for the House to pass the motion, as this would only result in upsetting the ongoing dialogue between Armenia and Turkey.

I realize that the motion as brought forward is one that will pit members on a number of sides on various poles and I believe it is important for us to take into consideration the good work that has been done by a lot of people to try to bring this forward. A famous prime minister once said that we must strive for justice; it is impossible to do it at all turns but certainly the most important emphasis is justice in our own time.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the distinguished member from Calgary Southeast.

• (1815)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): You need unanimous consent to do so during private members' hour.

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, I would ask for unanimous consent to share my time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I heard a no.

The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Bill Casey: It is a little disappointing, Mr. Speaker, that we cannot share our time in this debate. It is disappointing because here in Canada we do try to resolve our differences by giving different points of view. We do not resort to violence or military action. It is just disappointing that this happened this way.

This is the third time that I have spoken about this issue over several years. I want to compliment the member for Brampton Centre for raising it before and also the member today for raising it again, because it is an issue that certainly means a lot to a lot of people. It brings out a lot of emotion and a lot of sadness to people's hearts when we talk about it.

I was just thinking that we in North America were all moved by the disaster of September 11 when several thousand people died. Here, we are talking about a million and a half people, 250 times as many people, who were lost during this period from 1915 to 1923. It was a catastrophe of monstrous proportions that took place at the end of the Ottoman Empire and involved World War I.

We can only just possibly imagine what it is like for the Armenians to grasp the situation when we have turned our whole continent inside out because of the September 11 disaster that we experienced. In fact, it was only a small disaster relative to what they have gone through.

The whole debate surrounds the terrible massacre of human life between 1915 and 1923, with estimates in excess of a million and a half men, women and children lost. There was violence and there were deportations, internments, mass murders and all kinds of atrocities. We in the House can hardly imagine what went on.

It is good that we raise these issues, discuss them and raise public awareness of them and that we extend our sympathy to those who still suffer and are torn over the awful events.

We abhor any mass slaughter or killings, whether they are in Rwanda, the Middle East or Europe, by any country or any group. It is important that we remember these issues and work toward finding ways to prevent them. We have a responsibility in Canada to do that now and we have a responsibility to make sure that atrocities in the past are not forgotten. We are very fortunate here in the way we resolve our issues and fortunate that we have not been subject to anything like what those people in any of these disasters that I mentioned had to have experienced.

I think it is very important that we make sure we do everything we can to prevent them, as we are in Afghanistan now and in other areas around the world. It is certainly important that we keep the issues before the public so that we will never forget these awful things that happened.

I want to end my comments with that. This is the third of three debates I have been involved with, and perhaps if I had not been involved with the debates I would never have known anything about this. I hope that Canadians who are listening will take a lesson from it, learn about this issue and give it a lot of thought.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise tonight to support and second this motion

recognizing the Armenian genocide of 90 years ago and to condemn this atrocity as a crime against humanity.

I want to commend the hon. member for Laval Centre for bringing forward such an very important motion tonight. I also want to congratulate our fellow citizens, especially Canadian Armenians, who keep fighting for justice to be done.

As you all know, my hon. colleague for Burnaby—Douglas has moved a great number of motions along those lines over the last 10 years and more.

● (1820)
[*English*]

It is also true that the NDP, through the member for Burnaby—Douglas, has called for April 24 to be officially designated as a day of remembrance for the 1.5 million Armenians who fell victim to the first genocide of the 20th century.

We have all heard false arguments for why Canada should not recognize this genocide. I am very sorry to say that I think we heard one such argument or set of arguments from the new Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs this evening. I think that is regrettable.

The most common argument that one hears—and I think we need a moment to consider this—is that if this recognition of the Armenian genocide were to be adopted by the Parliament of Canada, Canada-Turkey relations would be adversely affected.

I suppose the same people who make that argument would have argued that we in Canada should have plunged ourselves into Bush's Iraqi war because one could say that we might have suffered some retaliation. In fact, many would say we are suffering some retaliation. However, it was an important stand of principle that the Canadian people took in opposing the illegal, unjustified war in Iraq and it is time for us here in Parliament to take a similar principled stand in recognizing the Armenian genocide.

Because I do not wish to encroach on the time of other members, I want to briefly wrap up by quoting from the current president of the Armenian National Committee of Canada and again recognize the important ongoing work that has been done, contrary to the parliamentary secretary who basically says, if I understood his comments, why do we not just let it go and move to the future?

It has to be understood that people move on from such a brutalizing experience to their people, particularly family members and loved ones, by being able to have an acknowledgement of the atrocities and then being able to leave it behind them. It is a psychological matter. It is a political matter. It is an historic question of justice.

Let me quote, in conclusion, from the very thoughtful submission of the Armenian National Committee of Canada:

The recognition of the historical fact of the Armenian genocide by a political body is a genuine expression of respect towards justice, respect towards the memory of the victims, respect towards their sons and daughters all over the world including Canada.

It is not an act of vengeance as it is often portrayed by the politicians of denial, it is not an act of obligation for restitution as professed by authorities of falsification, it is not an act that would create any hatred between communities as it is erroneously represented by the outside sources.

Private Members' Business

It is merely an act of historical justice.

It is time for Canada to add its name into that list of countries [who have already done so].

I hope we will do so here tonight.

Mr. Stan Dromisky (Thunder Bay—Atikokan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has certainly been a change in the atmosphere in this chamber versus the atmosphere of two hours ago. That is a clear indication to me, and to everyone else, that this is a solemn occasion and a sensitive one for all the members present in this chamber.

I would like to tell the House that in October 1995 I was fortunate to have visited Turkey. Why did I visit Turkey? I formed the Canadian-Turkish parliamentary friendship group here and was keenly interested in that country. I was hoping to develop more positive relationships with a country that I knew very little about, and most parliamentarians knew little about the country as well.

It was a highly organized and planned trip, one in which I had complete control in determining whom I would meet, the topics of discussion, concerns, places to examine, from the highest levels of governmental and religious control to the bagel peddlers on the street. Without any doubt, it was a fantastic learning experience.

Before I left Canada, I did a lot of research and had the opportunity to meet with some Canadians of Armenian descent and leaders in the Armenian community.

I will never forget that meeting because they did their very best to convince me not to visit Turkey. They presented to me a picture of a country where they claimed human rights did not exist for the masses and where the Kurds were being persecuted daily.

For instance, one story I remember so vividly claimed that if people were caught speaking on the street or overhead on the bus or on the streetcars speaking one of the Kurdish dialects, they were reported and could be punished. They told me quite a few others.

I soon discovered that none of their horror stories were true. The constitutional protocol of the Turkish government states:

Differences of languages, faith, and origin within our national culture enriches our cultural life. The natural prerequisite of a democratic social structure is that these differences can be expressed freely within the scope of national integrity.

Seventeen constitutional amendments, early in 1995, introduced democratic reforms in the human rights areas, the most important being freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of assembly.

These reforms are working. I found that there were 15 Kurdish newspapers, numerous books written in the Kurdish dialects and today, eight years later, the evidence is overwhelming with over 3,000 independent, not government controlled, radio stations, some broadcasting in the Kurdish dialect.

While visiting the Turkish grand national assembly, which is its parliament, I discovered that over 100 members sitting in that parliament were of Kurdish descent, such as the minister of foreign affairs, Mr. Hikmet Cetin.

With all the democratic improvements that have taken place in Turkey since 1995—and I compare it to all the other countries surrounding Turkey and near Turkey—I firmly believe that Turkey

stands out as the most secular and democratic state in the Middle East.

During my first visit I met many Canadians who had invested in economic projects in Turkey. From Montreal, there was the famous LaSalle College International Fashion School, whose graduates are found in many houses of fashion throughout the world. There was Netas, a giant telecommunications enterprise in Istanbul, a company which is 51% owned by Northern Telecom, and the list goes on.

● (1825)

The highlight of my visit was visiting the enormous complex subway system that was under construction in Ankara, the capital city. Government officials, engineers and representatives from Bombardier Incorporated and SNC-Lavalin, Quebec companies, and a delegation of officials from the Bombardier plant in Thunder Bay—Thunder Bay is my riding—where the subway cars were built, took me on the first trial run of the cars in that system. In that trial run I discovered that they were all highly impressed by the effectiveness of the system and by the superior workmanship revealed within the subway cars.

There is not enough time to deal with the economic relationships between Canadian and Turkish companies. Supporting and accepting this motion, for which there is absolutely no proof of a planned genocide of Armenians, would have disastrous economic effects on Canada's economy.

At this very moment, pending the outcome of this motion, we could win or lose a billion dollar contract to have over 300 subway cars built in the Bombardier plant in Thunder Bay. Over 1,000 employees are involved, mostly highly trained and skilled union members. Parts are manufactured in Thunder Bay, which involves a great number of other skilled workmen, and a great number of parts and systems are manufactured in Quebec.

SNC-Lavalin, a major contributor to telecommunications and control systems for the subway, would also be severely affected, which would mean a decrease in employment of this company, not only in Ontario, but especially in Quebec.

Our ties with Turkey are growing in a very positive manner and we must not jeopardize this beneficial growth in an emotional, reckless, foolhardy manner.

I would like to say a word now about the claimed planned genocide. The Ottoman Empire was comprised of 25 countries. For many years turmoil prevailed throughout certain regions, especially in eastern Anatolia and Armenia, which is in the far eastern section of what we now call Turkey. Even before the Balkan war started in 1912, many were moving and leaving that area for safer havens. Prior to 1912, British, French and Ottoman sources claim the Armenian population was somewhere between 1.05 million and 1.5 million.

Historian Dr. Justin McCarthy of the University of Louisville, British historian Arnold Toynbee and Monseigneur Touchet, a French missionary, all calculated that the Armenians lost approximately 600,000 people from 1912 to 1920. However, during the same period, over 2.5 million Muslims, including Turks, Kurds and Tartars, died in eastern Anatolia. We have no idea how many Russians were killed.

Private Members' Business

The Armenian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1920 declared that, after the war, 280,000 Armenians remained in the Anatolian portion of the occupied Ottoman Empire while 700,000 Armenians emigrated to other countries such as France, Australia, the United States, and Canada, where the majority went to Quebec. Clearly then, a great portion of the Ottoman Armenians were not killed as claimed.

Each needless death is tragic. Equally tragic are lies meant to inflame and perpetuate ethnic hatred. That is not the Canadian way.

•(1830)

In conclusion I would like to quote what the former prime minister, Jean Chrétien, said on April 24, 2002:

—let us be reminded of the importance of working together to eliminate intolerance and fanaticism wherever it appears, and to promote reconciliation and cooperation among peoples.

That is the Canadian way.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin debate, what is the scheduled rotation? There has been some discussion about changing it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): At this point in time, I try to alternate between the government and the opposition, and each and every party, if that is possible. Right now in the rotation it should be a Conservative member, followed by a Liberal, and this should bring us to 6:50 which is closing time.

•(1835)

Mr. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, in recognition of my colleague from Brampton, I will only take three or four minutes.

I have spoken on similar motions a couple of times and I have put on the record what I think is a pretty compelling and undeniable historical record. In my last intervention on this issue, I began reading from headlines that appeared in Canadian media outlets during 1915 and 1916. I would like to continue citing a few of these.

I would like the member from Thunder Bay to perhaps listen to what the Canadian media was reporting as objective news facts during the genocide.

The headline in *London Free Press* on October 22, 1915, read, “Armenian race may disappear before war ends. Vatican has appealed for unfortunate people”.

The *Globe* newspaper, predecessor to the *Globe and Mail*, reported on October 23, 1915, “A million Armenians wiped out by Turks. Only 200,000 Armenian inhabitants of Turkey now remain in country”.

The *Globe* on Saturday the 27th, 1915, reported “unspeakable cruelty to the lot of Armenians, massacres of unsurpassing horror committed, people burned alive, torturing, begging, all descriptive language practised on defenceless Christians.

That was according to Viscount Bryce.

The *Ottawa Evening Journal* on November 29, 1915, reported, “a saturnalism of slaughter by refined methods as young Turks set out to wipe Armenian race out of the world”.

The *Ottawa Evening Journal* of November 30, 1915, reported, “crime of Belgian venial sin when Armenian massacre known to nations”.

Those were the headlines in the Canadian media of the era.

Finally, the *Globe* newspaper, on December 15, 1915, reported, “a million Armenians massacred by Turks. Lord Bryce publishes further report of atrocities in Asia Minor”.

Those were the accounts of Canadian journalists and their firsthand sources in the region at the time. This is not some arcane debate between historians on differing sides. This is a recognized objective, historical fact that cannot be denied.

Let me move briefly to the comments of the parliamentary secretary, who continues to use the government's language of a tragedy. Oxford describes a tragedy as “a serious accident...or natural catastrophe”, whereas it defines a genocide as “the mass extermination of human beings, esp. of a particular race or nation”.

I believe the historical fact is absolutely clear and undeniable that that was what occurred during the first world war in that region. There was a deliberate attempt by an element of the then Ottoman government to destroy the Armenian people. I believe that just as the western world has recognized the reality of the Holocaust and has learned from the terrible historical lessons of that era, so too must we learn from the first great genocide of the last century.

I closing I want to say that I have many friends in the Turkish Canadian community. I have had representations made to me by the excellent Turkish ambassador to Canada, by the Turkish consul in Calgary and other members of that community. I believe the passage of this motion should in no way, shape or form cast any kind of cloud over the marvellous contribution made to Canada by Turkish immigrants, nor should it in any way inhibit our fantastic relationship with our NATO ally and aspiring European Union member in Turkey.

I reject categorically the notion that acceptance of the historical reality of the genocide will in any way inhibit our relationship with Turkey. I believe in that relationship. I am a fan of Turkey as a Muslim country that is seeking to lead the way in terms of democracy and human rights. Yes, it is imperfect, and yes, improvements are needed in many areas in terms of minorities, but it is so much further ahead of many countries in that region. We need to continue to build on that relationship and we need to ensure that the Turks in Canada do not feel that this motion in any way places any culpability on the Turkish people. That is simply a red herring.

On behalf of the vast majority of members in my party, we ought to recognize the historical realities so that our grandchildren and their grandchildren will know that this was the first great genocides, and that we must recognize it in our history if we are to prevent these things from reoccurring in the future.

Private Members' Business

• (1840)

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Laval Centre for presenting the motion. This is not the first and it will not be the last. I would hope it would be the last because we have worked on this in the past and we have to get on with debating other issues in the House to do with the Armenian-Turkish relationship. I hope we support this motion and go forward from here.

I want to reflect on the comments made by my colleague from Thunder Bay. He mentioned that Turkey is ready to join the European Union. That is a false statement because Turkey has tried for the last 30 or 40 years to join and every time it has been blocked for many reasons. The first issue was the human rights treatment by the Turkish government against a minority. The second issue was the Kurdish minority treatment. The third issue was the Armenian genocide. The fourth issue was the Cyprus issue. If it does not address these four issues, Turkey will never be a European Union country.

My colleague mentioned that the Turkish constitution is such a fantastic instrument. He may be right, but the Turkish constitution was written after the genocide. No constitution in the world would provide that type of clause. Even the Hitler constitution did not provide for genocide of the Jews. The Rwanda constitution and the Bosnia constitution never provided a clause to kill a minority.

These things are done in the name of national security. Turkey at the time felt that the Armenians were a threat to national security: "Let us eliminate them; let us solve it with a final resolution and get it over with".

My colleague from the NDP mentioned Iraq, the U.S. and Canada. She is 100% right. We can afford to upset the U.S.A. when we do about \$1 billion of trade a day. With Turkey our trade over two years was \$1 billion. If we can provoke the U.S. in these conditions, what is the big deal about a so-called provocation with Turkey? Of course we know this whole thing is hot air.

When France passed a resolution two or three years ago, the Turkish ambassador was recalled from Paris to Ankara and six months later he went back. It said it was going to cancel the contract. No contract was cancelled. Therefore the argument is totally false.

My colleague from Thunder Bay mentioned that SNC-Lavalin and the Canadian government are involved in a contract with the Turkish government to provide some 300 rail cars. I have been there long enough, especially on this issue for 25 to 30 years. Three years ago there were discussions that Turkey was going to buy a Candu reactor from us.

Every time there is a motion in the House that this issue is close to a settlement or a final resolution, Turkey comes up with a so-called memorandum of understanding. If anyone believes that Turkey is going to buy these rail cars from Bombardier, good luck. They are really naive to believe that Turkey is going to pay for this. It has no money to pay for its own daily expenses so how could it afford to pay so much money for this kind of fantastic service? Bombardier should know better. That company is being used to provoke the Canadian government to take a stand against the Armenian question.

It was mentioned earlier that we owe it to ourselves to know and recognize the history of this issue. This is not to do with the Turkish government. At the end of the day the relations between the two countries, Turkey and Armenia, will improve because this issue is out of the way.

I have a list of the countries that have recognized the genocide. The most recent one is the Swiss government on December 16, 2003. Others are the Canadian Senate on June 13, 2002; the European parliament assembly on April 24, 2001; the Italian chamber of deputies; the Lebanese parliament; the French national assembly; the Belgian senate; the U.S. House of Representatives; the Argentine senate; and the European parliament. There was a French law in January 20, 2001. Again there is the European parliament; the French national assembly; the Swedish parliament; the council of the European parliament; the Lebanese parliament; the Hellenic parliament; the Russian Duma; the European parliament; the Cyprus parliament; and Uruguay. There was a joint declaration of France, Great Britain and Russia on May 23, 1915 to condemn what happened to the Armenians.

My colleague from Calgary also read a few pages of a book.

• (1845)

I have in my possession a newspaper articles from the *Evening Telegram*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *London Times* and the *New York Times*. I also have in my possession all the resolutions I read earlier, about 40 or 50 pages, that passed through the parliaments of Canada, the United States and the European parliament. I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to leave these documents with the clerk for further study.

I remember debating this issue way back. I remember a few years ago there was the Cr ditiste Party some 30 or 40 years ago. They raised this issue—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. B lair): I would like to clarify with the hon. member because we are not sure what he wants.

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the documents I mentioned earlier. I have clippings from the *Evening Telegram*, the *New York Times*, the *London Times* and the *Globe and Mail* newspapers. These documents speak about the issue at the time. They are not edited. They are simply historical facts as they were written in 1915.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. B lair): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table the documents?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian: Mr. Speaker, I am sure anyone who would study these historical facts would find many undisputed facts in this presentation.

I mentioned earlier that the Cr ditistes in the 1960s were probably the first political party in the House of Commons to raise the issue of the Armenian genocide. Since then, in the 1970s and 1980s we passed many resolutions in the House to bring the issue into focus for the Canadian public.

Private Members' Business

I have to say that the issue was quite forceful and brought out many points of view on how to solve this problem. I am pleased that our Parliament in the past 10 years has passed many resolutions. One resolution was passed a couple of years ago by the Senate. The resolution asked the government and the Parliament of Canada to recognize this genocide as an historic event.

The second resolution passed nine to seven in the foreign affairs committee. That was an historic day for us. The foreign affairs committee accepted the fact that the House of Commons must recognize the act of genocide and passed the resolution on to the Government of Canada. I would like to have that motion passed again.

The motion was:

That the Committee invite the House of Commons to recognize the genocide of the Armenians, which began at the turn of the last C century, by the Ottoman Turks, during the First World War.

There was also a resolution passed in 1996 which was mentioned earlier. The resolution declared April 20 to 27 as a week of remembrance of the inhumanity to fellow man.

What is important is that we have to continue this struggle not only for the sake of Armenians, not only for the sake of the Turks, but it is vital to recognize the historical fact. When we take positive steps, it will help bring these two nations together forever. They will live together because Armenia and Turkey are still there. Armenia will not vanish and neither will Turkey.

It is better that we do our part to bring them together so they can move forward for the peace, security and prosperity of both the Armenians and Turks.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

It being 6:49 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:49 p.m.)

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