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(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 10, 2005

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 10, 2005

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)
[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Finance on Bill C-24, an act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts (fiscal equalization payments to the provinces and funding to the territories), and agreed on Wednesday, February 9 to report it with amendment.

• (1005)

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

The committee is recommending that the federal government increase funding to the women's program in Status of Women Canada by at least 25% for investments in women's groups and equality seeking organizations.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 the committee has requested a comprehensive government response.

* * *

• (1010)

PETITIONS

LABELING OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present two petitions, both pertaining to the matter of fetal alcohol syndrome and the need for alcohol warning labels on all alcohol beverage containers.

The petitioners are very concerned that the government has taken no action over the many years that this issue has been raised and certainly since April 2001 when this Parliament overwhelmingly passed a motion in support of such warning labels.

They will obviously take heart at the developments yesterday in the House but call upon the government to act as quickly as possible to ensure that every alcohol beverage container contains a warning that says drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause birth defects.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition from many members of my community in regard to the matter of missile defence.

My community is concerned that missile defence is designed to be a step toward weapons and war in space, including nuclear weapons and war.

The petitioners are calling upon Parliament to maintain Canada's multilateral approach to security and reaffirm this country's support for non-proliferation arms control and disarmament; to reject any and all plans for weapons and war in space, including plans for missile defence; and to seek Canada's withdrawal from any discussion of or participation in missile defence and the weaponization of space.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS ACT

Hon. Stephen Owen (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-39, an act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act and to enact an act respecting the provision of funding for diagnostic and medical equipment, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Government Orders

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to introduce at second reading an act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act and to enact an act respecting the provision of funding for diagnostic and medical equipment. It is a very long name, possibly befitting the enormous sums of money involved and the importance of this agreement to all Canadians.

Canadians have told their governments that health care is of primary importance to them. As such, they have asked governments to work together to strengthen the health care system, to improve access to essential services and to reduce the wait times.

Canadians want to ensure the health care system is there for them today and sustainable for future generations. Governments are working to meet those expectations.

In September 2004 all first ministers signed a 10 year plan to strengthen health care. In support of the 10 year plan, the Government of Canada committed to increase its transfer to provinces and territories for health by the sum of \$41 billion over 10 years starting in this fiscal year 2004-05. The increased funding of \$41 billion will do three important things.

First, it will strengthen the Canada health transfer, the largest federal transfer supporting health care. It will both increase the base level of the transfer and establish an automatic 6% escalator, which is an unprecedented move to ensure predictable and stable growth in the federal transfer support.

Second, it will create a wait times reduction transfer to assist provinces and territories in reducing wait times according to their respective priorities.

Third, the new federal funding will provide an additional \$500 million to provinces and territories for diagnostic and medical equipment, helping to improve access to publicly funded diagnostic services. The commitment to provide an additional \$41 billion to provinces and territories will help ensure that current and future generations of Canadians have timely access to essential quality health care across the country.

At the September 2004 meeting of first ministers, a broad consensus emerged between governments on a shared agenda renewal of health care in Canada. That agenda focused on ensuring that Canadians have access to the care they need when they need it. As a result, federal, provincial and territorial governments agreed upon an action plan to ensure viable health care for Canadians setting out commitments to improve access and to reduce wait times.

The federal government is committed to doing its part to support the needed renewal and reform of health care. As part of its contribution to an effective working partnership on health care, the federal government brings a commitment to a growing, stable and predictable health care funding so that provinces and territories can plan for the future.

The bill before us today would provide for new federal funding over the next 10 years in support of the agreement signed by the first ministers on health.

To that end, the Government of Canada commits \$41 billion in new federal funding over 10 years to meet those goals set out in that 10 year plan. Bill C-39 would implement those funding commitments.

To accelerate and broaden health care renewal and reform, the federal government will take a number of steps to strengthen the Canada health transfer, otherwise known as the CHT. It will invest an additional \$3 billion in CHT in 2004-05 and 2005-6 to close the so-called Romanow gap.

A second important initiative is establishing a new, higher base for the Canada health transfer beginning in 2005-06. In that year the new CHT base will be \$19 billion.

• (1015)

This commitment fully satisfies and in fact exceeds the recommendations made in the Romanow report on the future of health care in Canada. That new and higher base of \$19 billion includes \$500 million in targeted funding for home care and catastrophic drug coverage, clear priorities to many Canadians.

This funding for home care and catastrophic drug coverage recognizes and supports the first ministers' commitments to improve access to home and community care services and catastrophic drug coverage. These commitments are important to improving the quality of life of many Canadians and to ensure that no Canadian suffers undue financial hardship in accessing needed drug therapies.

Also of note, the health reform transfer created as part of the 2003 accord is now being rolled into the CHT effective 2005-06 and beyond. This consolidation of federal support for health reflects the continuing commitment to enhanced transparency and accountability and to support reforms established in the 2003 accord, including primary care, home care and catastrophic drug coverage.

To ensure predictable and sustainable growth in health care funding through the CHT, the government has committed to legislate an automatic escalator. An automatic escalator of 6% will be applied to the new health care transfer base of \$19 billion effective in the fiscal year 2006-07.

This rate of growth is higher than the projected rate of nominal GDP growth, the rate of growth of the Canadian economy and, therefore, growth in total federal revenues over the periods 2006-07 to 2013-14. This rate of growth is fully consistent with the recommendations of the Romanow report. In other words, the federal government has agreed to increase the funding to CHT faster than the economy will grow and faster than we anticipate that federal revenues will be realized.

Government Orders

Foremost in the 10 year plan is the need to make timely access to quality care a reality for Canadians. The government remains committed to the dual objectives of better management of wait times and measurable reduction of wait times where they are longer than medically acceptable. All jurisdictions have taken concrete steps to address wait times, particularly in such priority areas as cancer, cardiac care and diagnostic imaging. The bill provides for an investment of the Government of Canada of \$5.5 billion over 10 years in wait times reduction transfer.

Funding of \$4.25 billion will be provided through a third party trust and accounted for by the Government of Canada in 2004-05. The government recognizes that not all provinces and territories are at the same stage in implementing their wait time reduction strategies. Provinces and territories will now have the flexibility to draw down funding according to their respective jurisdictional priorities to meet their wait time reduction commitments.

This funding will primarily be used for priorities identified by each jurisdiction. These priorities include: clearing backlogs, training and hiring more health care professionals, building capacity for regional centres of excellence, and expanding appropriate ambulatory and community care programs and tools to manage wait times.

Beginning in the fiscal year 2009-10, \$250 million will be provided through an annual transfer to provinces and territories in support of health human resources and tools to manage wait times.

• (1020)

The government will also provide to provinces and territories a further \$500 million for medical equipment in 2004-05. Building on previous investments in diagnostic and medical equipment under the 2000 and 2003 health accords, this funding will assist provinces and territories in improving access to publicly funded diagnostic services by providing funding for new equipment and the related specialized staff training that is required to operate this new equipment.

The \$500 million more than fulfills the government's commitment that additional revenues from the goods and services tax as a result of the spike in gasoline taxes would be redirected toward further investments in medical equipment on a one time basis.

As a result of these commitments, total federal cash transfers in support of health are scheduled to rise to \$30.5 billion in the years 2013-14 from \$16.3 billion in 2004-05. The bulk of this new funding is being provided through the Canada health transfer, which will grow by 6% annually from its new base of \$19 billion in 2005-06 to nearly \$30.3 billion in the year 2014. This represents a significant and continuing federal investment in the Canadian health care system.

In addition, all funding will be distributed to provinces and territories on an equal per capita basis in order to ensure equal support for all Canadians regardless of their place of residence.

The new federal support of \$41 billion for 10 years builds on previous federal investments in provincial and territorial health care achieved under the 2000 agreement on health and the 2003 first ministers accord on health renewal.

In September 2000 first ministers agreed to an action plan for health care renewal. In support of the first ministers agreement for

health, the federal government invested an additional \$23.4 billion through the Canada health and social transfer to accelerate and broaden health renewal and reform.

Drawing on the 2000 framework supporting reform and renewal, in February 2003 the first ministers accord on health care renewal set out a plan for reforms to improve access to quality health care for Canadians. Building on the significant investments in 2000, the federal government provided \$36.8 billion in support of the initiatives outlined in the 2003 accord.

In addition to increased federal financial support, the first ministers also agreed in the 2003 accord that the sustained renewal of Canada's health care system required structural change. That is why they agreed to restructure the Canada health and social transfer into two separate transfers: the Canada health transfer and the Canada social transfer.

The Canada health transfer was designed to provide growing and predictable support for health. It also improves the transparency and accountability of the Government of Canada's support for health. And through the new CST, provinces and territories have continued flexibility to allocate federal funding for post-secondary education, social assistance and social services, including child care programs, according to their respective priorities.

In addition, these transfers meet the recommendation in the Romanow report for the creation of a dedicated cash transfer for health.

These measures contained in the 2000 and 2003 accords provide a predictable, sustainable and growing long term funding and planning framework for transfers to the provinces and territories in support of health care.

• (1025)

The new funding of \$41 billion in the 10 year plan builds on the significant federal investments in health care in the 2000 and 2003 accords. This new funding confirms the government's commitment to making major reinvestments in health a clear priority for Canadians.

Improving our health care system is not just about money. It is about results. All orders of government remain committed to an action plan that achieves results. As such, first ministers recognize that making health care sustainable and able to adapt to the ever-changing needs of Canadians will take time, sustained commitment and adequate resources.

Government Orders

Under the 10 year plan, the governments agreed to report to their residents on health system performance, including the elements outlined in the communiqué of September 16, 2004. In fulfillment of its commitment to Canadians, recognizing that it has authorized significant new expenditures of Canadian taxpayers' money, Bill C-39 includes a provision for parliamentary review of progress in implementing the 10 year plan.

As the hon. members know, at the first ministers meeting this past October, the Government of Canada announced fundamental changes to Canada's equalization program and territorial financing formula. These changes will bring stability, predictability and growth to the overall level of funding for these programs.

Bill C-24, currently before Parliament and just reintroduced into Parliament from the finance committee as of this morning, sets out a new \$33 billion framework for equalization and territorial formula financing. When combined with the \$41 billion health accord, these investments will total a cumulative increase of \$74 billion in new money transferred from the federal government to the provinces and territories over the next 10 years. This illustrates the government's commitment to ensuring that all provinces and all territories can offer the best possible services to their citizens.

In summary, Canadians have told their governments, year after year, to work together to ensure that our health system will be there for them and their children. Governments have responded.

On September 16, 2004, all the first ministers signed the 10 year plan to strengthen health care. As stated in the Speech from the Throne of October 5, 2004, "the Plan sets out a clear commitment, shared by all provinces and territories to achieve tangible results—results for patients".

The 10 year plan provides \$41 billion in new federal funding in support of these commitments. This is new funding that goes directly to provinces and territories in support of health care services that Canadians need.

The funding strengthens core support for health care and the principles of the Canada Health Act through increases to the Canada health transfer. It helps provinces and territories reduce wait times through the targeted wait times reduction transfer, and it provides additional funding for diagnostic and medical equipment.

The federal government has confirmed its commitment to health care reform and renewal through the tabling of this legislation to implement the funding commitments of the 10 year plan and provide growing and predictable transfer support for provinces and territories.

The \$41 billion in increased federal investment represents the firm commitment of the Government of Canada toward ensuring the sustainability of the health care system and that all Canadians have access to essential health services when they need them.

Hon. members can no doubt appreciate the importance of passing the bill in a timely fashion so that provinces and territories can have access to the 2004-05 funding and begin to plan for future programs. I therefore urge all hon. members to support the speedy passage of the bill.

● (1030)

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Madam Speaker, the hon. member talked about results and equal access regardless of the place of residence. I would like to point out that results and the past performance of individuals or governments can be a measure of what one can expect in the future. As we all know, the Liberal record on health care is terrible. The Liberals are the ones who cut the \$25 billion from the health care system in the first place and caused this health care crisis that we now have to deal with.

The member has said that everyone will have equal access regardless of their place of residence and that the moneys will be accounted for. I wonder, then, if the member can explain why the health care system for our first nations throughout Canada has been compared to those of third world nations. Why is it that the federal government has no measure of accountability on how the moneys are spent on first nations? And this is not just someone from a political party making this suggestion; it is the Health Council of Canada.

It is really disturbing that the federal government, which provides health care benefits for almost a million people, which makes it about number five as far as health care providers in Canada are concerned, has shown consistently that it is unable to provide health care for those people. Therefore, why should anyone believe that the government has any credibility on this file?

Thus, my question to the member is about equal access. We know that equal access does not exist. Regarding place of residence, I am sure that the people of our first nations would say that their health care is not adequate. As far as accountability goes, where is all the money going to these places? How can the member make these assertions when he knows very well that the Liberals are the ones who are not accountable? We just have to look at the Prime Minister's testimony today to find out where Liberal moneys are going. I wonder if the member could respond to this.

● (1035)

Hon. John McKay: First of all, Madam Speaker, I would like to point out to the hon. member that this bill is entirely with respect to federal transfers to provinces and territories and therefore has nothing to do with the federal government's additional responsibilities for first nations. In that respect, at one level, his question is irrelevant.

At another level, he asks about the issue of accountability. The issue of accountability is accomplished here. It is accomplished here in the House of Commons, it is accomplished here at the health committee, on which I know the hon. member sits, and it is accomplished by the Auditor General's review of the performance of the federal government in a whole variety of areas, which includes fiduciary responsibility for people of first nations.

There is an accountability mechanism, but as I say, the larger part of his question really has nothing to do with the bill before us today.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Côté (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Madam Speaker, during his speech, the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood talked a lot about the significant amounts to be paid to the provinces under this health agreement and the bill. He also talked at length about the broad consensus among the provinces regarding the implementation of this legislation and the accountability process.

I should point out that, in September, the participants at the meeting that led to the introduction of this bill recognized the notion of asymmetrical federalism, more specifically in the health sector where specific agreements can be reached with various provinces. Indeed, Quebec did sign a specific agreement.

I wonder if the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood could elaborate somewhat on how this bill will apply to Quebec? To what extent does it recognize Quebec's specific situation in the context of an agreement on asymmetrical federalism?

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay: Madam Speaker, as the hon. member knows, there were a series of communiqués, and I believe there were three agreements in total, entered into by the provincial premiers. All of the subnational governments entered into these agreements as part of the overall health care plan in September 2004.

Included in those communiqués was one entitled “Asymmetrical Federalism”. That communiqué, along with the other communiqués, is actually referenced in the bill before us. Therefore it is incorporated by reference. It fully respects the jurisdictional sensibilities of all the subnational governments.

• (1040)

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the hon. member's speech. He talked about the \$41 billion over the next 10 years that is going from the federal government to the provinces.

Last June we had an election. In that election the Liberals ran on health care as the number one item on their agenda. As an election promise, the number of dollars they said they would put toward health care was only half of what the government came up with in September. Actually, the numbers that came forward in the 10 year health accord were much closer to the numbers the Conservative Party had laid before the people of Canada, in genuine honesty, as far as what we should be doing with regard to health care over the upcoming period of time.

How did the Liberals miss their numbers so badly going into an election? Was it lack of foresight, lack of understanding, or a lack of vision when the government came up with the deal that it struck with the provinces last fall?

Hon. John McKay: Madam Speaker, my recollection of the various platforms is that the government had numbers that were fully costed and which reflected viability within the growth of the federal government's revenues within the growth of the economy as such. All governments regardless of their political stripe are necessarily constrained by the growth or indeed the absence of growth of government.

Point number one is that the hon. member will note that the escalator in the agreement is 6%. Six per cent is way beyond the

number for either nominal GDP or indeed real GDP going forward. We have not had a 6% year in I do not know how long; I would be speculating to name the year.

The second point has to do with the fact that this is an agreement. An agreement among governments would certainly supersede any election platform, whether it is the hon. member's platform or whether it is ours.

This was a negotiated agreement among the first ministers. This bill reflects that particular agreement.

I think that in some large measure the hon. member's question is irrelevant.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Madam Speaker, when the Prime Minister cut \$25 billion from the health care system in 1995, he gouged it for at least a generation. Essentially the bill only replaces some of the funding the government took from the health care system in the first place. The government should stop its self-congratulations and reflect on the harm it has caused all those who need care.

The Conservative Party supported the 2004 health care deal in part because any deal is better than no deal. The people on the front lines, the patients and the health care professionals need help and they need it now. The return of the stolen money deserves no accolades; rather it demands a watchful eye to prevent the same crime from happening again.

Restored funding is a welcome development, if a decade too late. However, money alone will not solve the problems with which the Liberals have burdened our health care system. It is not enough to throw money at a system and say, “Heal thyself”. Leadership is needed, leadership that is accountable to Parliament and to Canadians. Leadership means having the courage to commit to the necessary change and to see it through. Leadership means focusing on a goal until it is realized. Leadership means keeping those with a stake in the system in all cases, in this case Canadians, informed and aware of the progress made.

More money will not ensure accountability. Dollars invested must be accounted for, but unfortunately, measuring how money is spent and the value of that investment is difficult due to the dearth of reliable information provided by the government.

In the next 10 years \$41 billion will be transferred to the provinces. That is a lot of money, but I ask, how will Canadians know how that money is being spent? How will Canadians judge if it is being used effectively and for its intended purposes? The Liberal government's past handling of the public purse instills little confidence that it will manage the transfer of such a large amount of money and important funds in an honest and effective manner.

The bill makes mention of a parliamentary review in three years and one more three years later. There will be two reviews in the span of a decade. Giving the Liberals three years to manage our money without any accountability is like hiring the Hamburglar for a late night shift at McDonald's; Big Macs will inevitably go missing. Virtually no accountability mechanisms will be put in place. It makes me wonder how we will know that Canadians are getting a bang for their buck.

Government Orders

If the government were truly serious about reforming health care, it would not have walked away from the table in 2004 without agreeing to accountability measures. It would have included something in the bill that did not need to be reinvented. In fact, a mechanism for accountability already existed with the previous accord of 2003. Why does the bill not provide a mechanism that allows Parliament to review the progress and expenditures on a yearly basis?

Although accountability provisions are very weak, we will hold the federal and provincial governments accountable for meeting the commitments that they made in the 10 year plan.

In its annual report to Parliament the government consistently fails to report on a variety of important issues. These were recently highlighted in reports last fall. One of these deals with privatization.

A wait time reduction transfer will also be created to provide funding to help provinces reduce wait times according to their respective priorities. Unfortunately, the bill will give the finance minister the right to determine how much money is given and when, therefore opening the door for yet more Liberal funny accounting.

• (1045)

We are seeing that today. The Prime Minister is in front of a judge trying to explain why the Liberals were able to funnel money to their friends. It is the first time in 130 years a prime minister has found himself in this situation. It is very disturbing that we are setting up a playing field for such activity to occur again.

The value of this transfer and when it would take place should be predetermined and not be subject to the whims of a minister looking to fiddle with the books. Nary a whisper has been heard from the government in its yearly reports on privatization within the health care system. Private for profit services have proliferated, yet these reports make no mention whatsoever of this reality.

Governments at both levels are obviously not following the reporting protocol demanded in law by the CHA. The provinces fail to provide the information they are supposed to, and the federal government is not enforcing the law it is required to uphold.

Again we saw this with the Health Council of Canada in its report last fall and in the testimony of Michael Decter. The federal government is not leading the way in accountability to Canadians. In fact it is the anchor of non-progress on transparency and accountability.

Canadians deserve to know the details about the private clinics across the country. They deserve to know how new public-private partnerships initiated in several cities are progressing. What is the extent of this change? How much does it cost? What are the effects on the health care system?

Soon after his appointment the minister said that it was his priority to stem the tide of privatization. The lines of accountability are non-existent. He can continue to ignore his promise to Canadians. Privatization in health care, the supposed scourge of the Liberals which the Liberals vowed to defend Canadians from, is now a day to day reality in Canada.

In the last decade increasing medical use of MRIs, patient concerns and the business needs of for profit medical enterprises have fuelled an explosion in demand for high tech non-invasive diagnostic imaging. Private MRI clinics have sprung up across Canada in the past decade.

Canada's first for profit MRI clinic opened in Calgary in 1993. It was followed quickly by another in Vancouver. Today there are for profit MRI and CT machines in four provinces: three MRIs and one CT in B.C.; five MRI clinics, three with CT scanners in Alberta; ten MRIs and six to eight CTs in Quebec; and one MRI in Nova Scotia. At least one public hospital, St. Paul's in Vancouver, offers CT scans to patients for pay.

The health minister has indicated his intention is to penalize B.C. for allowing private clinics to charge fees for medically necessary treatment. Yet he fails to acknowledge that some provinces take liberties with the Canada Health Act. In fact Quebec is a province that is home to half of the country's 34 private MRI clinics.

It would be nice if the government could come clean on this subject. It should at least be transparent and admit the reality. We do have private health care in Canada, yet the government pretends it does not exist.

If public moneys are being used to provide services to Canadians at for profit clinics, should there not be some acknowledgment of this fact? Should Canadians not know how much of their \$41 billion is being spent on private medicine?

Aside from the one time contribution in 2005-06, no money is offered for pharmacare. This is despite the fact that many Canadians, especially in Atlantic Canada, have no catastrophic drug coverage.

• (1050)

There was also passing mention to affordable drugs. There is nothing new in this deal on health that will lessen the burden of prescription medications for Canadians. The government agreed to set up a committee to study the issue and report back. More committees will not help Canadians. In fact, the committee will not report until many years in the future. Contrast that with the Conservatives, who promised a catastrophic drug program. By now, if we had a Conservative government, no doubt it would already be underway.

However, Conservatives feel that individuals and families should not be financially ruined by exorbitant drug bills. Nor should they be unable to get the drugs they need because they do not have the money. The Liberals simply failed to address this question.

Canadians are now realizing that the Liberal government's solutions on health care will not provide relief to an already burdened medicare system. More money is not the key to reforming the system and providing a truly universal health care system in Canada. We need to look at other issues as well, for example, healthy living initiatives. Health care is more than just hospitals and clinics, MRIs and pharmaceuticals. Health care is about healthy living.

Government Orders

The government approach to health care is in many ways in the wrong direction. Rather than devoting billions of dollars only to treating those already sick or injured, why not focus as well on preventing Canadians from becoming sick or injured in the first place? Provincial governments across Canada are taking steps to encourage and educate their populations about the benefits of healthy living. It can relieve a great deal of burden on our health care system so our doctors and nurses can focus their efforts on those who are truly in need of medical attention.

Reducing smoking, encouraging healthier diets, more frequent exercise and cleaning the environment will all improve the general health of Canadians. Government's role in these efforts is not to force Canadians to change, but to educate them about the benefits of a healthier lifestyle and cleaner environment, and provide them the incentives to change.

Patient safety needs require attention. Studies have shown that preventable or adverse events may cause 10,000 to 20,000 deaths per year. Over a million hospital days are devoted to treating injury and sickness caused by adverse events. Imagine the time and money that could be saved if these were reduced. This again highlights the Liberals' backward approach to health care reform. Rather than simply having a health care system that people deserve, they are trying to deal with chronic care at the end.

A national mental health strategy would also have benefits. Mental health is like the estranged cousin of the health care system. Canada is the only country in the G-7 that does not have an articulated strategy for dealing with mental health. It is time the government addressed this issue and plays a leadership role in helping Canadians with mental illness. In conjunction with the leadership of the provincial governments across Canada, the federal government will play an important role in devoting resources and research to the treatment of mental illness.

Then we have the personnel shortages about which we hear so much. Responding to public concern, the government would establish a waiting time reduction transfer. The reason for this is obvious. Waiting times for certain services in certain places have become dangerously long. However, waiting times are only part of the problem. No matter the funding level, without enough health care workers in the system, the system will not function properly.

Canada's health care system faces looming personnel shortages. The number of doctors, nurses, technicians and other practitioners is increasingly inadequate to meet the demands of an aging population. Supply simply cannot keep up with the demand.

According to a Decima poll, more than 4 million Canadians cannot find a family doctor. Without a strong front line health care system, people cannot adequately access health care and deal with the health care issues from which these people suffer.

• (1055)

Front line physicians as a group are getting older, accepting fewer patients, working fewer hours and providing fewer services. The Ontario College of Physicians reports that since 2000 the average age of a practising physician in Ontario has increased from 49 to 51 years of age. In the past four years the number of family doctors accepting new patients has declined from 39% to 16.5%. Compared

to their older peers, younger physicians are devoting less time to direct patient care. Doctors across the country are reducing the services they provide. Traditionally, half of all physicians were family doctors. Today less than 30% of medical students opt for family practice as a career and increasingly prefer less stressful, more lucrative careers is specialization.

Nurses too are aging as a profession. When baby boomers start retiring in droves, there simply will not be enough nurses to staff an already overburdened workforce.

The bottom line is that more funding alone will not solve the growing personnel shortage. The government lacks a comprehensive strategy to recruit and train tomorrow's health care workers.

Foreign credentials need to be recognized so more qualified foreign trained physicians can practise in Canada. The government must pressure federal health organizations to end protectionism and controls that make it so difficult for foreign health professionals to get their credentials accepted. The government should also free up and provide resources so residency spots can be provided to allow these professionals to get the necessary training or qualifications they need to practise in Canada.

This is not a health issue, but needs cooperation on other files such as immigration, labour in cooperation with the provinces that are responsible for education.

Disparities in health care, access and the quality of service are rampant. It is no secret that despite the Liberal assurances that health care is provided universally to all Canadians, many receive less than adequate care, and it does depend, unfortunately, on where one lives.

Disparities and access to services and quality of services received is divided in regional and socio-economic groups. Atlantic and northern Canada tend to have poorer service than central Canada. Rural areas generally have poorer health care than do urban areas. Aboriginals and others with lower income certainly have poorer health care services.

Increased funding will not narrow the widening disparities in health care services provided to different Canadians. The government bill provides no assurances that this embarrassing situation will be addressed adequately. It is the same old theme, talking about the problem, throwing money at it and expecting everything to be all right. Then we have another health care summit to divvy up more money to solve the same problems. People are getting sick and tired of these health care summits. They want action.

Government Orders

We have a report that shows that 24,000 deaths per year may be caused by adverse events. Health Canada officials agreed yesterday before the health committee that this estimate is probably too conservative, as in all likelihood many more adverse events go unreported.

We have issues around prescription error. Online prescribing can help deal with this needless loss of life. It is not enough for the Liberals to say that funding has been provided and progress has been made. While they dither, people die. Aside from the cost in lives, researchers estimate that more than a million days in hospital could be attributed to adverse events.

The Liberals continue to show that they are unable to deal with health care in Canada. They caused the problem. They have a shameful record when it comes to tracking aboriginal health.

• (1100)

Is it not ironic that the government talks about accountability when it is not accountable itself? We have the ad scam, we have the cancelling of the helicopters, we have the HRDC boondoggle and the gun registry. The list goes on and on.

Conservative promises were made, and only the Conservative Party has the credibility.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's speech today and the concerns that he has raised. I know he has real heart to see the health care system improved in the country.

On the issue of accountability, he mentioned statistics about adverse events. Just yesterday we had the Canadian Patient Safety Institute at committee. There have been a tremendous number of deaths and casualties from medical treatment. That is just in the hospitals.

Is the member aware of an issue that came up recently with regard to *C. difficile* in Montreal area hospitals and across the nation. About 600 deaths were reported from this bacteria, a hospital based infection. Related to that was handwashing, overcrowding and use of antibiotics. However, there was another issue and that was the use of a commonly prescribed class of medications that people were on when they entered the hospital. That is gastric acid inhibitors that people take for heartburn and to reduce gastric acidity. There is a 250% increase in risk for people on these medications.

However, no one wanted to address the accountability in the system even though the CMA Journal had raised the issue in July. By October, they were reporting 600 deaths and no public warning and no warning to doctors that if a patient was on this class of medication, they should not go near a hospital with *C. difficile*. It surprised me that Canadian public health officials did not see that as a public health issue. They saw that as a practice guideline issue.

Along with his concerns, would he care to continue his remarks? I know he had remarks on his concerns about safety. Would he care to comment on that one.

• (1105)

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Madam Speaker, this is obviously a very important issue. People are dying as the member has stated.

Given the short period of time to answer the question, I will just say this. The Liberal government has caused a crisis in the health care system. This crisis permeates the entire system. This is just another example of not having the adequate number of health care professionals to deal with the increased number of patients. It is poor planning, a lack of funding and accountability.

It shows that the Liberals have caused a very difficult situation. We need to work hard. It will take a long time to deal with the damage that the Liberal government has caused to the health care system. I hope that when the Liberals go to bed at night, they think about all the people who have died needlessly due to their policies.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Côté (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Madam Speaker, unfortunately, the Bloc Québécois cannot support this bill in its present form.

Earlier, I asked the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood how, in the bill, Quebec's specificity, or Quebec's specific agreement, negotiated in September 2004 at the first ministers' conference, was recognized. The hon. member said that all the communiqués were incorporated into the bill and, consequently, that asymmetrical federalism and the agreement reached with Quebec were recognized de facto in the legislation.

Unfortunately, I must correct the hon. member opposite. While there is a brief mention of all the communiqués, the reference is found in a very specific part of the bill dealing with the parliamentary review. What is a parliamentary review? Once the various measures included in this bill are implemented, how will they be monitored? How will the accountability process relating to the implementation of these various measures be conducted? Indeed, the relevant clause provides that, for greater certainty and for the purposes of this section, the 2004 10-year plan to strengthen health care includes the communiqués released in respect of the first ministers' meeting on the future of health care that was held from September 13 to 15, 2004.

This is unfortunate, for it shows just how sensitive this government is to Quebec. For so important an accord, an accord on asymmetrical federalism which even the government recognized as historic, when the time comes to implement it, this government forgets the most important thing, recognizing the distinctiveness of Quebec in implementing the accord.

How is it recognized? I remind you that, in the wake of this 2004 conference, the government acknowledged that asymmetrical federalism allows for any province to have specific agreements and arrangements. The first ministers also agreed to a separate communiqué to report on the arrangements made between the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec with regard—and this is very important—to the interpretation and implementation of this communiqué. The funding made available by the federal government will be used by the Government of Quebec to implement its own plan for ensuring timely access to quality health care and reducing wait times.

We are not talking about parliamentary review or accountability in this agreement. We are talking about the interpretation and implementation of the agreement and the possibility for Quebec to have its own plan. Unfortunately, we do not find this in the bill.

Thanks to the vigilance of the Bloc Québécois, I know that discussions have been held, and are still being held, to ensure that these provisions, namely recognition of this communiqué which recognizes asymmetrical federalism and the specificity of Quebec, are included in the bill.

Let us be quite clear. If this fact is recognized only in the sections referring to parliamentary review, we cannot support this bill. That would be a shame, for we are of course talking about substantial funding for the health of our fellow citizens. Also, this is an agreement which was subsequently acknowledged as an established fact. I refer more specifically, for example, to the conference of health ministers held in Vancouver last October. The news release was very clear. A series of measures was listed relating to this agreement—measures concerning, for instance, reduction of wait times, improved access, the national pharmaceuticals strategy, and general and specific public health goals. The news release recognized the specificity of Quebec by mentioning, for example, that Quebec's contribution to these initiatives would correspond to the provisions of the document entitled “Asymmetrical Federalism that Respects Quebec's Jurisdiction”, which accompanies the 10-year plan to strengthen health care.

The health ministers and the first ministers agreed. Now the time has come to introduce the bill implementing these elements. Through a lack of sensitivity, no doubt—thank heavens that we are here in the House to remind them—they forget to include these elements so that they have the importance that they deserve.

• (1110)

It is the same in regard to human resources in the health sector. Quebec has a specific agreement. In the same news release from the health ministers, it said: “Quebec, having its own process, will collaborate on this initiative by supporting ongoing exchange of information”. One way it will do this is through its own health commissioner.

What has been negotiated by the first ministers and what has been presented by this government as a historic agreement must be referred to in the bill and not just in connection with the parliamentary review.

What did this joint Quebec—Canada communiqué say, more specifically? It stated that, in regard to the application of the clause

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in question, this specific agreement did not deal solely with the parliamentary review, but was much broader. It said, and I quote:

—resting on asymmetrical federalism, that is, flexible federalism that notably allows for the existence of specific agreements and arrangements adapted to Quebec's specificity—

Quebec will apply its own wait time reduction plan, in accordance with the objectives, standards and criteria established by the relevant Quebec authorities—

There is nothing here about federal interference; it is all about Quebec's powers. It also says, and I quote:

The Government of Quebec will report to Quebecers—

This joint communiqué goes much further. Indeed, it says the following in the last paragraph:

Nothing in this communiqué shall be construed as derogating from Quebec's jurisdiction. This communiqué shall be interpreted as fully respecting its jurisdiction.

In short, this means that health is Quebec's jurisdiction, period. This is a fact that is not mentioned anywhere in the bill, which talks solely about parliamentary review, and that is too bad.

As soon as we read this bill, we started negotiating with the government to ensure that this reference would be included, ideally in the introduction. It would really be too bad if we could not support this bill because of a lack of clarity on the way the measures to provide the Government of Quebec with considerable financial amounts will be implemented—amounts that will enable it to accomplish its missions, in the health field.

The federal government made us laugh when it said this was an historic agreement and that finally two federalist governments had managed to agree. However, this sense of harmony was short lived because of the conference on equalization that was held in the weeks that followed.

Following a number of criticisms by other provinces and various hon. members regarding the acceptance of this asymmetrical federalism, the government had no choice but to strengthen its resolve on equalization and impose an agreement on the provinces, especially Quebec. It is too bad.

If, in the context of equalization, we had managed to reach a more flexible agreement that was more generous toward Quebec, similar to the recent agreement reached with Newfoundland, for example, then the federal government may not have needed to present a bill that also gives effect to its interference in the area of health, by allocating specific funds to specific areas. It is unfortunate because this is not under the federal government's jurisdiction.

Once again, the government claims to know it all and know best how to manage every issue, especially those under Quebec and provincial jurisdictions. When it comes to managing federal jurisdictions, this government—and the previous government—has a disastrous record.

• (1115)

I could give you many examples, such as agriculture, the Canadian Forces, the softwood lumber crisis, and the mad cow crisis. These are all matters under federal jurisdiction in which the government has almost totally failed.

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At the same time, this government is saying it has money it does not know what to do with and that it will show us how to manage a slew of situations that come under provincial responsibility, such as health. Thankfully the agreement confirms the specificity of Quebec and its jurisdiction over health. This must be recognized clearly, precisely and without ambiguity at the beginning of the bill so that the reference applies to all the measures in the bill and not just the parliamentary review and accountability.

This situation is surprising, to say the least, since one would have thought that the members of Parliament from Quebec who sit on the government side would have sounded the alarm. It seems to me that as soon as they read this bill, someone in the government party ought to have noticed that an essential element was missing. Just by chance, once again, something was forgotten, demonstrating, I repeat, the lack of sensitivity to the needs and specificity of Quebecers.

Consequently, without a guarantee, without amendment to this bill, it will be impossible for us to support it. We will keep on fighting. We will ensure that this bill is amended to correspond with the agreement made by all the first ministers, in order to correct this unforgiveable oversight.

I hope that we will get the government's cooperation on this subject so essential to the health of our fellow citizens. I fervently hope that in committee the members of the government party will quickly remedy this situation. Because, as the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood mentioned, this bill must be implemented as soon as possible, so that all citizens of Canada and Quebec can benefit from the money provided under this agreement and this bill.

Why are this agreement and this money so important? We must not forget that in recent years the federal government has radically slashed transfer payments, thereby making it necessary to raise its funding one notch higher, bringing it to nearly 25%. Thank God this will permit the Government of Quebec, in particular, to provide some services which, at the moment, are very difficult to provide, since naturally it must fund other sectors. I am thinking, for example, of education. In this field, again due to the government's draconian cuts, federal funding is now around 12%. As a result, the provinces are called upon to make an extra effort, Quebec especially. In fact, Quebec has to ensure that the services it must provide to its citizens are adequately financed.

This agreement will ease the situation somewhat. Still, in order for this agreement to be effective—I repeat: without this condition we will not be able to support this bill—it is essential that the joint communiqué recognizing asymmetrical federalism, the situation specific to Quebec and Quebec's full jurisdiction over health be acknowledged.

• (1120)

In conclusion, I call upon the government MPs to assure us as promptly as possible of their absolute and total cooperation in getting these amendments into the bill, as otherwise we will not be able to support it.

[*English*]

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague from the Bloc Québécois is correct. The federal

government has made substantial cuts to health care over a period of time, which has caused great problems among the provinces. In my province of Ontario I think something like 14¢ on the \$1 was cut in the funding, which is a long way from where it was originally, which was 50¢ on the \$1.

This funding was agreed to by all the provinces, which is why I was interested in the comments by the member for the Bloc when he said that what was agreed to was not in the bill. I have not heard Mr. Charest grumbling about this or raising issues in the media or anywhere else with respect to the fact that the federal government did not honour its commitment.

The Bloc of course is saying that the government has not. Either the Bloc is right or Mr. Charest is not doing what he is supposed to be doing. However that is another story as far as I am concerned. In fact, many of the provinces thought Quebec got a better deal than the other provinces. However the deal was made and all parties agreed.

My question for a comment from the member, which he may or may not have an opinion on, is something entirely different. It has to do with the section in the bill that deals with funding for diagnostic equipment and medical equipment.

It is all very fine and good for a government to say that it will give funding for that type of equipment. In my riding of Dufferin—Caledon there is a hospital centre called the Headwaters Health Care Centre. Several years ago some private citizens wanted to donate an MRI to the centre but were told they needed to go to the Province of Ontario and get permission for people to operate this equipment. The province said that it did not have the funding for that and consequently we never received the MRI. That can be directly attributed to the lack of funding by the federal government and that problem has not been addressed in the bill.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Côté: Madam Speaker, as my colleague has pointed out clearly, the underfunding in recent years has created very great needs in the provinces and in Quebec. Some sectors, such as imaging, may have been neglected by the provinces because they are so hugely expensive. That is one of the direct consequences of the federal government's insufficient funding to the provinces.

This specific agreement, found only in the context of the parliamentary review is unfortunate. One might think at first glance that it refers to all communiqués which it does, but only in connection with a very specific section: parliamentary review, and not implementation of the entire bill.

It is very important that it be for the entire application of the bill. The joint Canada-Quebec communiqué referred to three or four very specific situations, which I will address rapidly. Among other things, reference was made to the following:

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The Government of Quebec will report to Quebecers on progress in achieving its objectives, and will use comparable indicators, mutually agreed to with other governments. In this respect, Quebec will continue to work with other governments to develop new comparable indicators.

Quebec's Health Commissioner is responsible for reporting to the Government of Quebec on Quebec's health system. He will cooperate with the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

Yet the responsibility lies with the Government of Quebec, through its Health Commissioner.

Continuing the quote:

Funding made available by the Government of Canada will be used by the Government of Quebec to implement its own plan for renewing Quebec's health system.

This is not a reference to accountability, but to implementation. It is not in the bill at the present time.

Naturally, since there is much talk about accountability and reviews, the communiqué is quite explicit. It states, and I quote:

The Government of Quebec will continue to report to Quebecers on the use of all health funding.

The member is quite correct. There are serious problems in a number of health care sectors. This bill corrects them to some extent, but we must not forget that they are the result of poor management, cuts to transfer payments and the underfunding of health by this government.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to comment on the remarks made by the official opposition. I have no comments for the Bloc member.

I want to set the record straight on the amount of health care funding. It has been suggested that the level has dropped from around 50% to 14%, which is not true. I beg the member to go back to his researchers and check it out more carefully. The percentage now is over 30% and it is higher than it was before program review.

I have no problem with the concept of asymmetrical deals. Provinces and territories came into Confederation with different deals. That is one of the great flexible things that makes our Confederation work and makes us modern and successful.

I would like to compliment the member of the loyal opposition for making the point that all the provinces and the territories and the federal government signed on to this huge deal that will provide massive funds for health care. This is an amazing concept when we have such distinct views across the country. However I would like to remind people that this is the second major deal in this decade that the provinces have signed onto. This is an important issue to Canadians and we are making good progress on it.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Côté: Madam Speaker, to be honest, at this time, I do not have the exact figures, in terms of percentage, on the government's current contribution.

However, we must not forget that if there was a funding increase, it followed many years of cuts and reductions. I am convinced that this increase in no way compensates for the cuts over the past several

years. I am convinced of this even without having the exact figures on hand.

We have suffered the consequences of these cuts in Quebec, and in all the other provinces. This government, in order to pay down its debt, sometimes endangered the health of people in Quebec and Canada, by making drastic cuts. It was high time this government increased its contribution so that the provinces and Quebec can provide decent health care, among other things.

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I cannot believe what the member from Quebec is saying about the federal government. No other province in this country has been given more flexibility to maintain and manage its health care system under the laws of our land than Quebec.

The member across should be embarrassed and should apologize to the government considering what this government has negotiated with Premier Charest in the province of Quebec. We have given extraordinary flexibility and large amounts of money to ensure that the people of Quebec can get timely access to health care that is of high quality.

Instead of criticizing the government, the member should be working with us and thanking us for helping the people of Quebec to ensure that the best we can do is to make sure that anybody in the province of Quebec, and indeed in every part of this country, gets access to health care when they need it.

This is a big challenge. We all have problems with this because our aging demographics and more expensive technologies are making it extremely difficult to ensure Canadians have access to timely health care.

We want to continue to work with the provinces, who are the managers of health care, to ensure all Canadians have this. It is a big challenge and we know it will be very tough to do but we have made an amazing contribution with the \$41 billion and we will continue to work hard to do better.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Côté: Madam Speaker, the member opposite is the one who should be embarrassed at presenting this money as a gift from the federal government. If one thing is clear in the Constitution, which was forced on us, it is that health care is a responsibility of the provinces and Quebec. This is not a gift, it is money that is owed Quebecers.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak in favour of Bill C-39, but with some reservation.

We are pleased that after 10 years of cuts to the provinces for social spending, the Liberal government finally realizes that tax dollars should be spent on more than artificial debt targets and that Canadians want a balanced approach to financial management in Canada, an approach that protects and enhances the social safety net that helps define us as Canadian.

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This funding formula will close the gap in funding identified in the Romanow report on health care. We welcome the end of reduced federal funding for health care and support the move to funding 25% of health care spending by government. It is about time. We cheer the Liberals' realization that costs increase over time and that base funding must increase, or in real dollars the amount of money available goes down.

The addition of an escalator clause in this agreement is very welcome; however, this agreement is missing an important element. Our system of governance in Canada is based on a series of checks and balances, but this legislation provides no check on how health care funding dollars are spent. Again and again, Canadians are telling us that they want to know where their tax dollars are paying for public health care and where those dollars are increasing the profits of private health care corporations.

Immediately after being sworn into office, the federal health minister said:

—what we need to do is stem the tide of privatization in Canada and expand public delivery of health care so we have a stronger health care system for all Canadians.

Since this agreement was signed in September 2004, health care advocates have been asking the health minister to affirm that the enabling legislation, when it comes forward, would include provisions to protect publicly funded and publicly delivered health care in Canada. There is nothing in this legislation to protect small communities and Canadians from for profit health care.

Since the actual agreement was made, I have been reading an analysis on the 10 year health plan. Again and again, I read how Canadians want governments to be accountable for the health dollars spent by Canadians, but they rarely get that accountability. This accountability discussion has been an ongoing issue. In 2000 the first ministers made a commitment to regular reporting and they indicated that it would be a process that allowed for third party verification, yet there are huge gaps in the data.

The last annual report from the Minister of Health could not indicate where money was being spent on the for profit delivery system, and in the report from September 2002, the Auditor General indicated that Health Canada is unable to tell Parliament the extent to which health care delivery in each province and territory complies with the criteria and conditions of the Canada Health Act. This is a serious shortcoming in this current piece of legislation before the House.

I want to quote from a paper written by Cindy Wiggins, a senior researcher from the Canadian Labour Congress. It is important that this is read into the record because this is how working Canadians see this agreement. It states:

The unified front maintained by the provinces during federal-provincial/territorial negotiations also has a significant downside for national social programs. Democratic deficits and provincial-territorial unity come at a cost. Dissent is muffled. Issues on which there is no consensus simply do not make it to the federal-provincial/territorial negotiating table, regardless whether such an issue is a key priority of the public.

We know provinces and territories have different opinions on the issue of for-profit care. Some provinces are ideologically committed to creating a role for the commercial health care sector. Some already have pursued this path. Others believe that a tier of commercial health care situated within the public system will do irreparable harm to the public, non-profit system and produce poor health care outcomes.

She goes on to say:

This issue has been at the centre of public debate around health care. Canadians are clearly opposed to for-profit health care and view it as a threat to Medicare. This issue was central to the conclusions of the Romanow Commission report. Because of the lack of consensus among the premiers, commercial health care and the threat it poses to Medicare was nowhere on the agenda of the September First Ministers' meeting. We can assume that this will be the same for other national issues, such as child care

• (1135)

As an example of the drive to use public dollars for private delivery, this morning CBC Radio was saying that provinces, especially Alberta, are already saying no to any child care program that directs money to not for profit centres, even though research has proven they provide better care than for profit centres. This is just an example of the public dollars going into for profit delivery.

Ms. Wiggins' paper continues:

The federal government played a role in the silence on commercial health care. For several years now, it has refused to enforce the Canada Health Act with respect to for-profit initiatives which violate the Act. As a result, Medicare has been left without a guardian and remains at grave risk.

I want to emphasize again that we welcome the closing of the Romanow gap, but throwing money at a problem and then refusing to be accountable for how that money is spent is absolutely wrong. While first ministers claim that this funding formula will put the health care system back on sustainable footing, the fact is there is no protection from for profit care and no accountability for how funds are being spent.

Again, from the Canadian Labour Congress paper:

The accountability measures in the agreement do not address this important sustainability issue. Accountability is in the form of reports on progress in areas covered by the agreement, such as wait times and home care.

Those are important initiatives.

Provincial jurisdictions supposedly must meet these reporting requirements as a condition for receipt of federal funds attached to the agreement. Report cards do not solve problems: they identify them. Provinces and territories are only responsible for reporting to citizens in their own jurisdictions - a provincialization of accountability for a national social program. Should provincial jurisdictions fail to meet the reporting requirements in the agreement, there are no consequences for such failure, making true accountability an illusion at best.

Canadians truly want to know where their health care dollars are being spent. Another area that the federal government needs to be accountable to Canadians for is protecting our public health care system from trade regulations. Canadians do not see our health care system purely as a business transaction, however.

Canadians see health care as an essential part of our identity, but when given the chance, the government did not negotiate an exemption for our public health insurance system. It did not exempt health care from World Trade Organization agreements.

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Now, because it also refused to enforce accountability and to stem privatization in health care, the government leaves the door open to our health care system being decimated by multinational corporations moving in to provide for profit health care. This is just another example of big box credit card medicine and it is not a route that Canadians want us to go.

One area not mentioned when the Liberals talk about health and human resources is the leeching away of good talent to the private sector. Every private MRI that opens increases wait lists because it must take qualified people away from the public sector. There are simply not enough health care workers out there to staff a public system and a private one, and certainly not health care professionals. We need a pan-Canadian health and human resources strategy that truly identifies the serious shortages that are coming up in the health care professions and we need to act on that now.

Furthermore, the government is moving far too slowly on a pharmacare plan. The cost of drugs is now second only to hospital costs and slightly higher than the amounts we pay to doctors.

Last night in the House we had the first hour of debate on private member's Bill C-274 presented by my colleague, the member for Windsor West. It has a real plan to ease some of the spending crunches that provinces are currently facing with drug costs by reforming the system of patents and allowing generic drugs to enter the marketplace sooner. This is a critical issue as well. The Liberals could have made these changes already, but they have introduced regulations that maintain the status quo and will not help Canadian families access cheaper drugs to keep themselves healthy.

In closing, in view of the lack of accountability from this particular bill and the creeping privatization, we need to have an open and public debate to shine the light on the decisions that were made behind closed doors at the first ministers meeting in September. It is absolutely critical that we have a full review at the committee level on the issue of accountability.

● (1140)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her very reasoned approach and I appreciate a lot of the things she said. I would like to elaborate that the federal funding was never 50% on health care. We paid 50% of certain costs in the past, but there was never a total of 50%. If members want to see the exact calculations, some do not have the figures at their fingertips, they are on the finance website. Depending on which of the health care items we put forward, it could be 33%, 37% or 40% today.

I am glad the member brought forward the point about human resource strategy because there are elements of that in our deals with the provinces. I am glad she brought up patents because I have been fighting that battle with her colleague and I am quite supportive of changes, although the regulations we proposed are not the status quo. The regulations that exist now are the status quo and we want to change them.

Hopefully the member will support the Prime Minister's effort to ensure that the discussion with aboriginal people took place before the main discussion on health care because that was an important item that had to be looked at. It was looked at and progress was made. The Premier of Alberta suggested that to keep the system

funded and sustainable there needs to be some sort of mix of both private and public or the system will bankrupt. I would like her to comment on the premier's views.

● (1145)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Madam Speaker, I agree with the human resource strategy. It is absolutely essential and I suggest that we need to go further than is indicated. I met with the College of Family Physicians this morning. It clearly indicated that unless we deal with it expeditiously in a coordinated fashion, we are going to be in real trouble with human resources over the coming years.

On aboriginal health, I have one of the largest first nations communities in British Columbia in my riding. Aboriginal people welcome being included in any solutions that are dealing with aboriginal health. It is absolutely essential that aboriginal voices are at the table when we are developing strategies to deal with aboriginal health. They must be at the table in a meaningful way, not just for consultation but able to give meaningful input.

When it comes to a mix of private and for profit, I would argue that as we are providing funds into for profit health care we are actually pulling money out of the public system. As soon as we introduce an element of profit I would wonder why we could not be spending that for profit money in the direct delivery of publicly funded and publicly delivered health care. Canadians have been very clear that they want a publicly funded and publicly delivered health care system that remains accountable.

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member from Vancouver Island for a number of her comments. Health care is something that we are all seized with because there are two things happening in our society that are clashing and in fact threaten to rupture all of our social programs. That is why we have been consumed by this issue, because it matters so much in a blood and guts and life and death situation for so many Canadians.

Our aging population and our increasingly expensive medical technologies are putting such a demand on the health care system and our social programs that they threaten to rupture them. With the amount of money we actually have to pay for them it is going to be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to meet those demands.

We have to ensure, as she quite rightly said, that we improve the accountability of the system to ensure that we get the best value for the taxpayers' dollars. I remind her that there is only one payer: the hard-working Canadians who pay taxes.

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How do we accomplish that? What the government has tried to do and is doing is to come out with the bill, an element of which is how we will work with the provinces to put in that accountability so that we do get the best dollar value for Canadians. I encourage her to put forward her comments and her input to the Minister of Health. I am sure he will appreciate that.

On the issue of private health care delivery, I want to remind the member of one salient fact. The Canada Health Act talks about us having a public payer system. It does not say anything about the delivery mechanism. In fact, as she knows, the vast majority of health care delivery in Canada is private. Physicians, physiotherapists and pharmacists are all private, for profit deliverers, so that is not the issue.

Here is what we are all trying to do. Here is what the Minister of Health is trying to do. We are all trying to work with the provinces because they are the managers of health care. As a federal government, as the member for the Bloc correctly said, we do not have the jurisdiction to manage health care, but we are working and want to and will work with every single province and every single minister of health to ensure that every Canadian has high quality access to health care. It is one of the most difficult things we have to do, but it is one of the most pressing.

I want to ask the member just one question. Tommy Douglas made it very clear that he did not have a problem with and in fact supported private, for profit deliverers giving health care. What does she say about that when Tommy Douglas, the father of the NDP, said that he would support this in the mix of trying to ensure that Canadians get timely access to quality health care in our country?

• (1150)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Madam Speaker, before I get to the member's final comment, I want to address the facts about what we need in a health care system. I agree that we have an aging population and we will have some serious problems if we do not deal with it, so I would encourage the government to actually develop a strategy that includes the social determinants of health and looks at health care in a much broader way than is currently done in looking primarily at acute care and primary care. We really need to encourage the system to be innovative and creative and to look at prevention. What we really want to do is stop people from getting into the health care system. When we look at things like the social determinants of health, that goes a long way toward that strategy.

With regard to Tommy Douglas, a number of years have gone by since Tommy Douglas and the party of the time took great strides in making sure that Canada had a national health care system. As they were making a transition from no medicare into something that was difficult for many people to get their heads around, he was making statements in the context of that day and age. I think that if we go out to the public in this day and age, we will hear the public clearly saying that it wants publicly delivered and publicly funded health care. Some 40-odd years later, that is what I think Canadians want.

I would encourage the Minister of Health to include in the Canada Health Act something to actually prevent for profit delivery. It currently does not.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, the comments by the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan in

this extremely important debate on the future of health care were very thoughtful. I was particularly touched by her comments around the possibility of big box, credit card, for profit health care coming to Canada given that the Liberal government has not applied for a WTO exemption on health care.

We already know that a number of the more right wing provincial governments, such as what we have seen in British Columbia, are moving in that direction. We have also seen the tragic consequences of this in the United States. The most expensive health care system in the world leaves 60 million Americans with no health care coverage at all. As we know from a study just last week, more than half the bankruptcies in the United States are caused by this lack of having a solid public medicare system.

My question to the member is the following given that Canadians are very concerned about this and given that, as in most areas, the Liberal government has not responded to Canadians' interests but has been more interested in Bay Street's interests than main street interests. Now that the member is the new health critic for the New Democratic Party, has she seen any movement from the government to actually respect Canadians' wishes to maintain a strong and viable public health care system?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Madam Speaker, leaving the trade issues aside, Bill C-39 in part certainly is moving in the right direction in terms of reaffirming our commitment to a public health care system in Canada. If we could build in the accountability measures and the publicly delivered not for profit measures, I think many of us would feel far more comfortable.

We have not seen the kinds of initiatives that we would like to see from the government in terms of protecting our public health care system. We have certainly seen creeping privatization, with private MRI clinics and a number of other issues coming up on which the government is not actually acting. It can take any number of years for measures to be brought forward under the Canada Health Act. They just do not get dealt with in a timely fashion.

We would encourage the government to actually enforce the regulations that are currently available and to look at tightening up that loophole.

• (1155)

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Government Orders

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

QUARANTINE ACT

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (for the Minister of Health) moved that Bill C-12, an act to prevent the introduction and spread of communicable diseases, be read the third time and passed.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of State (Public Health), Lib.): Madam Speaker, in today's modern era, emerging and re-emerging public health threats do not respect borders. This we know first hand from our recent experience with SARS.

With advances in technology, rapid air travel is now common practice in the daily lives of individuals, replacing the days of long voyages on ships. The new age of jet travel is paving the way for increased population mobility and has accelerated the rates in the spread of disease on both a domestic and an international front.

[*Translation*]

A serious communicable disease can spread to any part of the world within 24 hours, which is less time than the average incubation period of most diseases.

This new reality regarding the health of migrants is becoming a growing transborder problem with many public health ramifications, including effects on the social and economic fibre of our society.

While the existing health protection system has served the interests of Canadians well, the time has come to update our laws and to integrate them into a public health system that is stronger, more comprehensive and more flexible, precisely as recommended by Dr. David Naylor and the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology following the SARS crisis.

[*English*]

Lessons learned from SARS forced Canada to face the fact that our current Quarantine Act is outdated in the public health realm. The existing legislation had remained largely unchanged since the adoption of the first Quarantine Act in 1872. Hence, there is an urgent need for updated legislation to mitigate the heightened risk of global disease transmission and to support public health practices in modern times.

Although Bill C-12 serves to modernize the Quarantine Act, it is only one tool in Canada's public health toolbox. The creation of the Public Health Agency, the appointment of David Butler-Jones, Canada's first Chief Public Health Officer, and the Canadian pandemic influenza plan are all essential elements of the government's strategy for strengthening Canada's public health system.

Public health is a shared responsibility. While the provinces and territories bear the responsibility for protecting public health within their borders, the federal government has a constitutional authority for quarantine at Canadian points of entry and departure.

Existing federal powers under the Quarantine Act are outdated. They do not reflect the changing face of emergency preparedness and response in the 21st century. That is why we are moving forward immediately with new quarantine legislation that will give the

government the means to cope with and control disease outbreaks and ensure better communication, collaboration and cooperation among public health partners.

The scope of the new proposed Quarantine Act is limited to ensuring that serious communicable diseases are prevented from entering into Canada or being spread to other countries. It will also mitigate the risk of future threats to public health at home and beyond to our international partners.

The new act respects shared federal, provincial and territorial responsibilities in public health. Further, the Government of Canada will continue to work with our provincial and territorial partners to prevent and control the spread of communicable diseases within and between jurisdictions.

The modernized act we have proposed has a new focus on airline travel and will provide the Minister of Health with additional authority. For example, Bill C-12 would enable the minister: to divert aircraft to an alternate landing site if necessary to isolate and contain a public health threat; to establish quarantine facilities at any location in Canada; to order a carrier to not enter Canada if there are serious concerns that the arrival may threaten the public health of Canadians; or to close Canadian border points in the event of a public health emergency.

[*Translation*]

The proposed legislation offers greater flexibility with respect to the types of communicable diseases for which travellers coming into or leaving Canada may be detained by Canadian officers.

● (1200)

Bill C-12 protects privacy rights and maintains an appropriate balance between individual freedoms and the public interest. While the amended act allows the collection and sharing of personal health information, this is limited to what is necessary to protect the health and security of Canadians.

In addition, the bill enables Canada to assume its responsibilities as a partner in the area of global public health. The amended act is aligned with Canada's obligations under the World Health Organization's International Health Regulations.

[*English*]

Overall, this legislative reform initiative reflects the government's commitment to strengthening Canada's public health system. By introducing Bill C-12, the Government of Canada is responding to the call from Canadians to do more to protect the public from unnecessary health risks.

Further, the newly proposed quarantine act is responding to the calls of experts in the public health community to modernize the legal tools for preventing the import, export and spread of serious communicable diseases, while affording individuals full protection under the Charter of Rights.

Government Orders

In conclusion, I wish to express my gratitude for the hard work of the Standing Committee on Health. As the Minister of State for Public Health, I strongly support Bill C-12. This, as a federal legislative tool, is a critical measure in the establishment of a comprehensive pan-Canadian public health system and paramount to protecting the health and safety of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to see you in the Chair. I know that you have things well under control.

If I may, I would like to put a few questions to our colleague and friend. Incidentally, I knew her predecessor very well, the former member for St. Paul's. He was a phlegmatic person, who had a lot of composure and a bit of a British temperament. He was my friend and I know that the hon. member opposite is also my friend.

I have three questions to put to her. The Standing Committee on Health spent many hours working very hard because, as we know, the Quarantine Act dates back to the 19th century. It really needed to be modernized. Let us not forget also that, in the 19th century, ships were the primary sources of communicable diseases, since they were the main means of transportation. Today, the most important provisions of the bill deal with aircraft.

I would like to get the opinion of the minister who, as we know, is a doctor, regarding the issue of compensation.

We know that the bill allows the minister to designate any place in Canada as a quarantine facility. The Bloc Québécois took into consideration the jurisdictions of the provinces and proposed amendments on this issue. I want to ask the minister about her views on the issue of compensation. In light of this power held by the minister, our fellow citizens could conceivably be stranded for 24, 48 or 72 hours and prevented from getting back to their workplaces. Does the minister not think that it would have been advisable to include some compensation formulas?

I also want to ask her if, as a doctor and a parliamentarian, she can express her views on the list found in the schedule and review with us the various diseases found on that list.

● (1205)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois member has a good question regarding the issue of compensation. I think he is well aware that this issue requires greater flexibility and that each case should be reviewed on its own merits.

[*English*]

We think that sometimes it may be a small, very obvious compensation that would be negotiated. Sometimes it may be on a grand scale, such that everybody will be able to contribute their opinions on something like this. Obviously there are many times where it will be a public facility and many times it will differ from situation to situation.

We hope this kind of approach will not be in the letter of the law but will be something that is free to be negotiated situation by situation, not only with the Minister of Health but among the provinces and territories which often will be the ones that have the best opinion as to what place to use.

As the member knows, public health is really done from the bottom up and our job is try to facilitate the best possible decisions based on the people on the ground who know best.

The kinds of diseases that the member is asking about are communicable diseases that could put the public health at risk. During the SARS outbreak we did not have a name for the disease and we did not even know the incubation period. It was called severe respiratory syndrome because we did not have a clue what it was or how it was transmitted. We are hoping this bill today will help us with not only the diseases that we know now, but with the diseases yet to come.

The problem of new and emerging diseases and this interest between animal health and human health, we know that 80% of these new and emerging diseases come from animals. They are known to vets. We are doing everything we can to examine these new diseases, as well as dealing with the ones that we know so well and are listed as communicable diseases right now.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague from the Bloc raised an important question that we are concerned about relating to compensation. Not only can conveyances be held up but a hotel, an arena or a curling rink could be commandeered for an extended period of time by Health Canada. The current bill before us says that the minister "may" compensate.

We would have liked to have seen that amended to say that the minister "shall" compensate because there could be a huge loss to a private operator who had scheduled events cancelled and perhaps hundreds of people booked into a hotel that suddenly have to be cancelled, conventions and so on, that we are expecting the private enterprise owner to absorb in the interest of public health. Surely, if it is a public health concern, the government ought to have an interest in covering those conveyances. As a first question and as a supplement to my colleague from the Bloc, I wanted to raise that.

My second question is a follow up to the question on which diseases were mentioned. I remember some discussion at committee regarding the list of diseases, many of which are, according to the discussion from the experts, rather antiquated. The list contains diseases like tularemia; typhoid; yellow fever; the plague, which has not been around for centuries; measles; and Marburg hemorrhagic fever. There was some discussion with one of our experts, Dr. Donald Low, a respected microbiologist very much involved in the SARS debate, and I thought we would get some recommendations on updating that list.

Could the minister of state comment on why we are still faced with this new bill but with these antiquated diseases, many of which do not require quarantine with today's technologies?

● (1210)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, compensation would be on a case by case basis. It would not cover all the problem situations. Compensation may not be appropriate in the case of it being a shared responsibility of a community or whatever. We need to think about compensation but it has to be negotiated based on each individual case. We need flexibility with respect to what situations will be compensated. Who would be compensated would need to be negotiated.

Government Orders

After the SARS outbreak in Toronto it was extraordinarily difficult to figure out whether compensation should be extended to all of the people who were affected. Flexibility was needed in order to say who or when or why.

Obviously we will need some flexibility as new diseases are added. The trouble is that when specialists and experts get involved they have tons of opinions. We would have laughed at the word tularemia this time last year until there was a huge outbreak in hamsters in Winnipeg. That was the first issue the chief public health officer for Canada had to deal with in terms of the export of hamsters infected with tularemia, which could have been a public health threat.

We also had hoped that polio and smallpox would be eradicated. We need the flexibility to add or subtract from the list but it needs to be done in a very comprehensive way over time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Madam Speaker, Bill C-12 is an act to prevent the introduction and spread of communicable diseases.

[*English*]

I am pleased to stand today on behalf of my constituents and as a member of the health committee to discuss some of our concerns relating to this bill. We must recognize that the bill is updating the original Quarantine Act which dates all the way back to 1872. I think we were all in agreement that given the current realities, it was time to look at how a new act should be implemented.

The legislation covers a whole range of issues relating to transmissible and communicable diseases. It defines the powers of the minister. It gives details on designating analysts and officers at quarantine stations and facilities, on the designation of entry and departure points to the country. It has great provisions relating to obligations for arriving and departing travellers, duties to provide information, obligations to inform, how the traveller is to be informed, arrest without warrant, disinfestation of a traveller, and medical examinations. It is a very comprehensive list of events that could affect society in quite a broad way.

It talks about interpreters and public health authorities. It talks about conveyances, aircraft coming and going, a bus or a ship coming in, and reporting obligations. It talks about transporting cadavers and body parts or remains. It has a whole definition of powers, who has powers of inspection or warrant, standard dwelling places, public officer powers, relations between quarantine officers and environmental health officers, and compelling people to provide information.

There are a lot of aspects to this bill that Canadians would be interested in and which may in fact affect them greatly if the provisions in this bill are implemented.

One of the concerns I have is that a person who has a disease is actually isolated because of the disease, but a person who might have it is put into quarantine. Those terms are used differently; a person who actually has a disease is isolated, but a person who might have a disease is put into quarantine.

We went through the bill because ultimately the clauses in multiple places refer to if a person has or there is reason to think a person has a disease. We added in at least 27 places “or might have”. When talking about “or might have” a disease, that could include all of us here in the House. We never know whom we might have sat with on the bus coming here today, on public transit, on an aircraft or walking through a mall. We might have passed by somebody who had a sniffle. It might just be a cold but it might be something else.

I am concerned about the “or might have” that are provided all the way through the bill. We are giving extraordinary powers to actually control civil movement, to confine people for extended periods. The hon. member for Hochelaga who raised the question a moment ago mentioned 48 hours, but people could be confined for up to a week without any evidence that they were actually sick. They have to have an examination but it could be a week before symptoms might show.

There are great fears and concerns today. In Toronto we saw the devastation SARS had on the economy. There were 55 people who succumbed to the disease and many thousands who were inconvenienced by the disease. We saw the impact on the community.

There is a lot of fear being spread today about diseases, whether it is the avian flu or the West Nile virus. We are concerned about how they might affect the public. We saw an example in the Fraser Valley where there was concern about chickens that were sick. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency killed millions of chickens in the Fraser Valley. A lot of them were not sick. Some of them were organic birds, separated some distance from the ones that were sick. Was it necessary to kill all those birds in order to contain that disease? Were these responses appropriate or were they not? The agriculture committee is having some discussion about this. There are officials here this week discussing that very issue.

• (1215)

We have concerns about how these provisions might be implemented. We all hope that the provisions in this legislation will rarely be used and maybe never be used. The provisions in the old act were not called upon to be used that often.

My concern is that in today's environment of mobility, overzealous people may be concerned about something that inconveniences a lot of people who may not be ill at all and who may be held on suspicion and greatly inconvenienced.

There are powers for a screening officer without a directive from a quarantine officer to isolate a traveller. Police can arrest without warrant those who do not comply. People could be compelled to have an examination. They could be forced to have a health assessment if they might have a disease and forced to have a medical examination. That is not unreasonable if there is a serious concern. However they could be compelled to report to public health authorities.

Government Orders

Clause 26 concerns me. People might have a communicable disease or they might not and they could be compelled to have a treatment. It says that if a traveller has been in close proximity to a person who has or might have a communicable disease or is infested with vectors, the quarantine officer may order the traveller to comply with treatment or any other measure for preventing the introduction and spread of the communicable disease.

It worries me that people could be compelled to have treatment for something they might or might not have. Someone could come up with the notion that we should all be vaccinated with a new vaccine.

I just came back from Washington, D.C. the other day. There was an issue in the paper there about anthrax vaccines. U.S. military personnel are still being compelled to have anthrax vaccinations even though there was a court order to stop doing that because the vaccine had not been tested. There are very serious concerns about the safety of that vaccine and the FDA had not approved it.

There was a celebrated case in Canada. One of our own soldiers refused an anthrax vaccine. Some would say he might have been the smartest one in the group. The troops did not run into anthrax over there. If he has a good immune system, it may not have been a significant concern anyway, and there are very serious concerns about the effects of the vaccine on a healthy person's immune system.

I am concerned about compelling people to have treatment because they have been near someone who might or might not have a disease.

There are other concerns about compensation. We addressed those briefly in the exchange with the minister a moment ago. Clause 6 for example will require six and perhaps eight of our major airports to provide space free of charge. That includes fixtures, heating, electricity.

The airports at one time were run by the federal government but that is not true today. They are all run by airport authorities. Privately controlled airport authorities are having to raise their own funds for their expansion programs and for renovating their facilities. If the government is going to compel them to provide facilities, fixtures, heating and electricity without compensation, many of us in committee found that rather strange when those same organizations are paying very exorbitant rents to the federal government in order to use the space in the first place.

When we talked about compensation, we felt that if the minister was going to require the airports to cough up space for those facilities, the government should at least pay for what it requires them to produce. The airports already provide space for the Canada Border Services Agency, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, CFIA, Health Canada, the Air Transport Security Authority and the RCMP. All of that I gather is without compensation, while the airports are paying very expensive rents. It is a huge concern to the airports and airport authorities.

We mentioned in our questioning of the minister that the agency or the minister could take over a hotel, an arena or an auditorium to quarantine people if there was suddenly a need to contain people for an extended period of time and there is no provision to ensure compensation. It seems to me that fundamentally if it is a public

concern, we should not drive a private hotel owner into bankruptcy because as a public good the owner was compelled to provide that facility for purposes other than what it was scheduled for.

• (1220)

There are a lot of concerns about compensation.

I am also concerned that many of the amendments we put forward at committee were disallowed because they had to have a royal recommendation. I understand the same thing happened yesterday when amendments were put forward to provide compensation in instances like the one we just mentioned. They were disallowed for the same reason. We as members of Parliament cannot introduce an amendment that would cost the government money.

As members of Parliament it seems to me that our role is to stand between the government and the people to make sure the laws that are coming in actually serve the public interest and protect the public from being exploited by the government. Some of us in the House still think that is our role.

In trying to introduce those amendments to the bill, we feel it is a valid concern to be raised to protect Canadians from activities by government, such as expropriating property without compensation. On this side of the House we actually believe in property rights, that citizens do have some rights and government should not expropriate their property or livelihoods without some form of compensation.

The bill talks about confining people. It talks about confiscating conveyances and cargo, aircraft and ships. We talk about issues of compensation.

There was another issue on which we brought forward an amendment, which I believe is still on the floor. Motion No. 11 would amend subclause 40(1). It has to do with a person being compelled to move a conveyance that may or may not be infested with vectors. We introduced this amendment to say that no person could be compelled to carry out an order under subclause 39(1) if doing so would expose them to danger as defined in subsection 122 (1) of the Canada Labour Code.

That was to protect people where, for example, a quarantine officer might decide that a plane could have a disease on it which might just be a cold, but it could be something else, and the aircraft has to be moved. If the pilot is concerned that everybody has been quarantined and he has already come off the plane, he should not be forced to go back on that aircraft to move it. It could expose him to some risk that may put him out of circulation for some time to come. There may be another way to move a conveyance. That provision protects people from being compelled to perform a duty that may put themselves in danger.

The SARS episode a short time ago showed us the severe consequences of a rapidly spreading disease. It had a devastating effect on the economy. Perhaps the minister of state would correct me, but I understand there were about 55 deaths directly related to SARS. That figure probably is in the ballpark. There was a disruption to many thousands of people, to businesses and certainly to the entire health care system. It crippled the economy in the greater Toronto area for some time.

Government Orders

There are very serious concerns. On the other hand, I am concerned about a lot of media attention to diseases today. There is a lot of what some people might call fearmongering, particularly relating to the avian flu. We could perhaps include the West Nile virus. Ottawa city council passed an ordinance against using pesticides and herbicides in parks and areas where children might be exposed to these elements. That was overridden and we saw people spraying every little pond and pool of water because of the fear of the West Nile virus.

When I was on the health committee, officials who came before us said that only 1 in 155 people who contract West Nile virus have even a mild inconvenience, such as a fever, a cough, a cold, or any symptoms they could identify related to that disease. We have to wonder whether the heroic interventions that are being advocated by some are appropriate or whether they are excessive.

We are talking about viruses and pathogens. In the minister's opening remarks, she talked about the fact that today air travel moves people around much more quickly as opposed to the days when there was only surface travel and intercontinental travel took days and weeks.

● (1225)

However, there is quite a difference from being at surface level and being at 35,000 feet. Some of us in the House, especially those from the west and from the north, spend a lot of time on airplanes. Part of the difference is that the cabin pressure is much lower. The oxygen in the cabin may be as much oxygen as we have at ground level, but the pressure is not the same. They could not have ground pressure, one atmosphere, in the plane at 35,000 feet. It would blow the walls off the aircraft or it would be too heavy to fly.

The air pressure in the cabin is equivalent to about 700 feet of elevation. One of the privileges of travelling the long hours is we sometimes get to sit beside interesting people. I had an interesting discussion with an aeronautic engineer about this factor so I have some confidence in what I say. The problem with that is we need the atmospheric pressure to drive oxygen into our tissue. I am sure the minister would be willing to agree, or concede, that viruses work in anaerobic or hypoxic conditions. They have a great advantage over our immune system because our immune system is fuelled by oxygen. When we are on an aircraft, our heart rate is low, our respiratory rate is low and the cabin pressure is low.

We have talked about greatly inconveniencing air travellers by locking them up in an airport if they get off with a sniffle or with an elevated temperature. Maybe somebody ought to look at what we can do to reduce the threat to air travellers if they have a rapidly cycling virus, like the SARS virus, reproduce produces very quickly in their tissue when their immune system is at a disadvantage. That is where a long flight puts them at great disadvantage. If they were on surface travel, they might never have had the same complication with their immune system. However, this very rapidly cycling virus has advantage over their immune system, especially on long flights. We should look at this.

Perhaps it would be a good idea to give them more oxygen. That is not an expensive intervention. If people on the aircraft are ill, perhaps they could be administered more oxygen. Perhaps we could put a higher percentage of oxygen so the lower cabin pressure might

not put them at as great a risk. Perhaps we could look at what we could do with the filtration systems. I know travellers today are very worried about breathing the air when somebody has a cough or a sniffle. Those of us standing in lines at airports know what this is like. If people have a bit of a cough or tickle in their throat and they cough, they can have a lot of looks coming their way, even though what they have is probably a minor affliction. People are very worried about it today. Perhaps we could look at installing UV-light systems in the duct-work, which would reduce virus transmission in passengers.

I hope someone is considering these options to make air travel safer.

As well as what I have suggested, members who travel long hours should take a little extra antioxidant vitamin before they fly, some Coenzyme Q10, or some extra vitamin C, or some pycnogenol, or some maritime pine bark, some good antioxidant vitamins before they travel. I know a lot of members take COLD-fx now. It is anti-viral and non-toxic. Taking a little of that when immune systems are at a disadvantage might be a good idea for a lot of our colleagues in the House. I notice a lot are suffering right now from coughs and sniffles. This is one thing that we might consider doing.

What about other ground level interventions that might really help? For example, I remember when SARS came out, the former minister of health came out trumpeting that there was no known cure for SARS. The minister of state just admitted that. We did not know what it was. That is why we gave sudden acute respiratory syndrome an acronym. However, we suspected it was a virus.

Why would we not consider using things that are known to be anti-viral? We have Top medical expert Dr. Rath from Germany asked why had not considered giving intravenous vitamin C. There is a good possibility that it might have saved all but the most severely compromised.

I hope other alternatives are being considered. We hope the provisions of this bill will not be implemented very often. We hope we can all work together to see that Canadians are safe when they travel.

● (1230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank our colleague for his speech, which was often passionate, as we know Conservatives can be on certain issues. I will ask three questions of my colleague, a chiropractor by trade who, like myself, has followed the proceedings in parliamentary committee very closely. It is a committee, incidentally, which functions quite well and is relatively free of partisanship.

I would first like to ask what his party's view is on compensation. We know that a number of witnesses have said they would like to see the possibility of a per diem payment when a quarantine zone is established in Canada, even if it has to be established, of course, by regulation. I am not asking our colleague to tell us how much that per diem should be, but I would like him to speak to this all the same.

Government Orders

Secondly, this is a bill whose regulations, which will be made by order in council, are extremely important. Does he share my view that, as with the Tobacco Act to some extent, it is very important for parliamentarians to look at these regulations? We know that the regulations often determine the “operationalization” of a statute, and that it is increasingly common practice in this Parliament to ensure that hon. members can see these regulations in the end.

And third, can he tell us whether he considers Schedule 1 of the bill to be complete? If not, what other types of infections would he like to see in it?

• (1235)

[*English*]

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Speaker, I know he is a person who has been committed in his service to the health committee for a long time, although committed almost sounds like a sentence.

On the question of compensation, we talked about that in terms of conveyances already, and airports, hotels, et cetera. The form of compensation is a measure of accountability. When we give great powers to officials to inconvenience and affect public activity, we need to be careful that there are some accountability measures.

Specifically, I believe, the hon. member is referring to compensation for individuals. It concerns me when we have an official who may be overzealous. I have had some run-ins with officials who are rather zealous in applying their responsibilities, such as the CFIA in my own riding, for example, sometimes overriding the edge of what is reasonable for people to respond to in another area of responsibility. I am concerned that if there is no measure of accountability, these things can be applied because they are driven by other agendas, fear, “might be” or “what if”, rather than reality. I certainly felt that we should explore whether some mechanism of accountability could be applied.

If people are sick and confined, we expect they are receiving good care and the public is being protected. We understand that. However, if they are not sick and are inconvenienced for a week or held back, then there is a very serious reason to be concerned about that, and maybe they should be compensated.

The regulations need to be reviewed by the health committee, as we have in other areas like reproduction technology. We want to review those regulations.

As far as appendix 1, the minister has the power to add or to subtract diseases to that list. There are many on it that probably should not be on it. We could probably have a more refined and tighter list, according to some of the experts from whom we heard. I am not aware that there are others that should be added at this time, but it is something that should have been updated. I think it is a little antiquated.

Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, prior to coming to the House, I put on hold an over 25 year involvement in laboratory medicine, both in a university and hospital setting. I am intrigued by the comments of the hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni.

The question that prompts me, and it is probably a straight out question, is it the total legislation with which the hon. member has

problems or are there some elements of it with which he has problems?

A lot of the emphasis he raises has been with regard to the potential fiscal penalties. Being actively involved in a clinical setting, the ramifications of the SARS epidemic, where I am located, were clearly felt to be within the broad sweep of that international gateway. We were very appreciative of the measures that were clearly imposed upon us by the federal government and the province of Ontario to mitigate the spread of that infectious disease. As a result, we instigated measures to reduce the impact.

Perhaps the hon. member is in a position to answer the question.

• (1240)

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Speaker, I know that as an authority in his own right in laboratory medicine and procedures, his question is a genuine one. I am sure for people who were involved in that arena during that period, as he was, it was a life changing experience and one that nobody will likely to forget in a hurry, and probably not too keen to repeat.

My problem with the bill is not that we do not need to take measures. It is that we ensure that the interventions we take are the most appropriate ones. I am concerned that there are possibilities of mitigating the risks that are even under utilized and under investigated.

Some of the possibilities which I just raised such as oxygen, et cetera, with pathogens being more active in anaerobic environments, I raised with Dr. Low, a very well respected microbiologist. Frankly, it went right past him. He did not engage seriously with that. I think it is because all his research is at ground level, one atmosphere. When people work in one arena, they sometimes do not think about other possibilities.

In the oxygen area, I think we might have some great advances to reduce the morbidity of disease. Rather than going to draconian measures to restrict everybody, if we caught those people with low cost intervention, that might prove to be more effective, and we might obviate the need for some of the more serious interventions advocated by the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it will be my pleasure, in the next 20 minutes, for this is in a way the mandate I have set for myself, to speak to you about this exciting Bill C-12, the first version of which had been introduced by the minister of Foreign Affairs and used to be known as Bill C-36. Our television viewers—and we know that there are many at this hour—will no doubt be happy to learn that the number attached to bills corresponds to the order in which they are introduced in this House. So that means that this is the 36th bill being introduced by the government.

Government Orders

Those clarifications having been made, let us talk about the Standing Committee on Health. And I will take the opportunity here to thank my party for entrusting me with responsibility for health. After all these years, I derive a certain satisfaction from being the dean of the Standing Committee on Health. I believe I am the youngest in terms of age, but the dean in terms of seniority, since I have been there since 1999. As the hon. member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher knows, I have been through the great debates on labelling, tobacco products and so forth. So I have some experience, let us admit, on health issues.

The quarantine bill is rather technical, and we might think that it does not have much to do with human rights. But that would be wrong for, as I will show, the committee wanted to amend some 30 clauses—now I am getting the attention of the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin—to introduce a concept that has a very specific legal meaning, namely reasonable doubt.

The member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin used to be a penal law professor at the Université de Montréal. I know that his courses were popular: just one exam, no term papers, reasonable jurisprudence. He was a sought-after professor and he also served Quebec well in his various ministerial capacities.

That said, in regard to the quarantine bill, legislation from the 19th century—I think that only the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell could actually refer to this period from memory—the legislation has not been reviewed very often. The way diseases are spread is no longer the same. We will remember that ships were the main means of transportation in the 19th century. Now, as our transport critic knows, people travel by plane. There are trains, too, maybe, in some places, but the main means of transportation remains

An hon. member: Canoes.

Mr. Réal Ménard: Canoes are not used quite so much.

All that to say that the SARS crisis was a real revelation. We did not realize that there could still be major sources of infection, and that virology could attain mass proportions.

The minister responsible for the Public Health Agency of Canada—which we will fight to our dying day because of its intrusions into provincial jurisdictions—knows that one of the characteristics of the public health variables at the present time is that 85% of new illnesses discovered have an animal connection. It is important to keep this in mind.

That said, Bill C-12 enables the Government of Canada to do certain things without its jurisdiction being contested. I must digress for a moment, because there is a problem, unfortunately, with the Public Health Agency of Canada in regard to jurisdiction. The officials and even the minister, my friend the member for St. Paul's, know very well that there is a potential for intrusion because public health, on the face of it, is under provincial jurisdiction.

If we are talking about care for Native peoples or veterans, then we acknowledge that there is no possible encroachment. Constitutionally, this jurisdiction is valid, recognized by the courts.

Let us talk about patents, for example. I hope that, one day in this House, my colleagues will realize just how much I have considered

this matter, just how balanced my opinion is and just how important it would be, before long, to be able to have a debate on the new realities with regard to evergreening.

As a result, when it comes to quarantines, patents, veterans and aboriginals, for which the federal government is the trustee, there is no problem with infringement on areas of jurisdiction. When it comes to public health, there is a real potential for this to happen, so the Bloc Québécois will have to be extremely vigilant.

● (1245)

Before I come back to the Quarantine Act, I want to provide a little background.

I mentioned earlier, with a certain amount of pride, that I was the senior member of the Standing Committee on Health. I thank my leader, my whip and my House leader for entrusting me with this responsibility. We considered the bill on new reproductive technologies, to which our Conservative Party colleague alluded. When I read the first version of this bill, I immediately sounded the alarm, since this seemed to me to be a clear case of infringement. In fact, where are infertility treatments provided? Obviously, in clinics and hospitals. This was a clear infringement.

We must remember that 71% of Quebecers are dissatisfied with Jean Charest's government.

Mr. Serge Ménard: It is 71.6%.

Mr. Réal Ménard: It is exactly 71.6%, I am informed by the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, who knows the Criminal Code backwards and forwards and who is as knowledgeable about opinion polls.

That said, the Jean Charest government is challenging the reproductive technologies bill in court. This is nothing to sneeze at, for this is not a government particularly known for standing up for the interests of Quebec. With all due respect, one might in fact call it somewhat spineless.

This is a kind of repeat tendency by the federal government to wish to interfere in areas not under its jurisdiction. It is not surprising to see them doing so in connection with health, since that is still the area of most concern to our fellow citizens.

I do not want to stray off topic, so let us get back to Bill C-12. As I have said, when it was introduced by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, it was Bill C-36. This bill concerns both human rights and public facilities.

It has been clearly established that the way people move around has changed, and people are in closer contact, so the potential for infection is greater. I am talking about mere proximity, nothing extreme. In public places, even this one, we are seeing requests to wash our hands. Every time we go in or out of the House, we take great precautions. We now realize that even shaking hands can transmit certain things, though not the flu. According to scientific knowledge, influenza is not transmitted by human contact, but is a virus that can remain active a long time.

Government Orders

Let me not get off topic again. Back to the bill. It will give the minister the authority to designate quarantine areas anywhere in Canada. We in the Bloc Québécois, our colleague from Laval in particular, brought in a dozen or so amendments so that the government would never be able to do this without consultation and input from the health authorities, those of Quebec in our case, but those of the other provinces as well.

Unfortunately, I regret to inform the House that our amendments were not adopted by the parliamentary committee. I do regret that. The bill would have been strengthened, without our challenging the federal government's jurisdiction, if a real partnership like that could have been established.

● (1250)

The bill contains another important provision: it creates quarantine officers. These are people found often, but not exclusively, in airports. They will carry out investigations and verify whether someone is a source of infection. I will come back to this issue later, but it looks like an intrusion. The potential for violations of privacy in this bill was quite real. It was so real that the members of the committee felt the need to have the Privacy Commissioner testify. That was the Conservatives' idea. It was not a bad idea and we supported it. We did obtain a number of amendments, particularly concerning detention periods.

Happily or unhappily, I shall conclude by speaking of the number of quarantine officers and we will also look at some criminal law concepts. The hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin will have some good memories of that.

The House will be pleased to learn that there are two quarantine officers in Halifax, four in Montreal, three in Ottawa, six in Toronto, three in Calgary, two in Edmonton and five in Vancouver, for a total of 25. The committee had this confirmed. We had debates on the issue. For example, the Association des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec could have seen health professionals as quarantine officers. Nurses could have performed the function, since they are familiar enough with the early signs of an infection.

In the bill, the minister chose to state that quarantine officers must be physicians. Is that a corporate bias? I shall refrain from judgment and each member can make up his or her own mind on this. Still, the fact is that quarantine officers, in terms of professional qualifications, must be physicians recognized by their own provincial governing body.

There also will be officers of various kinds, including environmental health officers. We understand that the Quarantine Act obviously applies to people entering or leaving Canada.

There will be an obligation, which already exists and has been confirmed, for all Canadian airports to be equipped with a site for examining people who may be infected or contaminated. This is nothing new. It is and will be the responsibility of airport authorities to provide space for this purpose.

At first glance, one might think this is a technical bill that has nothing to do with human relations or rights and freedoms. One might think the bill is not covered by the charter. We know we have a system that protects human rights. In 1982, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was adopted in Canada. René Lévesque was opposed to

this charter for two reasons. I do not want to get off topic, but Mr. Lévesque said that section 27 on the enhancement of multicultural heritage went against our plan for integration. Quebec has always believed in a common public culture, which, incidentally, began with the late Gérald Godin, MNA for Mercier. Mr. Lévesque was opposed to the charter, the constitution that was imposed on us. Remember the unilateral patriation, the night of the long knives, and all that? The constitutional context is indelibly marked on the collective memory of Quebecers.

Mr. Lévesque was opposed to this charter, specifically section 27 on the enhancement of multicultural heritage. However, he feared for the linguistic rights of Quebecers. When we look at the Ford ruling and all the rulings—let us be frank—the Quebec clause has been invalidated. That is what happened with the charter.

● (1255)

Potential access to school was expanded for minorities, but not only for minorities. When a parent did his or her primary school in English in Canada, it was the Canada clause that applied, not the Quebec clause enacted by the National Assembly.

Mr. Lévesque was a visionary. I ask my colleagues to applaud Mr. Lévesque for, without his visionary side, without this grasp he had of the Charter, I think that the history of Quebec would have been different.

Let us not digress, however: back to the quarantine bill. This is a bill which concerns human rights. Why? Because the quarantine officer, to be designed by regulation, will have a power of detention. We know that he will have to be not only a health professional but a physician. In a certain number of cases—I grant you that this will have to be with court authorization—he will be able to detain for several hours, or several days, persons who he has reason to believe are infected to some degree. It is here that the parliamentary committee has shown vigilance in adding the legally sanctioned notion of reasonable doubt.

As the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin knows, it has been clearly established by the courts that one cannot cause bodily harm to a person. One cannot even compel a person to receive medical treatment. With regard to the Rodriguez case—whose connection to the Quarantine Act will be clear to everyone—and the issue of assisted suicide, it is important to know that the Supreme Court has said that section 7 on the right to life, liberty and security of the person does not imply the right to quality of life. The Supreme Court refused to declare invalid section 241 of the Criminal Code concerning persons who assist with a suicide.

Let us not forget the essential thing: all of this is to point out that Bill C-12 allows considerable powers of detention. The committee wanted to mark out those powers to some degree, and to ensure first of all that the trigger mechanism can be activated only on the ground of reasonable doubt and after an investigation.

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A final note on travellers. To make it very clear to everyone, clause 28(1) of the bill creates very specific obligations for travellers. Indeed, under the Quarantine Act, when on Canadian soil, a traveller arriving from Paris, London, Berlin or anywhere else around the world, will be required to undergo a health assessment. This traveller will have to agree to the treatment identified by the quarantine officer. This is still subject to the qualifications I made earlier.

Let us look at another aspect of the bill, namely the whole issue of compensation. As we know, this issue took up a lot of the committee's time.

As I have less than a minute left, I shall conclude. In a nutshell, Bill C-12 is constitutionally valid, because it falls under the government's jurisdiction. It is a technical bill which, in some regards, should raise concerns about human rights.

We would have liked the BQ amendment calling for provincial jurisdictions to be respected and for no quarantine areas to be established without the prior consent of the province concerned. We would have liked a little more compensation. But, overall, this is a bill that deserves to be passed. The Bloc Québécois will support it.

• (1300)

[*English*]

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member can correct me if I am wrong, but I thought I heard him say a moment ago that the government cannot compel a person to take a treatment. I would like to draw his attention to the provision in clause 26 which states that a traveller is required to:

—comply with treatment or any other measure ordered to prevent the introduction and spread of a communicable disease if, after a medical examination, the quarantine officer has reasonable grounds to believe that they have a communicable disease or are infested with vectors, or that they have recently been in close proximity to a person who has a communicable disease or is infested with vectors.

I wonder if the member is aware of that provision. I also wonder if he has a concern about the constitutionality of coercing individuals to have treatment for something they may or may not have.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, with the Quarantine Act, in order to avoid epidemics and the spread of communicable diseases, the government is aiming at requiring individuals with symptoms to undergo a certain examination. Our colleague knows that there are ways of challenging this and that judicial authorization is needed, as I mentioned. The committee amended various provisions in the legislation to refer to reasonable grounds on the part of the screening officer or environmental health officer.

What I was alluding to is the fact that the Supreme Court has determined that an individual cannot be compelled to undergo treatment. This does not have the same connotation or significance as what the member was talking about. The federal government says that it is responsible for quarantines related to public health because it does not want an individual to be a carrier spreading diseases listed in Schedule 1.

There was a case that was litigated a few years ago regarding parents who were Jehovah's Witnesses and refused to allow their

child to have blood transfusions. In broad terms, the Supreme Court determined that an individual cannot be forced to undergo treatment. However, one can also not contribute to a person's death. In regard to medical treatment, what I was referring to in my speech was a Supreme Court decision about forcing an individual to undergo medical treatment.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to congratulate the member for Hochelaga on his excellent speech. I would like to say that as the Bloc Québécois's health critic, he always works very hard. It was a pleasure for me to work with him when I was the NDP's health critic. A newly elected member is now assigned to this task, the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. She is very interested and has a lot of experience in this regard. I think that the members will work very hard together.

I have two questions for the member regarding Bill C-12. First, I would like to know whether the member thinks that the government learned any lessons from the SARS crisis two years ago.

Second, is it certain Bill C-12 provides protection for workers who are quarantined without any compensation when such crises break out?

• (1305)

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate relevant questions from my colleague. I have fond memories of when she was on the committee, since she represents the very progressive wing of her party. I hear excellent things about the new NDP critic, who will take over from the leader of the NDP. She is responsible and respectable. We are eager to discover our new colleague on the Standing Committee on Health.

Our colleague is quite right. There is a very serious flaw in the bill. A worker could be quarantined for 24, 48 or 72 hours, without the assurance of receiving daily compensation for lost income. The government says, "Compensation is a possibility. The regulations will allow us to do this. However, we will proceed on a case-by-case basis. We refuse to make this a policy". We think this is dangerous, because whenever decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, they could be discretionary. Consequently, we would have liked the bill to be more definite about this.

The whole issue of compensation is extremely important, but the amendments were unfortunately not accepted in committee.

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know we are talking about the Quarantine Act, but I want to draw to the attention of the member an issue that pales in comparison to anything that our species has ever been confronted with and that is the issue of AIDS. The AIDS virus is something that affects all of us in terms of the quarantine issue and the control of this illness.

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The AIDS virus is something that is going to kill up to 220 million people around the world. In fact, as the clock ticks, in one country alone, South Africa, by this time tomorrow at 1:10, the equivalent of two jumbo jets of people would have crashed into the ground killing everybody. In one country alone 660 people are dying day in and day out, 365 days of the year.

I only bring this *cri de coeur*, a cry of the heart, to say that we must continue to work with our partners to ensure that the appropriate antiretrovirals are in place, the infrastructure is in place, and the prevention methods are in place to ensure that we can get control over this illness.

I know the member has done a lot of work in this area and I hope he might share with us some of the things we should be doing in addition to what we have already done in addressing this problem which is something that is not only affecting sub-Saharan Africa. I want to again draw to the attention of everyone that this disease is at a very critical moment in eastern Europe, Russia, China and India. It is on the geometric cusp of where Africa was 10 years ago. Unless governments in these countries are seized with this issue now, the number of people who are going to die will be absolutely catastrophic beyond all comprehension, affecting not only people but also the social and economic structures of their countries and indeed the international community.

Perhaps the member would like to share with us some of the new initiatives he thinks that the parties should be working with members of the NGO community here and abroad in trying to deal with this issue.

• (1310)

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, and hopefully in the context of the bill that we are debating here today. The hon. member for Hochelaga.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, there is no question of heading off topic. You know that I have always had enormous respect for such questions, but the rule about relevancy deserves to be respected at all times.

Our colleague had worked with us on the health subcommittee and reviewed the first Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS, around 1996. Our colleague is quite right in saying that this is catastrophic, a pandemic. This is not an epidemic. An epidemic becomes a pandemic when more than one continent is affected. I do not believe that, in the context of quarantines, obviously, we would quarantine carriers of this virus.

In terms of international cooperation, for which we are still seeking at least 1% of the GDP, efforts must continue. Our colleague's observations are quite astute.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as was previously pointed out, the NDP does support the bill but we do have some concerns.

I previously mentioned the importance of protecting workers like our customs officers and our health care workers, and ensuring that they have the resources they require to do their jobs.

In the submission to the standing committee, the Canadian Medical Association pointed out that during the SARS outbreak of 2003, physicians and other health care providers were not only partners in containing infection, but many became ill or died as well, and since health care workers expose themselves to infection as they respond to health emergencies, protocol should ensure that care and attention is paid to their safety through measures such as ensuring ready availability of proper masks.

The CMA went on to say that the act or regulations should address precautions required to protect quarantine officers and other health care workers from transmission of disease or the effects of becoming ill. For example, it should address compensation for quarantine officers who lose work because they become infected in the course of their study. It is absolutely essential that we ensure those kinds of protections are available for frontline workers and that they get the resources they need to do their jobs.

We also need to have one clear health authority and urge that the enabling legislation for the Public Health Agency be expedited. This has been pointed out by a number of organizations, including the Canadian Nurses Association and the Canadian Medical Association. They were not included in this legislation because the expediting legislation for them has not been brought forward.

The Canadian Medical Association also talked about the importance of supporting the need to enact this legislation for the Public Health Agency, and pointed out the need for a comprehensive Canadian emergency response strategy so that when we are faced with things like the SARS crisis, we have a coordinated response.

It is our hope that we never need this bill and that we will never have to use it, but if we do, it does give sweeping powers to the minister to detain people, to use privately owned facilities and to force people to accept medical assessment or treatment. Not enough assurances are in the legislation that the minister will act in a reasonable manner, that people's privacy rights will be respected or that workers affected by the quarantine will actually be protected.

Some of these areas of concern are going to be dealt with by regulations, and we have already indicated how important it is that the government act quickly on this, but other areas will not and we need to know that the government will soon bring forward legislation, especially for workers, that provides a quick response during a health emergency to such issues as employment insurance claims, medical leave and health and safety standards for frontline workers. We are asking our frontline workers to put their lives on the line in a crisis and they deserve every protection that the government can afford them.

Another omission that was identified during the committee stage was how the bill covers travellers and materials travelling in and out of Canada but has absolutely no provisions for interprovincial travel. Considering that it takes longer to fly from Vancouver to Halifax than it does to fly from Europe to Halifax, the chances of a communicable disease being transmitted from one end of the country to the other are great.

I would urge the House to consider the various concerns that members have raised around some of these issues and that we look forward to passing the bill quickly.

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●(1315)

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

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

* * *

PATENT ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-29, an act to amend the Patent Act, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (for the Minister of Industry) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (for the Minister of Industry) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Hon. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in my place to begin the third reading of Bill C-29, which makes technical amendments to the Patent Act. Hon. members will recall that the changes provided in this bill are strictly technical and narrow in scope. We have made some further changes in the bill since it was introduced in the House last December.

The modifications to the bill are the result of representations received from intellectual property practitioners and that were presented to the committee which looked at some of the serious concerns.

Neither of these amendments materially changes the purpose or objective of Bill C-29 but both amendments are required for the bill to be effective in protecting intellectual property rights.

Before addressing the substance of these two amendments, let me remind this House of the issue at hand. Let me reiterate the points that were made during second reading of this bill.

We introduced Bill C-29 to respond to an unexpected court decision known as the Dutch case. The decision has raised uncertainties about the status of some patents. In order to apply for and maintain a patent application or patent, a set of fees must be paid. One of the factors affecting the fee payment is the size of the entity that is applying for the patent. If someone is a small entity, defined as an individual, a university or a business with 50 employees or less, the entity's fees will generally be half of those of large entities.

The definition of large and small entities sometimes becomes clouded when a business begins as a small entity but grows to a large entity, or a small entity is merged into a large entity, for example. This uncertainty of entity size sometimes leads to mistakes in determining the amount of fees that should be submitted.

The Commissioner of Patents administers the system and sets and collects the fees. In the past, if an entity had made an honest mistake in determining the level of the fee, the commissioner acted on the principle that the entity had acted in good faith. He gave the benefit of doubt and the entity was given an opportunity to top up his own fees.

That was the practice, but the Dutch case has terminated this practice and we now need to take corrective action, as the court found that the Commissioner of Patents had no legal authority to accept top up payments.

The case was appealed to the Federal Court of Appeal and on March 7, 2003, the court agreed with the lower court that late top up fees could no longer be taken.

Furthermore, the Federal Court of Appeal ruled that the determination as to whether an applicant would be considered a small or a large entity is to be fixed at the time of entry into the patent regime. This interpretation means that any applicant who had entered as a large entity and later became small, and paid commensurate fees, suddenly found themselves in the position of having underpaid the prescribed fees. These applicants and patent holders risk invalidation of their rights.

This creates a very difficult situation for holders of patents who may have not paid the right fee. An estimated 7,000 patents and applicants could be declared invalid if contested in the courts on the grounds that certain fees have not been paid at the proper entity level. Until this bill is passed, there is no legal way for these patent holders and applicants to rectify their situation. Bill C-29 seeks to end that confusion and remove the uncertainty.

As hon. members will recall from the second reading debate, the amendments contained in the bill provide a 12 month timeframe for patent holders and applicants who are negatively affected by the court decision to maintain their rights by making necessary top up payments.

This brings me to the two amendments to Bill C-29 that have been recommended by intellectual property practitioners in their representation to the committee.

●(1320)

The first amendment can best be described as an amendment to provide greater certainty. After the introduction of the bill on December 3, the Intellectual Property Institute of Canada advised the Canadian Intellectual Property Office that as currently worded it is not absolutely clear that clause 2 of Bill C-29 would apply to complex transitional provisions already found in the Patent Act.

We want to make it very clear that clause 2 will apply to the Patent Act's transitional provisions. Following the recommendation of the committee, the bill has been amended by adding at the end of the proposed new section 78.6 the following text:

(5) For greater certainty, this section also applies to applications for patents mentioned in sections 78.1 and 78.4.

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The House will readily see that this amendment does not change the purpose of Bill C-29. In fact, it greatly clarifies the intent and ensures that all patents and patent applications caught by the Dutch decision are covered by this bill. Not proceeding with the amendment might leave some uncertainty in a bill that has been specifically introduced to clarify an uncertainty.

This brings me to the second amendment recommended at the committee stage. It also responds to the representations of intellectual property practitioners. They have told us and the committee that the requirement to provide information with respect to "the day on which the prescribed fee was paid" would create a significant compliance problem because patent agents may not be able to provide such information in every situation.

What would happen in the event that a patent agent could not accurately report the day on which the fee had been paid? What would happen, for example, if the fee had been paid many years ago and the relevant document is no longer available? According to the bill, as introduced last December, this would cause otherwise valid patents or patent applications to still be at risk.

The inability to provide information concerning the day on which the fee was paid should not invalidate a patent. Our objective is to create a system where innovation is protected, not one where innovators can be tripped up by red tape.

In the amended bill before us, the specific requirement of section 78.6(2) to provide information on the day in which the patent was paid has been removed. As in the case of the first amendment, this will not materially affect the purpose or objective of Bill C-29. It would make sure that the requirements can be met by practitioners.

These amendments are straightforward. They improve a bill that is designed to provide technical amendments to the Patent Act, amendments designed to clear up uncertainties. The bill had speedy passage at second reading and there is nothing in the minor amendments that would warrant a prolonged debate during third reading.

Although these technical amendments may seem like minor adjustments, they are in fact very important to the holder of patents potentially in default of the Dutch case. We should not delay this legislation. We should move quickly to clear up the uncertainties and thereby maintain Canada's reputation as a country that protects intellectual property rights.

Finally, let me remind the House that Bill C-29 also makes a technical amendment to the Jean Chrétien Pledge to Africa legislative provisions adopted during the last Parliament. It provides the other place with equal participation in assessing and recommending candidates to an expert advisory committee. This amendment clears up an oversight in the original legislation. No objections or concerns regarding these provisions were raised at the committee hearings.

I urge hon. members to pass the third reading of Bill C-29 as quickly as they can and allow it to proceed to the other place.

• (1325)

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill

C-29, an act to amend the Patent Act. This is a housekeeping bill, in our view, which addresses two separate patent related issues.

The first issue it addresses deals with the Jean Chrétien Pledge to Africa Act, which does help to facilitate the flow of drugs to help with HIV-AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis in least developed nations.

The act called for the creation of a committee of experts to advise the government on what pharmaceutical products should be eligible for export under the licensing regime set up by the act. The first part of Bill C-29 amends the act to allow the Senate, not just the House of Commons, to assess and recommend potential candidates for the committee of experts. We support this specific aspect of the bill, although we would ask for guidance from the Senate as to which committee or committees should actually deal with this issue.

The second part of the bill deals with patent fees and entity size. Fees are required at all stages of the patent's life, application, review and maintenance. Canada and the United States have separate fee structures depending on whether a business applying for a patent is a small entity or a large entity. A separation based on size is quite common.

Until recently, a company that filed for a patent under the small business fee structure and then became a large business, or vice versa, was granted flexibility in its patent fees. The company could pay a top-up or could reduce its fees due if the enterprise size changed. The top-up scheme has caused considerable administrative trouble for patent agents and it is my understanding that they would like this matter remedied as quickly as possible.

A court case has clarified that there should never have been such a top-up scheme. The courts ruled that the entity's status is determined when a patent regime is first engaged. Thus, if the company files as a small business at day one, it is considered a small business for the life of the 20 year patent. This set of amendments is required to prevent possible lawsuits for an estimated 7,000 patent holders and patent applicants on the grounds that their fees have not fully been paid and thus their patents could be declared invalid. This was the Dutch Industries case, in fact.

We support these amendments as well in the sense that they will certainly reduce a lot of the legislation or the litigiousness that could result from this. We think that the size of the company when it gets a patent should determine its size for the life of the patent.

In conclusion, we also support the amendments to the interpretation of schedules because we would like Canada to have a clear intellectual property framework.

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• (1330)

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support passage at third reading of these technical amendments to the Patent Act. The matter before us is very simple and straightforward. A court decision has determined that a well known practice followed by the Commissioner of Patents was beyond his authority and jurisdiction. As a result, many of the patent applicants and holders who had taken advantage over the years of the commissioner's practice of flexibility are now seeing the protection of their patent rights being jeopardized.

The bill provides a technical solution. It provides the patent applicants and holders with a 12 month period in which to make top-up payments.

Fees are applied to patents, trademarks and industrial designs. On January 1, 2004, a new fee structure came into effect. On filing an application for a patent, a small entity is required to pay \$200 and a large entity \$400. On requesting an examination, a small entity pays \$400 and a large entity \$800.

Maintenance fees on applications filed on or after October 1, 1989, vary according to the amount of time that has passed. For two to four years, for example, the maintenance fee is \$50 for a small entity and \$100 for a large entity. At the other end of the continuum, a small entity pays \$225 to maintain a patent that is 15 to 19 years old and a large entity pays \$450.

One can readily understand why an entity would prefer to pay at the lower amount. This is especially the case with individuals and small businesses. Often an inventor must keep a close eye on the expenses. The invention may one day land the inventor a windfall, but until that happy day comes, the inventor may have to scrape pennies to keep the operation going from one year to the next. But as the Dutch Industries case has shown, it is very important that an entity submit the correct fees; otherwise the patent may lapse.

I think it is very important also to bear in mind that the Commissioner of Patents and the patent applicants and patent holders have acted in good faith in these matters. The applicants and holders endeavoured to pay the right fees and sought corrective action by paying top-up fees if they found they had been mistaken in the past, and the Commissioner of Patents acted in good faith by providing the opportunity to take corrective action by paying top-up fees.

It took a court case to determine that this corrective action was beyond his jurisdiction and authority. Notwithstanding the fact that top-up maintenance fees have been accepted by the Commissioner of Patents, the courts have held that it was an improper exercise of the commissioner's discretion and not within his jurisdiction.

On September 24, 2001, the Canadian Intellectual Property Office issued an official notice stating that, as a result of the Dutch Industries decision, the office will not accept any corrective payments submitted after a due date unless the appropriate actions are taken as required by legislation or, in other words, a reinstatement or late fee in the correct amount is submitted with the prescribed period.

While the impact of the court's decision is understood for going forward, the bill allows for redress for those unexpectedly affected

by the decision. But those entities that filed the wrong amount before the prescribed period are now in a state of limbo. Unless we take action with this technical amendment, their patents may lapse.

We should not be penalizing the inventors and innovators who mean so much to our economy. We should give them an opportunity to take corrective action by allowing them, for a period of time, to take the necessary action which results from the court decision.

Many inventors and innovators wait anxiously for our action in this matter. By some estimates, there are some 7,000 patents that may have been maintained with incorrect fees. The Dutch Industries case has put the validity of these patents into question, and until we make this technical amendment, the threat of intellectual property litigation hangs over them.

This technical amendment will provide the patent applicants and holders with 12 months in which they can make top-up payments.

I would point out to the House that during the committee phase, the patent agents, through their professional association, the Intellectual Property Institute of Canada, proposed two amendments to the bill. Neither of these amendments changes the fundamental purpose of the bill.

The first amendment of course provides for greater certainty. The bill is intended to apply to all past top-up payments and make them legal, but when one reads the wording of sections 78.1 and 78.4 of the Patent Act, it is not clear that this would be the case. These two sections of course provide that patent applications filed at certain specific dates are to be dealt with and disposed of in accordance with the provisions of the Patent Act as they read on these dates.

• (1335)

The provisions of this bill will not have been part of the Patent Act on those past specific dates. There is a concern that the technical changes before us would not apply to past filings. That is clearly not the intent of the bill, so a new proposed subsection 78.6(5) has been added to clause 2, stipulating that this section also applies for applications for patents mentioned in sections 78.1 and 78.4.

The second amendment deals with a compliance difficulty. In clause 2, certain information is required when applying to make top-up payments. One requirement is the day on which the prescribed fee was paid. Some of the payments may have been made 10 or 15 years ago. While the day of payment for examination fees or final fees is kept on record, the exact day on which a maintenance fee was paid may not be known. The amended bill now before us has deleted the requirement to provide the day on which the prescribed fee was paid.

These amendments improve a bill that is designed to provide tactical amendments to the Patent Act. The bill passed quickly through second reading and committee stage and I see no reason why it should be delayed here at third reading. I hope hon. members will join me in working for a swift passage of the bill.

Government Orders

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me say to my colleague from Huron—Bruce that I have listened to the debate and I am trying to figure out why it took so long for a pretty simple straightforward amendment to get to the House, especially in light of the administration having had a majority government in the last Parliament. If I add up the time correctly, it has been over four years since it was identified by our courts that this practice was not proper.

I am just wondering why it took the government so long to actually deal with this, in light of the instability created for all those people who had those patents, some 7,000, and who have been sitting and waiting to figure out whether in fact the patents are valid.

Mr. Paul Steckle: Mr. Speaker, not having been a member of that committee, it is my understanding and my full belief that there was always a willingness to resolve this issue as quickly as possible, but there was delay, I believe, because of the fact the court had not rendered its decision in the case. That has now occurred. The decision has of course now allowed us to move forward. Taking the decision, we move today that we take the corrective measures which have been recommended. We trust that all opposition members will concur.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague a question. One section of this bill contains, among other things, an amendment to allow the Senate to participate in the appointment of experts, including to make recommendations. Obviously, this resulted from Jean Chrétien's promise to Africa.

We must remember, however, that Jean Chrétien left the Liberal Party and this House over a year and a half ago. Does the member not believe the introduction of this bill has led to unreasonably long delays? At that time, should the bill not have been split in two? Just one of them could have been introduced, simply to permit the commitment to Africa, which would have made everyone's job easier. Now, once again, there is a delay caused needlessly by the Liberal Party.

• (1340)

[English]

Mr. Paul Steckle: Mr. Speaker, that is certainly a very valid question. Given that the member may be new to the House, I can assure him that it was agreed something needed to be done to correct the past mistake. As one would know in the House, all measures and all bills of the House are usually referred to the other place at some time. There was an error in omitting the Senate from this process. This is the first opportunity the House has had to bring this to the point where we can now bring the Senate back into the process where it always should have been.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will briefly repeat what I said at second reading. This bill must be passed as soon as possible, since it will allow us to provide Africa with quality drugs as soon as possible and at a lower cost.

When all the parties helped pass this bill at second reading, it was in the months leading up to a possible election call. Collaboration in

the House permitted the desired result to be achieved at that time. The intention was extremely good, although we will have to wait a bit longer for the results. We passed this bill at second reading, but at the same time, we did not necessarily provide the funding to go with the drug supplies.

When Africa receives the crates of drugs it needs to treat these kinds of diseases, it must also have the necessary infrastructure and staff. We have some work to do here, which is much more important than the aim of the amendment moved today. Be that as it may, the two amendments deserved to be adopted.

Let us hope that we will then be able to achieve a workable system as soon as possible to eradicate diseases such as AIDS, which is wreaking such devastation in Africa. New cases appear daily. The phenomenon has, unfortunately, become commonplace, and taken for granted in recent years. Major corrective steps need to be taken. It is always the same. We in the developing countries have better means to defend ourselves against such things as earthquakes and disease, for example.

In this case, we really needed to make changes to the matter of intellectual property in order to meet international objectives on this in order to help Africa. This has been a collaborative effort by both the R and D companies producing experimental drugs and the generic drug companies. The same collaboration took place here in the House. This is, everyone must admit, a rather rare occurrence. The R and D firms researching new drugs and the generic firms are locked in battle, and there are often serious clashes here as well, leading to some pretty sharp exchanges. In this instance, however, we all felt that the situation needed to be remedied as soon as possible. That is the purpose of the two amendments we are looking at now.

In fact, an oversight occurred in our rush to get the bill through. The senators kindly agreed to pass the bill regardless, so as to not hold up the process. Now we are making the correction in this first amendment.

The second amendment, is intended to assist business, small research firms in particular, which felt they were being penalized by the kind of fines that they occasionally had to pay. So we are correcting this situation as well. This is a definite advantage.

I therefore encourage everyone in the House to vote in favour of this bill as soon as possible, so that we may at last put the finishing touches on this legislative package that will enable us to provide the countries of Africa, generally the most disadvantaged countries in the world, with these drugs.

Let us also call upon the government to make some specific announcements as part of its next budget for companion actions. This must not be just a bill but rather an action plan that will make it possible to eradicate such diseases as AIDS and malaria from Africa. We have no right to leave these countries struggling with these diseases as they are at the moment.

Government Orders

• (1345)

[*English*]

Hon. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important for me today to thank all of the different parties in the House. There was strong cooperation in committee from all parties in the House and that was very much respected.

This is a significant time to move forward and to move forward quickly. My colleague across the way has been instrumental in bringing forward the issue of disease and the help that we can bring forward with the patent changes so that generic drugs can flow to Africa and help people there.

Does my colleague see ways that we can expand that cooperation so we can meet our humanitarian challenges around the world? Every party worked together very carefully and has been supportive with respect to Bill C-12.

I wonder if the member has some views about the way we could extend the opportunity to work in humanitarian ways in all other conflicts or problems around the world. That is critical today. The Canadian government has been called upon to do things that are humanitarian in nature. We have reached out to other countries as we saw with the tsunami. We saw it in this particular case. We see it all the time. How can we work together better and achieve the goals we need to achieve?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, it is obvious there is no easy solution. Nevertheless, there are some possible actions I can suggest to my colleague.

The first is to significantly and effectively increase the money available for international aid, most particularly in the area corresponding to this bill. Internationally, Canada, which was one of the first countries to vote on this bill, should also be in the avant-garde and not the rear guard of international aid.

The second may appear to be a bit of a stretch, but I think it is actually very closely related. The bill splitting up the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade must be withdrawn. It is important not to create a distortion such that, in our trade policies, we would no longer consider the human aspects, the impacts, and the decisions we make on the international level. I think that would be an important idea to follow up on here.

Also, as quickly as possible, we must come up with a foreign affairs policy that integrates trade and diplomacy issues as well as questions of international aid, so there will be guidelines, so all departments know which way we want to go. The NGOs must also get much more support than they do now. For example, Doctors Without Borders works in the field and is often at a loss when they have drugs but not the people who can administer them, because the protocols and support do not exist, or because there are not enough nurses. Those are the kinds of steps we should be taking.

I will add one final point. Parliamentarians should go into the field and see what conditions are really like in Africa. When one returns from such a trip, it is impossible ever to forget the importance of

having a bill such as the one before us. In addition, for a developed society like ours, we must devote a bigger share to international aid.

[*English*]

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Burnaby—New Westminster. I too want to comment on Bill C-29.

I want to indicate that we all recognize here in the House and in Canada the serious nature of HIV and AIDS, and the consequences they are having around the world. To highlight, we just saw the tremendous tsunami that literally has taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and the huge devastation.

The reality with HIV-AIDS is that it is like a tsunami happening every 10 days. Deaths and illness due to HIV-AIDS is equivalent to a tsunami happening every 10 days. It is absolutely crucial that as a Parliament, as a nation and as a world, we respond as viciously and vibrantly to that disaster that is happening to humankind as we do to the tsunami.

My colleague from Huron—Bruce indicated that we have a process where bills have to go through the other place and that is the proper process. However, the reality with the technicality in relation to the Senate and this bill is not that we would avert that normal process of bills going from the Commons to the Senate. In this so-called technicality what is put into the bill is the fact that there has to be a Senate representative on the advisory council. That is absolutely not necessary. It certainly is not something that we would see as a technicality that had to be fixed in order for this bill to do its job.

There is no question that on the issue of the fees we have to respond, and we have to respond quickly. We do not want to delay these products being made available. However, I wanted to correct the impression that somehow we were suggesting that we would not go through a certain process. However, we all recognize there is an unelected other side over there that not all people of Canada support.

• (1350)

Hon. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with that correction it is my view that we are a body of half of Parliament. The other place, the Senate, is the other half of Parliament. Bills are passed and policy is set in this place and the other place. It was not the intention of the House of Commons to have a House of Commons committee appoint those people who would decide who the experts were or what would happen with regard to people that are going to do the future work on the bill.

It was the intention all along of the government not only to have representation from the House but also to have representation from the Senate. However, in the drafting of the bill, when it got to the Senate, the Senate pointed out that it was not recognized as part of that committee or group which was going to make the decisions. As a result, officials from this department made a commitment to the Senate that we would correct that situation as soon as we had opportunity to bring the bill back in the House.

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That is why we corrected it and I want to make that very clear. We had the Senate commit to passing the Jean Chrétien legislation with the commitment that we would ensure the Senate could be a part of making those decisions in the future. That was fair. The Senate acted in good faith and now we are acting in good faith to that commitment.

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, the point I was making was that it was not necessarily a technicality that had to be fixed within the bill in order for the bill to proceed and do the job that it is intended to do.

There are differences of opinion as to whether or not everyone thinks it is necessary to have a Senate member on the advisory committee. I think it is going to go through because generally people want to see this proceed. I would hope that had that not been included in the bill, had there been a decision in the House not to approve it, I would hope that the reason that the Senate would not proceed with passing the bill would not be because its members did not get to sit on the advisory council.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Churchill for her intervention which as always was very succinct, to the point and effective. I know she is aware that there were significant amendments brought forward by the member for Windsor West who improved what was a badly flawed bill in the beginning. Does she have any comments about the role that the member for Windsor West played in the improvement of the original bill?

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, I know that our colleague from Windsor West kept us updated as a caucus on how things were proceeding on a very regular basis. Previously I had the opportunity to be the industry critic and dealt with one aspect of the patent legislation. I found it hard to understand how a ruling could come from an unelected body such as the World Trade Organization. It would tell a country to change its legislation because it said so, and the country would say that it would do it even though it was not representing the elected members of a country.

I know that my colleague from Windsor West, on a number of occasions, tried to ensure that legislation was put in place that reflected the needs of Canada, and not necessarily the desires of corporations in the World Trade Organization.

•(1355)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-29.

I will start by coming back to the work that the member for Windsor West did on the initial legislation. The initial regulations were badly flawed, I think it is fair to say, in the original bill that was proposed. The member for Windsor West, who is a member of the NDP caucus, submitted over 100 amendments and was instrumental in improving the bill. We can take some comfort in that many of the worst aspects in the original legislation have been improved.

The government was forced to present substantial amendments to the bill. The amendments eliminated the first right of refusal clause and extended eligibility to other developing countries. Amendments by the member for Windsor West also forced the establishment of an advisory committee; placed humanitarian reasons before economic considerations in an appeal of the royalty rate; added a key fixed

dose combination drug for the treatment of tuberculosis; and added East Timor to the list of eligible countries. These were all passed.

Effectively he presented a series of amendments that helped to improve the basic legislation. Some amendments were not accepted, such as the amendments on alpacas and others. The basic issue is that a bill that was presented to the House was improved through the actions of a member who was able to bring in improvements at the committee level and also push the government to improve it.

That is the role we play in this Parliament. As a minority Parliament members have perhaps more input than they would normally have. Very clearly in this case a single member was able to force improvements to the legislation. What has happened here is perhaps one of the better sides of how a minority Parliament can work effectively. Members have now been working together since the beginning of October when this session of Parliament opened. Members from all sides have been able to contribute to the debate.

In this particular case, we are talking about an amendment that deals in the longer term with the crisis in Africa and helps to provide the HIV-AIDS drugs to people who sorely need them. We know the crisis that exists. Many of us have seen the devastation of HIV-AIDS in villages in Africa.

Stephen Lewis, a former NDP leader in Ontario, has spoken on this subject extremely eloquently. He has spoken about the devastation in communities. He has spoken of the orphans in villages. Their parents have passed away and there are millions of orphans as a result of this pandemic. It is crucial that we start to flow drugs to those individuals, the villages, communities and countries that have been affected by the pandemic.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster will have time to complete his remarks after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

JOHN VANDERTUIN

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to pay tribute to an outstanding member of the Brant community. Dr. John Vandertuin is a gentleman with exceptional musical talent and I am honoured to acknowledge him today.

At an early age Dr. Vandertuin began his formal study in piano and music Braille. He attended the well known W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind, as it was then known, in Brantford. At the age of 14 he made his recital debut in Paris, France. Dr. Vandertuin continued his studies in music and earned a Doctor of Musical Arts degree with highest honours from the University of Michigan. After a lengthy and rewarding career as an organist, Dr. Vandertuin has earned numerous awards and honours. Most recently in July 2004 he was made a Fellow of the Royal Canadian College of Organists.

I would ask all of my hon. colleagues to join me in congratulating Dr. Vandertuin on his many outstanding accomplishments.

●(1400)

SASKATCHEWAN

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 12 years ago a rather famous Saskatchewan Liberal said, "Vote for me for a powerful voice at the cabinet table and much will be accomplished for our province". Let us review his record.

His government implemented a useless \$2 billion gun registry. His government gutted a good part of the Saskatchewan rural rail network and terminated the Crow rate. He has permitted his tax collectors to harass and attack amateur junior hockey in Saskatchewan. His farm programs have utterly failed farmers in Saskatchewan. To put the icing on the cake, he is contemptuous of Saskatchewan's legitimate demand for a fair deal on equalization.

The House has witnessed the introduction of the endangered species legislation. I would suggest that for Saskatchewan, Liberals should be included on that list as a species at risk.

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LABOUR

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February 11 will mark the 42nd anniversary of one of the most tragic labour conflicts in Canadian history, a tragedy that pitted father against son and brother against brother. Bush workers were on strike against Spruce Falls Power and Paper Company in Kapuskasing in January 1963.

[*Translation*]

On February 11, during the early morning hours, approximately 400 strikers descended on Reesor Siding, and the farmers felt threatened. Shots were heard. Three strikers were killed, and eight wounded.

The Reesor Siding incident is a tragic reminder for the entire community. Regardless of sides, it highlights the sacrifices made by workers in defending their rights and their jobs, as well as the potential for tragic consequences.

This anniversary was immortalized by Doric Germain, in his book *Défenses légitimes*.

By looking back at our history, we hope to prevent history from repeating itself.

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PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Sunday, the 8th regional telethon for persons with disabilities was held in Abitibi-Témiscamingue. The event is an outstanding example of social solidarity and collective generosity.

Approximately \$287,067 was raised. This money will be used exclusively to provide help and services to local persons with disabilities, regardless of the disability.

The success of the telethon can be measured by the great generosity of donors and the work of the 1,200 volunteers who have demonstrated the goodness of their hearts and their sense of caring and sharing.

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The funds raised are administered by the regional service organization Ressource d'aide et de services pour personnes handicapées de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue. Thank you, and bravo for your dedication.

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CANADIAN COMMERCIAL CORPORATION

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to congratulate the Canadian Commercial Corporation, or CCC, and its president, Hugh O'Donnell, on having just won for the second consecutive time the Auditor General of Canada's award of excellence for its annual report.

The CCC is not well known, but we have all heard of the Canadarm used on space shuttles. The CCC was responsible for selling it to NASA. More recently, the corporation was also instrumental in fulfilling Canada's commitment to helping resolve the humanitarian crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan, by using its contract negotiation skills to make helicopters available to the observers.

The CCC helps Canadian companies secure export contracts—over \$1 billion in new contracts last year alone—and, as suggested by the Auditor General's award, it performs its duties with transparency and in a responsible manner.

The Canadian Commercial Corporation is involved in promoting trade and investment, two tenets of the government's economic strategy. Most of its clientele is comprised of small, growing companies, the engine of job creation in Canada. With fewer than 100 employees, the CCC is truly a gem among crown corporations.

Congratulations on its excellent work.

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●(1405)

[*English*]

FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour the many career and volunteer firefighters in my constituency of Fundy Royal.

On Monday, June 14 of last year Albert County suffered one of the worst fires southeast New Brunswick had seen in the past two decades. This fire consumed 125 acres of forest and resulted in 100 homes being evacuated.

If it was not for the heroic efforts of the firefighters and other emergency service providers in our community, the results of that fire could have been much more devastating. These brave men and women willingly put their lives on the line to protect others and they deserve our appreciation.

At this time I would like to extend my congratulations to the community of Riverview which is preparing the official opening of its new fire station in May of this year. Riverview Fire & Rescue provides fire and emergency services to 20,000 citizens in the town of Riverview and neighbouring areas in Albert County and responds to over 1,000 emergency incidents per year.

Again, congratulations to Riverview Fire & Rescue.

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FREE THE CHILDREN

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the unprecedented achievements of Craig and Marc Kielburger who grew up in my riding of Thornhill.

In 1995 at 12 years of age, Craig founded the not for profit Free the Children organization. Since that time Free the Children has grown into an international network of children helping children through leadership and action.

The goal of the organization is not only to free children from poverty and exploitation, but also to instill in young people the idea that they can effect positive change and improve the lives of their peers.

In the past 10 years Free the Children has spread to more than 35 countries with over one million participants. The organization has built more than 400 schools which provide education to over 35,000 children every day.

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Craig, Marc and the many volunteers to improving the lives of those who are most vulnerable, our children. I am truly inspired by the presence of such great humanitarians and amazed at the growth of Free the Children. In less than 10 years it has grown from a tiny operation in a Thornhill basement into the world renowned organization that it is today.

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[*Translation*]

TIBETAN NEW YEAR

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to acknowledge today in this House the Tibetan New Year, better known as Losar. On this occasion, I wish the entire Tibetan community, here and elsewhere, all the best as they celebrate a most wonderful spiritual and secular festival.

At a time of international debate on cultural diversity, every nation in the world must first recognize this diversity within its own borders. It is this diversity that has always shaped humanity and it is our duty not only to preserve it, but to promote it.

I invite you to celebrate Losar with the Tibetan community next Saturday evening in Longueuil. In addition to being an act of solidarity, it will be an opportunity for you to discover more about this great people and their rich culture and spirituality.

Let us hope that this year's celebration will be one of hope for all Tibetans. More than 50 years after the Chinese invasion of Tibet, openness to discussion seems to be on the horizon. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama, whom I had the privilege of meeting, said so well, when peace survives, war dies.

Happy Losar.

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BELGIAN COMMUNITY

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 2005 is the 100th anniversary of Le Club Belge in Manitoba. Since 1905, Le Club Belge has been serving the Belgian Canadian community of Saint-Boniface, Winnipeg and rural Manitoba.

I want to congratulate all the members of Le Club Belge who, over the years, have managed to promote and preserve the culture and heritage of the Belgian community. The first group of some 200 Belgians immigrated to Canada in 1888 and settled in the rural French-speaking parishes of Manitoba.

[*English*]

Le Club Belge, founded in 1905, offers to all newcomers a meeting place for cultural, social and sports activities in the community. It is also home to Branch 107 Belgian Veterans who have made a significant contribution to preserving Canada's democracy and quality of life.

The influence of the Belgian community is certainly felt through the written press, and the business, political and banking sectors in our province.

Congratulations to Le Club Belge on its 100th anniversary. It has certainly left its mark in the unique riding of Saint Boniface.

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BORDER SECURITY

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Niagara Regional Police Service patrols one of the largest geographical areas of any municipal police service. It provides policing and public safety for 12 municipalities and 430,000 people.

What most people will find surprising is that the Niagara Regional Police Service also has the primary responsibility for patrolling 120 kilometres of international border and this cost is picked up by municipal taxpayers. This is wrong.

The federal government should have another look at the Canadian Constitution. Border security is a federal responsibility. How big does the federal surplus have to get before the federal government starts living up to its obligations and starts paying for the protection of Canadians?

It is not that complicated. The federal government should do what the federal government is supposed to do: pay for international security.

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● (1410)

[*Translation*]

AQUATIC CHAMPIONSHIPS

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are celebrating a great moment in amateur sport and a great moment for our athletes and coaches.

Today I would like to stand up and say how proud I am of my city, Montreal, and its mayor, Gérald Tremblay. Mayor Tremblay has succeeded, against all odds, in saving not only one of the most important of world sporting events, but also the reputation of his city, our province and our country.

Despite the detractors and nay-sayers among the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives, both more keen on pointing fingers and scoring political points than on saving the event, Mayor Tremblay has saved the day, and the World Aquatic Championships will indeed be held in Montreal in July 2005.

Honourable mentions should go to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and to FINA President Mr. Larfaoui. His sensitivity to the situation enabled him and his board members to come up with the best solution for these athletes.

In a world constantly trying to discredit politicians, I would like to close with a quote from a great contemporary philosopher—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning a group of proud Canadians from Hamilton stood outside the federal government's offices in Downsview, Ontario to apologize to federal civil servants and to urge the enforcement of Canadian environmental law.

They have apologized because the city of Hamilton has launched a \$75 million lawsuit against 64 civil servants and four Chrétien cabinet ministers for the alleged crime of doing their job to protect Canadians by applying the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act in the matter of the Red Hill Creek Expressway.

Our civil servants conducted over 5,700 environmental assessments last year. Hundreds of government staff worked to implement this law, and the lawsuit is imposing a chill on them. They do not know whether their government, their employer, will support them or cut a backroom deal.

Seven out of fifteen Hamilton city councillors not only voted against it, they have also written the government urging a vigorous fight against this lawsuit.

It is time for the government to stand up and defend its own environmental law.

* * *

THE VATICAN

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, as His Holiness John Paul II returns to the Vatican following a brief hospitalization, I am deeply privileged to have the honour of expressing, on behalf of my colleagues, the most sincere wishes for continued good health.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude for the profound affection he has shown Canada over the years. His Holiness has graced our country with his presence three times, visiting big cities, small communities and remote areas.

Many will fondly remember his most recent visit to Toronto for World Youth Day 2002. For these moments we are grateful.

As Roman Catholics around the world and across our country enter into the solemn Lenten season of spiritual reflection, we should

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pause and contemplate the Holy Father's message of peace and understanding, a message which has touched the lives of Canadians of all faiths.

Today our thoughts and prayers are with him. May God bless the Holy Father, John Paul II.

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[Translation]

WAL-MART

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the multinational Wal-Mart announced the closure of its Jonquière store. I was extremely saddened and upset at the news.

A company like Wal-Mart cannot challenge the fundamental right to form a union. It has acted in bad faith, claiming an agreement with the workers was impossible. The people of my region do not deserve such shabby treatment from the firm's management, which, visibly engaged in global expansion, thinks it can do anything it pleases.

Two hundred jobs lost in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean is a huge number. These workers have my sympathy for losing their jobs so abruptly and at a particularly bad time, moreover, because the La Baie plant of Abitibi Consolidated also shut down for good just a few weeks ago. That put some 650 people out of work.

I heartily condemn this action by Wal-Mart, a very poor corporate citizen. I call upon my colleagues and the general public to challenge such actions.

* * *

[English]

EQUALIZATION PROGRAM

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of National Revenue said complaints about equalization were “mired in the world of have nots clamouring for more subsidies”. It amazes me how this minister can so easily display ignorance and arrogance at the same time.

All provinces pay into equalization so the so-called have not provinces can share the revenue of the haves. This money is not for the federal government's coffers and should never be a subsidy handed out by a bunch of Liberal hacks in Ottawa.

The Liberal formula is so screwed up that Newfoundland actually benefits more from oil and gas drilled in Saskatchewan than the citizens of my province who do the work. Provinces that see the value of their non-renewable resources go up, quickly discover the Liberals picking their pockets, undoing any hope of future prosperity.

Canadians would be better served by getting the Liberal Party and their holier-than-thou rhetoric out of this equalization debate. We must fix the formula so that all provinces benefit from their investments without going cap in hand to Ottawa every year.

What we really need to do is stop robbing Saskatchewan to pay Paul.

Oral Questions

●(1415)

TSUNAMI RELIEF

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize the success of Kitchener's tsunami relief concert which raised close to \$150,000 for Asian tsunami and earthquake survivors.

The concert is an excellent example of how the arts, local citizens and businesses work together to help others. The Kitchener-Waterloo philharmonic choir, the Kitchener-Waterloo symphony and the Centre in the Square worked in cooperation to organize this special concert.

All musicians and staff donated their time to support the event, ensuring that 100% of the proceeds would support the relief effort. The money raised from the concert has been given to the Mennonite Central Committee that will distribute the funds to the people in need.

Canada's arts community is always keen to help others in times of need. Across Canada, artists have been donating their talents to support the tsunami relief effort.

I ask the House to join me in recognizing the outstanding contributions made by our talented and dedicated artistic community.

* * *

[Translation]

TEACHER'S WEEK

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this year, from February 6 to 12, we have an opportunity to formally thank teachers for the professionalism they bring to their work with young people each and every day.

Teaching is more than just transferring knowledge, it is about promoting the values of equality and justice, freedom and cooperation. It is about working against marginalization and failure. It is about shaping independent and responsible citizens capable of critical thinking. It is multi-faceted.

Teaching is also about meeting a number of daily challenges. It is about helping young people achieve their goals and giving them the inspiration to pursue their studies. It is about transmitting enthusiasm for life and shaping the adults of tomorrow.

As a former teacher, I invite my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois to join me in applauding Quebec's teachers and expressing our gratitude to them.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two Liberal prime ministers have appeared before the Gomery inquiry and their lines are, "We authorized the programs and we take all the credit, but we didn't know anything about what happened and we accept no responsibility".

Do the Liberals really expect Canadians to buy these lines from their Prime Minister?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is committed to transparency and accountability. It was this Prime Minister who set up the Gomery commission. This Prime Minister indicated from the outset that if called upon to do so, he would appear before that commission. That is what he is doing today. He is answering the questions put to him in a candid, frank and straightforward way.

In fact, the opposition asked 178 times on the floor of this Parliament for an independent investigation. That is what we—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker, and 178 times later we are still waiting for the first answer.

[Translation]

The Prime Minister continues to say that he saw nothing, heard nothing and knew nothing. However, as Minister of Finance, he was the one who signed the cheques and as Vice-President of the Treasury Board, he was the one responsible for the proper management of public funds.

Does the Prime Minister really think that the Canadian public is buying his alibi?

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has not even completed his testimony, and once again those members are already commenting on daily testimony.

Despite daily warnings that it is folly to comment on daily testimony, because it can be contradicted by other days testimony, they continue to do that. This morning the commission chair submitted evidence correcting testimony provided at the commission on Tuesday, testimony that the opposition presented in the House as fact on Tuesday.

The opposition members are frequently jumping to the wrong conclusions by foolishly commenting on daily testimony. They are making mistakes, and they should wait for Justice Gomery to complete his work.

●(1420)

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as his mother said, he would do anything for a few extra bucks.

Media reports today state that the Prime Minister's Office is looking for ways to shut down the Gomery inquiry. According to one source, "it remains to be seen if we can actually dump Gomery, but we are working on it".

We know it shut down the Somalia and APEC inquiries. We know it tried to shut down Krever. It only did this when it was dragged in kicking and screaming. Why would anybody be surprised that the Liberal Party wants to shut down this inquiry too?

Oral Questions

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister appointed Justice Gomery to do his work. The Prime Minister is appearing before Justice Gomery today, in full cooperation with Justice Gomery's work.

The government has defended Justice Gomery. The only people who are subverting the work of Justice Gomery are the Conservatives who on a daily basis are interfering with the work of Justice Gomery, an independent judicial inquiry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are doing everything they can to defame the Gomery inquiry. Here they keep asking us to allow Justice Gomery to do his work. Outside the House they talk about how much the inquiry is costing and they make disrespectful comments about Justice Gomery.

After seeing them in action, why should we believe they sincerely support the Gomery inquiry?

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact is the government has supported Justice Gomery. We are cooperating with Justice Gomery. We have provided him with the resources and the information he needs, including cabinet confidences back to 1993.

We are cooperating with Justice Gomery because we, like Canadians, want to see Justice Gomery complete his report and do his work.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know to whom the public works minister is referring when he says, “we are supporting Justice Gomery”. The transport minister refers to the inquiry as water torture. Jean Chrétien's testimony was an insulting comedy act. Former Deputy Prime Minister John Manley has been attacking the investigation.

When will the Liberals walk their talk outside the House and tell people like Warren Kinsella, Jean Chrétien and John Manley to stop attacking Justice Gomery and support the inquiry right through to the end? When will they do that?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we now learn that the members of Conservative Party are actually against free expression of thought in the country. They want us to tell people who have no direct connection, people like John Manley, people who are not involved in the government anymore, that they do not have the right to express their views as individuals.

Last week they wanted us to interfere and to witness tamper by telling Mr. Chrétien what to say before the inquiry.

This is shocking that on an ongoing basis they are willing to on the floor of the House of Commons admit that they do not value individual rights and freedoms in the country.

[*Translation*]

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs promised, “to respect Quebec's experience in this matter”, as Quebec already has a generous child care program. As for the Minister of Social Development, he promised to invest \$5 billion over five years.

Given such promises, could the Minister of Social Development tell us whether or not, as of the budget to be tabled on February 23, Quebec will be receiving its fair share of the funding for child care, with no strings attached and without having to wait after the other Canadian provinces?

[*English*]

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said repeatedly in the House, we will respect the jurisdiction of the province of Quebec. We are respectful of its leadership in early learning and child care, and we will continue to be.

I am optimistic that we can find a way for Quebec to participate in this new initiative.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister says, on the one hand, that he will respect Quebec's jurisdiction and, on the other hand, that all the provinces will have to account to Ottawa.

Is he in favour of Quebec receiving its share, with no strings attached by Ottawa and with full compensation, and administering its own program without the need to follow standards imposed by Ottawa?

● (1425)

[*English*]

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat the answer I gave before. We have been respectful of the jurisdiction of Quebec, of the leadership that Quebec has taken and of the inspiration that it has provided in the area of early learning and child care. I am optimistic that we will be able to find a way for Quebec to participate.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister appears to be having a hard time with his answers. I am not trying to blindside him. The question is explicit, but I will simplify it for the minister.

Is the Minister of Social Development prepared to sign an agreement similar to the one that was signed for health, which gives Quebec full jurisdiction and full control over that area and recognizes that Quebec is accountable to its own population?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can only try to simplify my answer. The answer is the same answer. There are conversations coming up this weekend in which the government of Quebec will be present. It has been a constructive member of these discussions. It has added to the experience around the table and I am very confident that we will be able to work out something with the government of Quebec.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, an agreement like the one signed for health is required. I ask the minister again.

Is he prepared to include in the future child care program the right for Quebec to opt out with full compensation, and with no strings attached? That is the question.

[English]

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will be meeting with the provinces and territories this weekend. We will not be coming to an agreement. Any kind of understanding will come later, after budget time. Quebec has been a very constructive member of all of this and we expect that we will be able to work out an arrangement with the government of Quebec.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, no wonder the largest corporation in the world, Wal-Mart, feels that it can throw workers out into the street. Our federal government will not even stand up and use the charter or defend the charter in the Supreme Court from attacks by Wal-Mart.

[Translation]

The federal government must protect workers by invoking the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is important.

[English]

My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Why will the minister's officials not acknowledge the amount of money that we are going to be spending buying air in Europe, when a European magazine, expert in the field, says it is \$1.4 billion?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thought the question was about Wal-Mart.

I will repeat again that there is no way the Government of Canada will build a Kyoto plan that will put Canada in a situation to buy hot air. This will not happen. If we have to trade abroad, it will be for greening credits. This is very clear.

Mr. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, finally we are starting to get at the truth. We have been poking at this one for a long time. It is interesting that Point Carbon, which is the world's foremost authority magazine, expert in this field, says that Canada is going to spend \$1.4 billion buying air in other countries. That is not going to clean up the air here in Canada that people are choking on right now.

Why are we getting this information from a European magazine instead of the government?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): I do not know, Mr. Speaker. I do not know where those members find their information. It is news to me, but I may tell the hon. member that I will be very pleased to discuss the Kyoto plan that we are reviewing, when we have it.

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SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we have more evidence of kickbacks to the Liberal Party from ad scam. Liberal activist Alain Renaud brokered millions to Groupaction. Renaud profited handsomely from his Liberal connections. In 1998 he donated over \$60,000 back to the Liberal Party, its seventh largest donor.

So the sponsorship program was really a revolving door for cash: taxes from working Canadians, contracts to Liberal donors and back around to the Liberal Party. Is that not the real truth?

● (1430)

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the real truth is that the opposition continues to make errors by doing what the hon. member just did in the House of Commons, by commenting on selective testimony or evidence without the whole picture. The only way we are going to have the whole picture is to wait for Justice Gomery to report back.

As I said earlier, the commission chair submitted evidence earlier today correcting testimony that was presented on Tuesday, testimony that the Conservatives used on the floor of the House of Commons and presented as truth on Tuesday. They should withdraw, in fact, their assertions on that before they start making new ones.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, actually these facts did not come out at the Gomery inquiry. They are additional facts.

It is telling how often the word "Liberal" appears in this latest cash for contracts story: Liberal Party, Liberal volunteer, Liberal friendly ad agencies, Liberal ties, donation of \$63,858 to the Liberals.

The sponsorship program has been exposed over and over as a Liberal shell game with the public's money. How can the Liberals continue to defend this betrayal of Canadians?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how can the Conservatives continue their continued betrayal of Justice Gomery?

* * *

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 1995 the current Prime Minister was the finance minister and was campaigning very hard to be the leader of the Liberal Party.

Oral Questions

According to a 1995 memo, the finance department directed half of a \$600,000 advertising contract to an Earncliffe company even though Earncliffe actually lost the bid. Coincidentally, the finance minister's chief of staff, Terrie O'Leary, was also the common-law partner of David Hurle, one of the principals at Earncliffe and a key leadership campaign adviser to the finance minister.

Is this not proof that changing prime ministers just meant changing the flavour of Liberal rot in the PMO?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is old news. I have answered the question before. The awarding of the contract in question was consistent with the rules that were in place. I understand that this matter was dealt with entirely by officials of finance and public works. There was a legitimate difference of opinion based on the principle of low price versus the principle of better value. Our government has made major changes in terms of advertising and public opinion research, but the fact is, the Auditor General has said that we are in fact managing public opinion research and advertising well.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was a pretty shaky answer, I would say. The truth is that the inbreeding between Earncliffe and finance was like something out of the Ozarks. The only thing missing was the straw hats.

It was clearly inappropriate to update Terrie O'Leary on the contract discussions that affected Earncliffe. Even worse, can the government not see that it is a massive ethical breach to break the contracting rules just to reward the PM's friends at Earncliffe?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, let me remind the House of what the Auditor General said in her 2004 report. She stated that, overall, public opinion research was managed transparently, with roles and responsibilities clearly defined. She went on to state that her audit found that public opinion research was well managed by the government.

* * *

[Translation]

BILL C-39

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-39 enacts the agreements reached last September on health. We have realized, however, that in its current form, this bill does not respect the specific agreement reached with Quebec on September 15, which recognized Quebec's full jurisdiction and full control over health.

Is the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs prepared to commit to integrating this specific agreement with Quebec into all the clauses in Bill C-39, and not limiting its effect to the lone clause on parliamentary review?

[English]

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-39 references the communiqués that the hon. member is concerned about. By referencing the communiqués, it therefore incorporates those communiqués into the legislation itself. That in effect addresses the hon. member's concerns.

• (1435)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, greater clarity is needed here. The government had indicated to us that it would be prepared to accept an amendment to Bill C-39, so that the specific agreement with Quebec on health, reached last September, amends the entire bill and not just the clause on parliamentary review, as is currently the case.

Could the minister tell us clearly, simply and publicly if she intends to ensure that the agreement reached with Quebec on health is integrated, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we know, those communiqués were in fact tabled here in the House this week. As well, they are referenced in the bill itself. As I say, the concerns of the hon. member are ones that I think are ill-founded.

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[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning's papers hint that the federal government has finally decided not to participate in the American missile defence shield project.

Can the Prime Minister confirm that, in this matter, the government intends to take the same position it ultimately adopted with respect to the war in Iraq, and tell us there is no question of participating in the American missile defence shield project?

[English]

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear to the member that the government's decision said that we will, if asked by our partners, train Iraqi troops outside Iraq, but the government and the Prime Minister have made it very clear that we are not sending our troops into Iraq.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary has given me the wrong answer, because I asked him a question about the missile defence shield. I will try again with another question. I hope this time he will give me an answer related to the missile defence shield.

This government has made a commitment to consult the House on this subject. The Prime Minister is going to meet President Bush at a NATO meeting in less than two weeks.

Can he promise that the House will vote on this issue and do so before he announces the Canadian position at his meeting with President Bush?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear. We have said this time and time again. The Prime Minister has said this, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has said this, and the Minister of Defence has said this too. All of them have said that in the House it will come to a vote on the issue of the ballistic defence shield, but we have also made it very clear that as a government we are not going to participate in the weaponization of space. I hope the member understands that very clearly, because we have repeated it in the House a hundred times.

* * *

[Translation]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Serge Savard, who raised a million dollars for the Prime Minister, received over \$250,000 in sponsorships. Why? Because the finance minister's office called Mr. Gagliano and insisted that this money be given to him.

Why does the Prime Minister not rise and acknowledge his role with Serge Savard?

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. member is commenting on items that fall within the mandate of the Gomery commission. The Conservative Party has status before the Gomery commission. If he wants through legal counsel to intervene that would be the appropriate place to do so.

It is not appropriate to try to operate a parallel public inquiry here on the floor of the House of Commons when in fact the effect of that is to make mistakes on an almost daily basis that end up actually compromising the work of Justice Gomery.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is tough to take anything the minister says seriously. Let me quote something he said in the past: "Canada needs an alternative to tired, corrupt, intellectually bankrupt Liberal government...". This is the minister who not even so long ago was saying that. Now he defends the same corruption that he used to attack.

Today at the inquiry the Prime Minister took no responsibility for his role in funnelling a quarter of a million dollars of taxpayers' money to Serge Savard, his fundraiser friend. The Prime Minister is testifying that he saw no evil, heard no evil and did no evil. How can he claim ignorance when he was directly involved in awarding a quarter of a million dollar contract?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is pretty audacious for the hon. member to say. Let us talk about corruption. I can say one thing about the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party would not have, as its deputy leader, someone who cannot keep his word on a written agreement, somebody whose signature is not worth the paper it is written on. The Liberal Party would not tolerate that and I do not think the Liberal Party would tolerate somebody who would have a staff member impersonate them on a radio show while they were serving coffee in their coffee shop either.

● (1440)

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to the former Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, Hal Jackman, the Liberal Party has as a minister a man who is "a disgrace to our political system" and "a sleaze of the worst order".

The Prime Minister pretends in public that he was outraged with Liberal corruption, but yesterday in private he snickered about it, saying that he was proud of Jean Chrétien's contemptuous performance at the commission and that he agreed with virtually every single word. Why is it that the Prime Minister sings one tune of outrage about Liberal corruption in public but applauds it in the secrecy of the caucus room?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate this one more time. This Prime Minister has been absolutely clear about his commitment to transparency and accountability. He put the Gomery commission in place. He indicated he wanted that commission to do its work. That is why he is there today, answering questions in a candid, frank and straightforward fashion. I would ask that the hon. members of the opposition actually let Mr. Justice Gomery do his work.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this sanctimony is unbelievable from the crowd whose own senior PMO source says "it remains to be seen if we can actually dump Gomery but we are working on it", the same crowd whose caucus chair yesterday applauded Jean Chrétien for opening up a "can of whup-ass" on Judge Gomery.

How do the Liberals expect Canadians to take their commitment to getting to the bottom of Liberal corruption seriously when they cheered on that ridiculous scene of contempt brought to the commission by Prime Minister Chrétien?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that it is not appropriate to discuss what goes on within the sanctity of a caucus room. The only way to know absolutely what goes on within the Liberal caucus is to be a member of the Liberal caucus.

I can tell the House that if there were any centrist, moderate, progressive members over there they would be welcome in the Liberal caucus, in fact more welcome than they are there and they would feel very comfortable in a modern progressive party like the Liberal Party of Canada. The way they can learn what goes on in the Liberal caucus is by joining the Liberal caucus and building a better Canada.

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SPORT CANADA

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the ancient Greeks had a saying that goes like this: A healthy body is a healthy mind.

My question is for the Minister of State for Sport. What is the Government of Canada doing to encourage and promote physical activity among Canadian children and youth?

Oral Questions

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Sport), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the member for Scarborough Centre as someone who exemplifies those two fine Greek qualities.

I was very pleased earlier this week with my colleague, the minister responsible for public health, who made an announcement in Toronto on Tuesday, in partnership with the Canadian Tire Foundation, to provide for up to 20,000 children to take part in community sports events over the next year. These are children who, through poverty, disability or other barriers, were unable to take part. This will rise to 50,000 children over the next three years.

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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after 12 years of broken Liberal promises, parents are desperate for child care solutions. Canadian families do not want vague promises. They want a sustainable, legislated not for profit program; a safe place for their kids.

The Minister of Social Development might be famous for the number of pucks that he stopped but on this one he is leaving the net wide open to big buck operators. It is sort of a business opportunity on kids.

Why has he failed to deliver even the basic elements of a national child care program and why is he leaving it wide open for the for profits to move in and take it away?

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we are trying to do in the area of early learning and child care is to make a breakthrough that has not happened for the last 20 years or more, and that is to move something from fragments, from very good individual parts, but to something that really represents a system with the ambitions of a system and the expectations of a system so that children in this country can have the kind of early learning and child care development that can come from that sort of assistance.

• (1445)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it begs the question: Exactly what is the government trying to do? What kind of breakthrough are we are talking about? None of the basic elements are there in terms of the money, not for profit, enshrined in legislation, accessibility, affordability. Just what is the breakthrough that we are talking about?

The minister is creating a system that will allow big buck operators to move in on our kids. Is that what the government calls a breakthrough?

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our intention is to create a system that has quality across the country.

Our focus is on quality, delivering quality for parents and for young kids in their early development; working with the people across the country in small towns and in bigger places; work with what we are, improve what we are and to create this system.

NATIONAL REVENUE

Mr. Jeremy Harrison (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of National Revenue denigrated my home province by referring to Saskatchewan as having been “mired in the world of have not, clamouring for subsidies”.

If the people of Saskatchewan have managed to pull themselves forward it has been in spite of this government, not because of it.

Why will the Liberal government not treat Saskatchewan with respect? Is it ignorance or is it arrogance?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question because now I can stand up in the House and say exactly what the Minister of National Revenue did.

He was celebrating the enormous success of Saskatchewan. He was celebrating the fact that, thanks to the good leadership of the Minister of Finance, we have been able to arrive at a situation where Saskatchewan no longer requires equalization, so there is more for those provinces that do.

Frankly, as a Manitoban I look forward to the day when we no longer require equalization.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the revenue minister celebrates Saskatchewan by taking a \$1.08 back for every dollar we gain from oil and gas revenue. Yesterday he proved to the people of Saskatchewan that his arrogance is only surpassed by his ignorance. He does not understand that his government's carrot and stick equalization formula puts Saskatchewan's future in jeopardy.

The Liberals use their outdated formula as a self-serving political program picking the winners and losers. Why will the finance minister not fix the formula so provinces like Saskatchewan do not have to fight with Ottawa to get their own money back?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is really hard to understand what the members opposite do not understand about success.

Thanks to the hard work of the finance minister, who is from the province of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan is doing exceptionally well, and we should all be proud of that. It is a big accomplishment. It is finally in a position where it is able to manage its own affairs completely. It is a wonderful success story for Saskatchewan.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in June 2003 a Canadian, Zahra Kazemi, was assassinated while in the custody of the Iranian government. That rogue state felt immune to repercussions from our impotent government.

Why did the Canadian government not intervene after her arrest and before her death?

Oral Questions

Hon. Dan McTeague (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I made it very clear to all, and the hon. member would certainly know, that our Canadian ambassador to Iran has taken up the case of Ms. Kazemi, which reflects very clearly on the fact that Canada has renewed its desire to have a trial that is both transparent and fair and which brings those perpetrators of that brutal murder to justice as soon as possible.

We cannot in the House of Commons afford to play political games because the House must speak with a universal voice of condemnation, and that is exactly what I expect the member to do.

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): I have been condemning for a long time, Mr. Minister.

The Iranian ambassador to Great Britain—

• (1450)

The Speaker: I think the hon. member meant, Mr. Speaker, perhaps.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I did mean, Mr. Speaker. My apologies.

The Iranian ambassador to Great Britain attributed Ms. Kazemi's death to "shrewd security forces," and added, "We're sorry for it". Not sorry enough to return her body to her family and not sorry enough to find her assassins.

It is time the government showed Iran that these human rights violations will not be tolerated by Canada any longer. What is the government going to do to rectify this situation?

Hon. Dan McTeague (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will know that a couple of months ago we in fact withdrew our ambassador as a most important sign of our condemnation of this act.

I am glad the hon. member has raised this question because it is a serious one. The comments of the Iranian ambassador to Britain are the latest in a line of comments from Iranian high officials, including the president himself, that reflect serious concerns about the circumstances of Ms. Kazemi's death.

We renew our call to ask for a transparent and fair trial that will bring forth the actions that will bring those perpetrators to justice.

* * *

[Translation]

BROADCASTING

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the CRTC approved the sale of the Radiomédia stations, including CKAC, to the Corus group. This CRTC decision will result in the closure of CKAC's newsroom and in the loss of some 20 jobs, and this will adversely affect Montreal's francophone information sector.

In the name of the right of Montreal's francophones to information, will the minister ask the CRTC to reconsider its decision to avoid the paradox of Montreal's having fewer French newsrooms than English ones?

Hon. Liza Frulla (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Minister responsible for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are well aware that the CRTC makes its decisions totally at arm's length. Let

us also not forget that this transaction has the positive effect of increasing regional coverage by regional radio stations.

The case of CKAC is unique. If an application is made, we will then review the whole decision. However, until such time, this is a decision that was made by the CRTC in a context where there are problems regarding AM radio—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Lambert.

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we know that the government has the power to ask the CRTC to reconsider its decision. Therefore, I will repeat my question.

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage tell us whether or not she intends to use that power, that privilege, and ask the CRTC to reconsider its decision?

Hon. Liza Frulla (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Minister responsible for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, we have not received any request. Second, if a request is made, we will have to look at the whole situation, not just in Montreal, but also in the regions. We will have to take into consideration the viability of AM radio stations and the jobs retained, both in Montreal and in the regions.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, crystal meth is a highly addictive, dangerous and potentially deadly drug that is destroying individuals and communities in Saskatchewan and throughout this great country. It is time to get tough on criminals who traffic this menace.

Crystal meth needs to be reclassified as a schedule 1 drug under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. This will allow judges to impose penalties on par with those imposed for trafficking in cocaine and heroin.

Will the justice minister do the right thing and reclassify crystal meth?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this issue was discussed at the recent federal, provincial and territorial meetings of Ministers of Justice. We have referred that to our working group to come back with a recommendation for us by this June so that we can proceed on this matter.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government falsely leads new Canadians to believe that they can successfully sponsor their parents to come to Canada.

Top immigration officials tell me that sponsoring parents and grandparents is a zero priority. They will not even look at the files. However the Liberals continue to rake in the application fees and all of the other related funds.

Why is the government misleading new Canadians and taking their money under the false promise that they can actually get their parents into this country?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that of course is that those allegations are absolutely untrue. They do not do anything like that.

In fact, we give everyone an indication of their chances of getting into the country and we give them an opportunity to have a self-assessment and counselling assessment.

I do not think it is very helpful to have a member of Parliament stand in the House and make allegations like that that are hurtful to the people who are making those applications. Shame on him.

* * *

•(1455)

AGRICULTURE

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

The United States closed its border to Canadian cattle and other livestock in May 2003 as a result of BSE, causing devastating economic impacts for the Canadian livestock industry.

Yesterday, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Andy Mitchell, met with the U.S. secretary of agriculture in Washington. What assurances did the minister receive from Secretary Johanns regarding the upcoming March 7 border opening and when can farmers expect full and fair resumption of trade within the industry?

The Speaker: The hon. member knows she cannot refer to other hon. members by name. I would caution her in that regard.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food (Rural Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister and his delegation certainly should be congratulated for their trip to Washington and for their efforts to get the border open.

We are very pleased that Secretary Johanns is committed to the March 7 opening for live cattle under 30 months. We are also pleased that he is still committed to working toward a full resumption of trade.

We as a government will continue to press aggressively in that matter for full resumption of beef trade—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Peace River.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the chairman of the Standing Committee on Finance.

Oral Questions

Today a motion was adopted at the Standing Committee on Finance instructing the chairman to sign the contracts for four specialists in budgetary estimates to conduct quarterly updates of the estimated fiscal balance, with the assistance of the officials of the Department of Finance, by the end of the business day.

This motion was a follow up instruction in relation to an earlier instruction from the committee and motion of the committee on December 1, 2004 that was approved.

Is it the intention of the chairman of the finance committee to comply with the instruction of the committee, or is he—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as discussed today in committee, we plan on keeping our commitment. The clerk has the drafts prepared. The drafts have been sent to the independent economist. We are waiting to hear if everything is fine and if the terms in the contract are agreed to, but it is in the hands of the clerk.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, history repeats itself. Secret experiments are still being conducted using Canadian soldiers as guinea pigs. Canadians are shocked to learn that soldiers used as test subjects by Defence Research and Development Canada are being denied disability pensions today as a result of health problems caused by these experiments.

Now that the minister has confirmed there is a problem, what does he intend to do on behalf of all members of the military involved in highly classified activity?

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are no individuals of that nature who have come to our attention, but if there are, we created a special centre in 1999 where veterans and soldiers could go if they had any problems.

If the member has knowledge of any individual who has any pension issues or problems at all, she should bring them to the minister or myself, or the individual can go to the centre that was created in 1999 to deal with exactly these problems.

* * *

[Translation]

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the residents of the Magdalen Islands are facing a crisis. If Québecair Express stops operating, there would be just one flight a day operated by Air Canada. The mayor of the Magdalen Islands recently stated that he feared it would be impossible to transport the sick and those who accompany them or ensure the arrival of specialists.

Could the Minister of Transport reassure the people of the Magdalen Islands that they will not have to cancel their appointments in big city hospitals, because there is no room on Air Canada?

Government Orders

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if anyone in the House is concerned with the fate of the people of the Magdalen Islands, it is me, because I am one of them.

However, I can reassure the hon. member by telling him that I have had discussions with the president of Air Canada. Furthermore, on Friday, I will be meeting the mayor of the Magdalen Islands with the hon. member to examine all the details, air or marine transportation or any other problem he wishes to raise.

* * *

● (1500)

[English]

SOCIAL PROGRAMS

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, President Bush is proposing significant changes to U.S. social security. In the wake of reports that it is not fiscally sustainable, what assurances do Canadians have that the equivalent of U.S. social security in this country is sustainable?

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are quite fortunate here in Canada in that our public pension system is fiscally sustainable through to the year 2075. That puts us in remarkably good shape, vis-à-vis our friends to the south. That directly flows from our commitment to fiscal discipline over the past number of years and the measures that we took in the last few years to ensure that our pension system is in fact on a fiscally sound basis.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Indian reserves homes with Zonolite insulation are called death houses because exposure to Zonolite kills. The government is spending millions of dollars on military bases to ensure that armed forces personnel are not exposed to Zonolite, but yet on Indian reserves it only sends a letter to the band councils saying that they have homes which are toxic.

How can this glaring contradiction be allowed to exist? Will the minister tell us today that he will help Indian reserve communities test for and pay for the removal of Zonolite wherever it is found?

Hon. Andy Scott (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question because it gives me the opportunity to reassure the member that in fact we identified every house that we could find in our records that might contain Zonolite. We advised the first nations chiefs and councils. Health Canada has made inspections in those communities and on a case by case basis we are paying for the remedy.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we learned yesterday that the Minister of National Defence was considering reorganizing operations at the Bagotville military base, in my riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. This decision is not

supposed to result in any job losses, although I have my doubts. The Minister of National Defence has to recognize the strategic nature of the Bagotville military base.

Can he assure us that this reorganization will not result in any job losses for the riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord?

[English]

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the member's information and for the information of his constituents, negotiations are taking place. This issue is being looked at but no decision has been made yet. It is important to note however that there will be no reduction in pilots, no reduction in jobs, and no reduction in the capabilities of the air force, which we value as an essential part of our armed forces.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government House leader would explain to the House of Commons and to the viewing public what the government's legislative agenda is for the upcoming week and the days beyond.

I would also like to know when we can expect the judge's remuneration bill that has been promised for months now to come before the House.

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today and tomorrow we will continue third reading of Bill C-29, the Patent Act. This will be followed by second reading of Bill C-31 and Bill C-32, respecting international trade and foreign affairs.

We will then proceed to second reading of Bill C-28, which amends the Food and Drugs Act; report stage of Bill C-8, the public service bill; report stage of Bill C-3, the Coast Guard bill; and report stage of Bill S-17, respecting tax treaties.

On Monday we will begin with report stage and third reading of Bill C-24, the equalization bill. If this is completed, we will then return to the previous list where we left off.

Tuesday and Thursday of next week shall be allotted days.

Next Wednesday we will commence second reading of Bill C-38, the civil marriage bill.

With respect to the question on the Judges Act, that will be forthcoming in due course.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1505)

[Translation]

PATENT ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-29, an act to amend the Patent Act, be read the third time and passed.

Government Orders

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, without taking all the time remaining to me, I would like to get to my conclusion.

In my speech on this important bill, I mentioned all the contributions made by the hon. member for Windsor West to the former Bill C-9. It is a very important act, which, as we know, is affected by Bill C-29.

Bill C-29, an act to amend the Patent Act does speak to pharmaceutical patents, but in addition—and that is unfortunate—it amends former the Bill C-9, to which the hon. member for Windsor West contributed so much. As we know, Bill C-9 deals with the entire question of AIDS, which is rampant in Africa and causing a crisis all across it.

What is so unfortunate about Bill C-29? It modifies former Bill C-9 and the government is, in a way, eliminating the fact that representatives of the Senate can sit on the advisory committee that will, in fact, be making decisions about which pharmaceuticals will be on the list of drugs available for export.

Because of that, we are somewhat hesitant to give our support to Bill C-29. It is unfortunate because the primary goal of the bill as it now appears, was not to make these changes to the former Bill C-9.

At the same time, it is very important to emphasize that we consider former Bill C-9 extremely useful in resolving or beginning to resolve the crisis in Africa. Since the regulations will not come into force for several years—and even though Africa cannot wait—we must wait in order to be able to help Africans to the fullest.

For this reason we will support Bill C-29 only bring about the implementation of the regulations of former Bill C-9 as quickly as possible, so that we will finally be able to help the people of Africa, who need it so much.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

* * *

• (1510)

[*Translation*]

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE ACT

The House resumed from February 9, 2005 consideration of the motion that Bill C-31, an act to establish the Department of International Trade and to make related amendments to certain acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The last time that this bill was before the House, the hon. member for Joliette was speaking. He still has nine minutes left in the time allotted for questions and comments.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary had asked me a question which I did not have an opportunity to answer. I will start by replying to him.

It was actually a very interesting question that enables us once again to clarify the role that the Bloc Québécois plays in this House. The parliamentary secretary was wondering how it was that a sovereigntist party could be interested in this question of the separation of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade into two entities, namely Foreign Affairs and International Trade. It is interesting to note, by the way, that in this case it is the governing Liberals who are the separatists while we are trying to the contrary to suggest that there be some consistency between two key functions of a department.

When we are here in Ottawa, we not only defend Quebec's interests but we also promote a concept of the responsibilities of a country, a nation and a government. We do not think that it is in Quebec's interest to divide in two the missions of international trade and foreign affairs. We would not like a sovereign Quebec to take an approach like that currently proposed by the Liberal Party of Canada, by the current government. It is an approach that means that Foreign Affairs cannot use trade policy as a tool to help fulfill its international obligations.

We are therefore here both to defend Quebec's interests and to promote responsibilities that should be shared by all nations and all sovereign countries throughout the international community.

So this is the answer that I wanted to give the parliamentary secretary. Unfortunately, he is not here now, but I know that he is an avid reader of *Hansard*. He will therefore have an opportunity to see my answer.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during question period I had an opportunity to examine the bill we are looking at today. Basically, it is a matter of dividing up the activities of the Department of Foreign Affairs and of International Trade.

I was struck by the fact that here we are at a time when there are more and more rules on globalization, when world trade is multiplying, wanting to separate these two entities. The government is trying to convince us that the bill it introduced in December 2004 is nothing more than a housekeeping bill, a technical bill with the purpose of dividing up functions.

I would like to ask my colleague whether he does not think the bill also contains a vision that is likely in the end to reduce the protection of human rights in the world. There cannot be any distinction made between trade and foreign affairs at a time of burgeoning foreign investment, trade intensification, when people believe that ethical investment must play an increasingly important role and we on this side of the House believe that fair trade must play an important role as well.

Does he think that the bill to divide the two entities is liable to reduce the protection of human rights?

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his most relevant question.

Government Orders

I would like to cite a few figures here. He was saying that trade is intensifying. One of the indicators of that fact is that Canadian exports, as a percentage of everything we produce, are increasing phenomenally from decade to decade. In 1971, for example, 18.2% of what we produced was exported from Canada, Quebec included. In 1980, the figure rose to 24.6%. So nearly a quarter of Canadian production was exported. At the moment it is 38%, that is, almost 40%. The figure for Quebec is even higher.

Indeed, we can no longer separate from our production processes our responsibilities for human rights, union rights, environmental rights, social rights and cultural rights. Since 40% of everything we produce goes abroad, we must keep in mind that this is production on a planetary scale.

Unfortunately, yesterday we were reminded that this reality is quickly catching up to us. The closure of the Wal-Mart in Jonquière fools no one. It is an anti-labour move, which we are obliged to denounce here. However, if we have no action outside Canada and Quebec to denounce anti-labour activities, we shall find ourselves isolated. In any case, within North America Quebec is already fairly isolated in this regard. This Wal-Mart incident is going to be a common occurrence here, just as this sort of thing happens every day in Mexico, Honduras and pretty much all over the world.

I completely agree with the hon. member that the division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade into two entities will weaken Canada's capacity—even though, at the moment, that capacity below what is expected of Canada—to establish a trade policy that serves foreign policy, and what the hon. members across the way like to call the promotion of Canadian values.

In that sense, this division is politically harmful to Canada, and indirectly, to Quebec. What is more, it is economically harmful, because the current foreign affairs function plays an important role in promoting our export interests. This is true for Canada, but also for Quebec. As a result, everyone will lose. The only winner in this situation will be an economist vision of globalization that jettisons everything to do with the environment, culture, social rights and union rights.

In closing, I would add that the civil society groups very rightly defending these causes will find themselves shunted back and forth between the department of Foreign Affairs, which will say that Canada's trade policy and international economic relations are the responsibility of International Trade, which in turn will say it deals with international trade only, and so matters to do with the big international conventions are the business of Foreign Affairs. Thus these groups will find themselves in no man's land with even less of an audience. They will no longer be able to put pressure on this government, which is already extremely weak in terms of its planetary social responsibilities. Such pressure will be even less significant, and we shall see drift, something that has already begun with this decision by the Prime Minister.

• (1515)

[English]

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question for my good friend. He said that by splitting the department, it would weaken it.

By splitting the department, as Bill C-31 outlines, does he not see that it will allow trade to focus on trade and foreign affairs to focus on foreign affairs policy per se? Does he not see that it will allow the department to focus on the areas about which he has expressed concern, like labour abuse, child abuse, labour laws being strengthened, et cetera? This will enhance the department's position and ability to address those concerns.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question because it touches on what is at the heart of this debate. We know this was all done on the sly and they are trying to make this a fait accompli. We know the decision was made a year ago by a little known order. However, I do not believe that separating the two entities will make them stronger, on the contrary.

I will give you a single example. Currently, an ambassador is evaluated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as the Minister of International Trade, on both missions. This will no longer be so. In the future, under Bills C-31 and C-32, ambassadors will be evaluated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs based on diplomatic performances. That is very good. I have nothing against it. However, the Minister of International Trade will no longer have any evaluation to make and ambassadors will be less inclined to look out for Canadian economic interests.

Furthermore, under Bill C-32—I can never remember the clause number—coordinating international relations will no longer be the responsibility of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. If this coordination had been left to a single minister, then that might have made up for creating two separate departments.

However, the coordination of international relations—and I will close on this note—has now been entrusted to the Minister of International Trade. As a result, both missions will be weakened to the detriment of Canada's political position and Quebec's interests.

• (1520)

[English]

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I get into my presentation, I would like to respond to the previous speaker when he said that it is a fait accompli, that it has been done in the back rooms. That is not the case. As we saw, he was on his feet a minute ago expressing his views. I am on my feet expressing my opinion. Yesterday we were debating Bill C-31. The Minister of International Trade and the parliamentary secretary a couple of days ago were doing the same thing. I refuse to accept the comment that this is being done behind the scenes.

Bill C-31 and Bill C-32 will be voted on in this House. We all know the numbers. We do not have a majority government but we certainly know that if we present good legislation, the opposition members would not dare not vote in favour of it, because in essence, they would be telling Canadians that they do not want to do what is good for the country. Nothing is being done in the back rooms. Everything is above board and transparent. That is why I take this opportunity to talk about Bill C-31 at second reading.

Government Orders

Bill C-31 establishes the Department of International Trade. I have said before and I will say again that I support this initiative, which was introduced back in December by the Minister of International Trade and the Prime Minister, to create this new department. It enhances our ability to improve our trade and economic position nationally and internationally, but mostly it addresses some of the concerns that were expressed by the previous speaker and other members.

The government's decision to establish a separate Department of International Trade and to add to it the investment functions from Industry Canada is a recognition of the importance that these two functions work in close collaboration with each other in shaping a strong 21st century economy for Canada.

One of the key priorities of the new department and this government is to continue to further secure and enhance our access to the United States. Most of my comments will be primarily as our trade activities relate to the U.S. and Mexico. Of course, as we have heard repeatedly from other speakers, the United States is our major trading partner and I want to reflect that in my comments. At the same time I want to add some comments on how the Minister of International Trade is very proactive in trying to expand our horizons and secure future opportunities for Canada.

Canada and the United States share a unique and vital relationship which is driven not only by our social and cultural similarities with respect to our history, but also our economies primarily are intertwined. This serves as a model to the entire world. The importance of this relationship can never be overstated. We have heard that stated repeatedly. Earlier today in the House of Commons there were questions about our beef industry, our softwood lumber industry, energy, and the list goes on.

Canada and the United States share the largest bilateral flow of goods, services, people and capital between two countries in the entire world. Approximately \$1.8 or \$1.9 billion worth of goods and services move across the border each day. Canada and the United States are each other's largest customers and biggest suppliers. For example, in 2003 Canada exported \$330 billion in goods to the United States and imported \$240 billion in return. When members do the adding and subtracting, they will see where we stand.

The largest and most reliable source of energy was exported from Canada to the U.S. in 2003. The value of this exported energy was \$42 billion U.S. The relationship is very important to Canada because over 80% of Canadian goods and services exports are destined for the United States. These exports represent approximately 30% of the value of our GDP.

• (1525)

Canada is the number one foreign market for 37 of the 50 states in the United States of America. Although the U.S. buys more goods from Canada than from any other country in the world, its exports to Canada represent only 1.8% of its GDP. When we compare the numbers, the percentage of GDP, 30% to 1.8%, we can see why we try to do our best to maintain an excellent relationship.

Earlier today we heard in the House that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is meeting with his counterparts in the United States. This government and the Prime Minister have been

continuously working hard with the President of the United States to make sure that we have access to that market with respect to our beef industry. While trade is highly integrated and mutually dependent, the fact that we depend more on the U.S. market than the U.S. does on us is very clear.

NAFTA is the cornerstone of our trading relationship with the United States and Mexico and has served us extremely well. Under NAFTA and the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, Canada has expanded two-way merchandise trade with the United States by over 8% annually.

NAFTA was a visionary trade agreement when it was signed and is still a model for the world. It has succeeded in stimulating growth, raising standards of living and delivering competitive prices for customers. Most of all it has created jobs and growth for Canadians right across our country. Our enterprises have been embraced. The new opportunities created by the NAFTA market have become stronger, more competitive and more export driven.

This of course has helped Canadians reach a very high level in the G-8. Today among the G-8 proudly I say we are looked at as the number one country in terms of no deficit, tremendous growth and job creation. That is not to say, of course, that we have been over the past many years recognized continuously as the best country in the world in which to live. That does not happen and people do not say that without a reason.

Since January 1, 1998 virtually all Canada-U.S. trade has been tariff free, fostering increased trade and investment among the various partners. Between 1993 and 2003, two-way trade in goods increased an average of 7.6% per year. Canada receives about 11% of the total stock of U.S. direct investment abroad, which amounted to \$192 billion U.S. in 2003.

In turn, Canadian companies have also invested in the United States. In 2003 they invested approximately \$127 billion U.S., accounting for 41% of Canadian direct investment abroad and employing 534,000 people in the United States. In economic terms we are truly integrated and vital to each other's economy and of course security.

We built on the already strong foundation of the Canada-U.S. relationship during President Bush's visit to Canada last November. During that visit the Prime Minister and the president committed to deepening cooperation in North America and the world as a whole. They agreed to work bilaterally to address Canada-U.S. priorities and to continue close cooperation with Mexico on issues of trilateral importance. They also announced the new partnership to lay out an agenda designed to increase the security, prosperity and quality of life of citizens on all sides of the borders.

Government Orders

Through the new partnership, Canada and the United States committed to continuing joint efforts on the smart borders accord to secure the safe movement of people and goods in North America. FAST, which stands for free and secure trade, and NEXUS are two examples of joint Canada-U.S. programs which have been expanded under the smart borders initiative. It has often been said that post 9/11 not just our country and the United States have changed, but the world as a whole has changed and is still changing.

● (1530)

That is why in cooperation with our neighbours to the south, the United States, we have been working to find the means, ways and systems not only to move goods and services expeditiously but more so to move goods and people in a secure way. FAST and NEXUS are the two systems that have been implemented to facilitate that.

The FAST initiative is designed to make cross-border commercial shipments simpler, cheaper and subject to fewer delays. Something we have been hearing about continuously is how to eliminate delays, how to expedite, how to prevent pile-ups at the border, at the Windsor crossing for example, while being cognizant of the fact that we must maintain security. FAST is currently operational at 12 land border crossings. It is anticipated that all land border crossings will be FAST capable in the near future.

The NEXUS program facilitates the movement of pre-approved travellers moving between Canada and the United States. As much as I talked about our goods moving across borders by trucks for example, we also must keep in mind that there is a tremendous number of people who frequently fly to different destinations in Canada and the U.S. for pleasure or for business, daily or on a weekly basis. The NEXUS program helps to alleviate some of the anxieties and delays that people have experienced in the past. I am sure that even now people are experiencing some.

Through this new partnership we have also committed to secure the borders through a land preclearance initiative, and make strategic investments in border infrastructure at key crossings, such as Detroit-Windsor, to ensure that physical limitations do not hamper the flow of North American commerce. Our goal is to strike the right balance between ensuring effective border security while facilitating the cross-border flow of low risk goods and services. In support of this our government has already announced more than \$1 billion in border infrastructure improvements.

The North American economy is already highly integrated. We need to ensure that our policies, particularly standards and regulations, reflect and complement that integration. Through the new partnership the government has committed to pursuing joint approaches to partnerships, consensus standards and smarter regulations to promote greater efficiency and competitiveness while enhancing health and safety.

In addition we have agreed to accelerate efforts on rules of origin liberalization to help reduce export related transaction costs. NAFTA rules of origin, which determine whether a product is entitled to be shipped tariff free within the continent, and other customs formalities are often complex and impose a costly regulatory burden on business.

At the July 2004 NAFTA commission meeting, ministers endorsed a rules of origin liberalization package covering a broad range of foods, consumer and industrial products affecting approximately \$20 billion U.S. in trilateral trade which was implemented by Canada and the United States last month. This is significant. Work is already well under way trilaterally to explore the scope for agreement on a second group of liberalized rules of origin to be implemented in January 2006 in sectors such as chemicals, pharmaceuticals, plastics and rubber, and motor vehicles. Through this working group we can use the NAFTA framework to further enhance and strengthen our trade and commerce relations with the United States.

All these steps reflect the reality of the North American economy. Increasingly our companies, our entrepreneurs, whether they are Canadian, American or Mexican, operate continent-wide supply chains and distribution systems. Approximately one-third of Canada-U.S. trade is intra-firm, that is, between two branches of the same corporation.

Considering many Canadian production and service hubs are located closer to U.S. markets than some American sites, and are within an hour and a half drive of the U.S., it would seem natural that companies would take advantage of strong Canada-U.S. relations to examine and maximize their business potential. We are committed to doing what we can and taking the necessary steps to facilitate and foster these trading relationships as they are of benefit to all Canadians.

● (1535)

Canada and the U.S. have one of the most prosperous and dispute free economic relationships in the world. There have been a few bugs here and there, but the mechanism is continuously being applied, seeking through those means to ensure that we are treated fairly. Softwood lumber is one area where on many occasions the WTO has ruled in favour of Canada. The government has continuously been at the plate, ensuring that our position, without any ambiguity, is known. The rulings speak for themselves.

As I have already mentioned, Canada and the United States have highly integrated economies, and this adds to the prosperity of both nations. This has been shown over the past 11 years that I have been here. Back in 1993 our unemployment rate was around 12.7%. In 2004 over three million jobs were created, and the economy is stable.

We eliminated the deficit many years ago. We have provided surpluses over the past several years along with balanced budgets. This has allowed the government to reinvest in the economy, whether it be in health care, social programs, research chairs, et cetera. Part of that is the result of the excellent cooperation we have with the United States.

Government Orders

I have said repeatedly that it is important that Bill C-31 be debated in the House so everyone has the opportunity to express their views. Just as important, Bill C-31 must be passed in the House. I encourage all members to consider why we are looking at Bill C-31 and Bill C-32. Bill C-31 is important legislation that would allow the Minister of International Trade to focus on trade.

Before I went into politics, I used to run an employment agency. One department specialized in information technology. Another specialized in the medical industry. Others specialized in the legal industry and the technical and engineering industries. I used to tell my staff that if they spread themselves too thin, they would not be effective. Consultants who worked in the IT area strictly focused in that area. The same was true for the consultants who worked in the legal area and those who worked in the medical area. They would focus on those areas only. They did not cover all ground at any given time.

Once Bill C-31 is passed, it will provide the framework for the minister of trade to focus on trade and economic activity and to generate more commerce for Canadian companies and Canadians. The end result will be revenue, employment and reinvestment in our country.

I covered more so the relationship we have with the U.S. and partially the relationship we have Mexico. That is very important. We should continue to enhance that relationship. At the same time, it is incumbent upon us as the government and with the help of all members in the House to promote new partnerships, grow economies, or as they are also termed emerging economies, whether that be China or Brazil. We cannot overlook Europe and some of the new countries unfolding as well. That will broaden the opportunity to work with the U.S. and yet create other options.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is not often that I am partly in agreement with a member opposite. However, today I agree in part with the hon. member's presentation on our trade with the United States and Mexico. He is right when he says that we are doing business with these countries and that there is a huge import and export market. However, he would be well advised to inquire about the impact of all these imports and exports.

We have been debating Bill C-31 for a few days and I keep getting back to the issue of the maquiladoras, in Mexico. It is the best example, it is at the core of our discussions. I hope the hon. member has already done some research on this issue.

The maquiladoras are free trade zones where Canadian businesses, among others, have settled and are making big bucks. These companies are not required to reinvest anything, whether it is in terms of labour or infrastructures. Wages are very low and working conditions are terrible. These companies would rather invest in buses to pick up workers and bring them to their workplace, thus ensuring that they are indeed at work doing their job, than invest to provide these workers with decent living conditions. There is no infrastructure. The water is literally undrinkable, except on the company's

premises. The ground is polluted all around the plants. Human rights are not respected. These companies just focus on trade.

The hon. member talked about competition, productivity, competitiveness and trade relations. He never said anything about the impact on the population.

In light of these facts, I have a question for him. Does he realize that trade relations that are strictly based on competition totally ignore the development or the protection of human rights? Can the hon. member tell me whether Bill C-31 includes a guarantee that human rights will be protected?

[*English*]

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to what the hon. member had to say. I think the key to her question was how we in these initiatives address the human rights violations of child labour laws, for example.

I asked this earlier and I will repeat it. What would the member prefer? She talked about the area being horrible and that people really had nothing. She talked about the effects on the population. They were already bad.

I will not refer to the area she did, but let us say there is an area with no infrastructure, water, nothing. Should we abrogate our responsibility and say that we will not be there? We can go back to when NAFTA first came into being. We talked about cheap labour in Mexico. I guarantee that if the member were to ask workers today how they are compared to 10 or 13 years ago, I am willing to bet, and I am not a betting man, dime for dollar that they would say they are better off today. Back then they were earning nothing, but now they have jobs.

The member brought forth concerns about human rights. My view was, is and will continue to be this. I would rather be there so I can have the opportunity to address it, but I know Rome was not built overnight. I do not have the ability to go in there tomorrow and tell them to change. It is a gradual process. By being there, we not only create economic activity, thus prosperity and opportunity for all concerned, but we also relate our ways, our Canadian approach, which is respect for human rights, dignity, et cetera. That is another part of Bill C-31. It might not be as tangible as they want to present it, but it is tangible and it is there.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Speaker, when we talk about creating jobs, I should point out that, in Mexico, there are currently 2 million people working in maquiladoras, except that these people are losing their jobs, precisely because companies like General Motors Canada, which had opened plants there, are closing down their operations and moving to China, with the assurance that their costs will be lower in China. Canada is opening doors for these businesses in China.

Government Orders

On the environmental front, the businesses which operated in maquiladora areas have contaminated the land in northern Mexico. It was contaminated by lead, and the businesses are not even required to decontaminate.

At present, wages are low. In the future, even larger numbers of people will be living in poverty because they are migrants who travel from the south to the north of Mexico to work in plants opening up trade between Mexico, Canada, and the United States. These people are living in shanties, because these are Indians from the north or from the south who migrate to these businesses.

My hon. colleague would be well advised to get the facts.

[*English*]

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, the member is totally out to lunch. She talks about loss of jobs. I got into the computer business in the early 1970s, and there was this fear that jobs would be eliminated, that they would not longer be needed. Receptionists and typists jobs would be gone. It was nonsense.

We have seen what has happened in the past 20 or 30 years. There was a job loss for maybe for those secretary-receptionists who used manual typewriters. The jobs today are high tech. Secretaries have the ability to use various word processing facilities and databases. They are multi-diversified, multi-talented and multi-experienced. They are no longer “good morning, how are you, thank you, type a note” jobs. They have more skills to offer.

There should never be fear that because we are moving to another site, jobs will be lost. For every action there is a counter reaction. We have found means and ways over the years to recreate, reinvent and come back on the human rights side, as she so stressed, on the environment, et cetera. Canada at least knows where it stands. If we have the opportunity to go out there and compete through trading initiatives, we know that we will have the other side to present, not just the dollars and cents.

We have an obligation to this world called earth to try to protect it. We have supported Kyoto. We have invested in our environment like no other country has, our clear cutting in terms of our forestry. We have done our job.

By taking our experiences to these countries, we will also show them the way. Yes, we must be environmentally smart, decent, proper and ethical. However, I cannot go to the people's houses and force them to do what I want them to do. I can only suggest to them. Through the international bodies and cooperation, whether it be NAFTA and other bodies, we will do our best to ensure that the right thing is done.

● (1550)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak in the House to Bill C-31.

I want to recognize the work of my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster. He has done a terrific job in putting forward the NDP's very serious concerns about this bill. I want to begin by speaking about what this bill means and what its consequences are, and then move to some of the specific concerns that we have.

The first thing that strikes me since we came back last September is that the work of the government has been almost completely

characterized by a housekeeping agenda. We have seen ministries pulled apart. We have seen new ministries created. We had a bill that was to create Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, which had already happened a year ago and finally the bill caught up with it. We have seen another bill that created the new Ministry of Human Resources and Skills Development, and on and on it goes.

For us in the NDP, it raises a very serious question along with the feedback that we get from our constituents because it belies what the agenda of the government is all about. Every day in the House during question period we raise extremely serious questions that are the reality of what Canadians are facing, whether it is job losses or the fact that working people are making less money now than they did a decade ago.

One would expect that in this chamber we would be debating these kinds of issues, that we would have a plan from the government to deal with these real questions facing Canadians, yet what have we seen? We have seen this very ho-hum legislative agenda. We have before us today another bill pulling apart another department. For what reason? Is there any logic to this?

We do know that there has been very little consultation. In fact, there has been no consultation on this. It has not been studied in committee. It is not known where these recommendations might have come from, but here it is. It is put forward as some sort of housekeeping initiative. Pulling apart this department and separating out Foreign Affairs and policy on foreign affairs from trade issues is something that will have enormous consequences, both in a policy sense and in the international arena.

As members of the NDP, when we took a look at this bill, we immediately knew instinctively that this bill was the wrong way to go. Now we are hearing some of the commentary that has come out, for example, from retirees from the foreign service who have written to the committee, to the minister, and who have communicated with us. We can see the kinds of serious concerns that are within the professional service. We should be listening to those people.

These are individuals who have invested their professional lives and careers in the foreign service, in DFAIT. When they say to us that they do not understand why this department is being split apart and they do not understand why this bill is coming forward, then it is incumbent upon us to hear what they have to say and to respond to the genuine concerns that they are putting forward.

The fact is that Canada is a well respected middle power. It is a role that Canadians want to see us play in the international community. We are not one of the superpowers, but people see us as an independent nation with an agenda that speaks in the international community, that hopefully has integrity and principle, and is based on the values of protecting people's human rights, and protecting and promoting fair trade values.

Government Orders

It only makes sense to have a department, and presumably it did make sense because we have had this department for 15 years or more since it was created, that was able to bring together these different, very fundamental policy initiatives within government, so that Canada, in terms of its place in the international community would have a policy basis from which to deal with these very important questions. On the one hand it could speak about and maintain the values of human rights and Canada's place in the world, but also recognize that in the context of trade. To us, this initiative is something that is very illogical.

• (1555)

The Prime Minister recently returned from China. There have been other initiatives to other countries. In fact, we have a Prime Minister who likes to be more away than he is at home. We have a Prime Minister who is trying to make us believe that he has this very noble and honourable international agenda for Canada's role in the world. Again, why would we then take a department that has dealt with these two key issues and break it apart?

We have been raising the question of our outrage about the sell-out of Canadian jobs in the House. It has included the possible foreign takeover of Noranda by China, foreign investment, and the lack of any kind of policy review about foreign investment and takeover. The issue that flared up just last week raised by our member for Timmins—James Bay stunned the House in regard to the little Canadian Maple Leaf on a pin. He said to people, “Why is it that Canadian jobs are being exported and being sent overseas? Why are we supporting a race to the bottom? Why are we supporting an economic agenda and a trade agenda that is based on no value of human rights?”

People were stunned and we saw the government scramble. In fact, the minister that day really did not have an answer for the question that was put in the House. He was very much taken aback. However, several days later the government found a loophole and it found a way for the little Maple Leaf flag pin to be made in Canada. It was a very symbolic thing. It spoke to a central issue that has concerned us in the NDP and has concerned Canadians right across the country and that is the future of our economic prosperity, the future of Canadian workers and Canadian families. That may seem distant from this department, but this is a very related question.

I suggest again to members of the House and to the minister that it is a serious mistake to move ahead with this kind of legislation. I know the next piece of legislation that we will be debating is to create the new foreign affairs department. Therefore, we will have these two separate departments.

I have been on so many committees where no matter what party one is a member of members would express frustration about how government departments operate in silos. Whether it is social policy, economic policy, environmental policy, agriculture or whatever it is, we can hear the frustration of government backbenchers too. There is frustration about how difficult it is to deal with some of these complex issues that we face and the studies we might undertake in a committee because we deal with these different departments that never speak to one another. They do not communicate.

We have these ministers who perhaps at a cabinet level have some communication, but very often within the real world of this federal

bureaucracy, especially when there have been so many cutbacks in the public service, these departments become very territorial. I have participated in committees where the whole committee has said, and a word was invented, “horizontality”. What a word, but it was invented to speak to this issue of needing to ensure that departments were working together in a much more comprehensive, constructive, and holistic way to deal with complex policy issues.

That has been a thrust over the seven years that I have been here, whether it has been on issues around employment insurance, social policy or housing. Even in the housing field, a whole secretariat was set up interdepartmentally. I know the minister responsible for housing is very proud of that, that a secretariat was set up to ensure that the different departments that were involved in one way or another on the question of affordable housing were actually working together.

• (1600)

Here we had a department that was actually bringing together these two essential components and now it is going to be broken apart. That is really a very unfortunate thing. It is something that we should expose as a short-sighted move. We should expose it as being very unprofessional. This is evidenced by the letters that we have received from retirees in the foreign service. We should expose it for something that will downgrade Canada's ability to operate in the international community in a very complex world.

It is a move that will lose us credibility as we move forward. We need to have a keen nuance about foreign affairs policies and development, and trade issues.

From the point of view of the NDP and the work that our very able critic, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, has done in speaking to this bill, and I know our foreign affairs critic, the member for Halifax, has been very involved in this area, it is a real mistake to bring forward both of these bills to split DFAIT. I think it is something that we will regret in the long run.

People work in that department and have a lot invested in terms of the different portfolios. We have seen numerous reorganizations in British Columbia. Every department has been turned upside down and inside out. New departments are created and put back together again. They give people different ministers and different subsets and junior ministers.

I always think that when that happens it is a real sign that there is a real structural problem. It is a sign that there is a real problem and a vacuum in leadership. People at the end of the day do not know what to do, so they start moving the blocks around. It strikes me that this is what we have been getting into with this government. There is no agenda. There is no vision about where we are going. There is no vision about protecting Canadian workers. There is no vision about protecting Canadian jobs in Canadian companies. It seems like everything is up for sale.

Bill C-31 is a part of that. It is not the critical part, but it is a part of that larger problem. For those reasons, we in the NDP will be opposing this bill and the break up of DFAIT.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on her very clear and very substantial speech.

Government Orders

I would like to ask her if she thinks it is logical for the government to have decided to have this debate on Bill C-31 and Bill C-32 when it has been announced that, in a few weeks the Minister of Foreign Affairs will be presenting new directions concerning foreign affairs. Mind you, we have been hearing that this was coming for over a month.

All things considered, is this debate not somewhat irrelevant, at a time when we should be focussing more on substance instead of talking about splitting up a department without any foundation in terms of content? I totally agree with her analysis about this being harmful to the economic and political interests of Canada. From a logical standpoint, however, does she think there is any point in having this debate before the foreign policy directions have been discussed?

• (1605)

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from the Bloc has raised an extremely important point. We do know this major foreign policy review, discussion and document is to come forward. Presumably all of us will have a very keen interest in it. There will be a lot of debate about it because there are some very sharp differences about Canada's foreign policy and where it should be headed. It seems inconceivable that we would be taking this very precipitous action to separate this department on the eve of when we are receiving a major policy paper on foreign policy and that the debate will take place.

We would want to be assured that what is happening with this department being cut apart will not impact on what happens in the debate, but we have no assurance of that.

The minister is taking very pre-emptive and unilateral action. There was no compelling imperative out there anywhere saying that this department needed to be sawed in half right now.

At the very least the government could have waited until the foreign policy review paper came forward and members had a chance to take a look at it and deal with that paper in the context of the bill.

However that is not the agenda of the government. It obviously does not want to have that debate, so we will deal with it at that time. It is very unfortunate that it has taken place in this manner because it means we will not have the broader context in which to look at that foreign policy review.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Vancouver East for a very eloquent presentation on the reasons why Bill C-31 is inappropriate. I thought some of her comments were very pertinent to the debate.

Being a fellow member of Parliament from British Columbia, the hon. member and I have seen the actions of the B.C. Liberal government over the last four years with a constant restructuring, pulling apart and tossing together of ministries. I would like her to comment on that.

Another comment she made that was extremely relevant and pertinent had to do with the outsourcing of jobs. She mentioned the

member for Timmins—James Bay who brought forward the Canadian flag lapel pins that were being manufactured offshore.

We heard the Minister of International Trade this week actually encouraging corporations to employ people outside the country. He said that we would not weep if there were lost Canadian jobs. However a member of the government earlier in the debate said that he thought, in some sort of weird physics lesson, that for every action there was an equal and opposite reaction.

If that were the case we would not have seen the 40,000 lost jobs in the textile and clothing industry under the Liberal government's watch. We would not have seen the 20,000 lost jobs in the softwood lumber industry under the Liberal government's watch. We would not have seen the constant degradation in the quality of jobs that we have seen in this country over the past 12 years where there are fewer and fewer workers having access to pension benefits and fewer people having full time jobs. Jobs are becoming increasingly temporary.

I would like the hon. member to comment on those two things, the administrative chaos that she has lived through as a member representing British Columbia with the provincial government, and second, the comment that somehow jobs are not being lost when we know for a fact that they are.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I will deal with my colleague's second point first.

I think a lot of people will be weeping if this policy, or what appears to be a policy, continues. It is now called outsourcing. What a word. People's jobs are being taken away. Their jobs are being sent to corporations that feel they can get a better deal and do something at a much lower cost. The Minister of International Trade had the audacity to tell us that this would be good for workers and good for Canada's economy. If this were not so serious, we would be amused, but it is pretty serious because it does have a real impact. Many people will be weeping at the end of the day when they see their jobs being shipped out of here.

The importance of this department having a comprehensive policy around trade and foreign policy was absolutely critical to developing a program to protect Canadian interests and Canadian jobs and to work in the global economy in the international community.

This is further evidence of one minister running off and doing something while another department is espousing broad human values, which seem to be so contradictory. We are trying to raise some of those contradictions in the House. We want to know why one minister is telling us that the loss of jobs and outsourcing is a good thing, while the Prime Minister is running around the globe talking about human values and human rights. Those things are working against each other. That is another reason that the department should not be split apart.

Government Orders

On the member's second point, I have seen several years of the B. C. Liberal government creating chaos. One has to wonder whether the government has ever considered the impact its decisions will have on the people who work in those departments? It seems to me that the public service is maligned. It is an easy target for the government to take on, whether it is through cuts or reorganization, and yet most often it is the people within those departments who know what works, what produces results and what produces value but they are often never heard.

We know there was no consultation done with respect to Bill C-31. Thousands of people work for this department. They have invested a lot of time and professionalism to it. I bet they never had the opportunity to give their input on this. It is a shame because that creates real instability for people.

That is not the central question but it is a consideration. It would have given everyone more assurance if there had been proper consultation before this bill came forward.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to address the bill now before us, namely Bill C-31. This gives me a chance to illustrate the total lack of consistency displayed by the Liberal government in many areas. This inconsistency is all the more noticeable in foreign affairs and international trade.

I am talking about inconsistency, because Bill C-31 is nothing less than a step backward after what a previous Liberal government, that of Pierre Trudeau, undertook in the 1970s and 1980s. At the time, the federal government decided to integrate the International Trade staff with the Foreign Affairs staff. Most of the decisions made under the leadership of Pierre Trudeau sought to integrate not only the employees, but also their efforts, the efforts of each of the two entities of the Department of Foreign Affairs, so that trade would be a tool at the service of Canada's foreign policy.

Now, the government is proposing two bills. Today, we are dealing with Bill C-31, but Bill C-32 will soon follow. Both of them have the effect of splitting the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade into two distinct departments. From the outset, this is a futile exercise that is pointless, since everything has already been decided and the process is already underway. Indeed, the two bills merely confirm a change that has already been announced by a ministerial order dated December 12, 2003, which is the day the member for LaSalle—Émard was sworn in as Prime Minister.

The issue of the democratic deficit was raised. The Prime Minister likes to seize every opportunity to say that he will solve the democratic deficit. However, on the day that he was sworn in, he decided alone to split a department into two entities.

What I find truly astonishing in the government's action, is above all this blatant lack of transparency. As I mentioned, the split was announced on the very day that the Prime Minister assumed his duties. The Liberals cannot in any way claim that they held consultations on this issue. The fact is there were never any consultations.

In November, at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, the current Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade was absolutely unable to explain the need for this separation. We are served up a *fait accompli* with the same arrogance this government displayed when it had a majority. I want to remind the Liberal members that they are in a minority in this House and that they better realize it as soon as possible.

It would have been interesting to see the government use some logic in its approach. I mean that it could have used the foreign policy review as a chance to consult the public, NGOs, and parliamentarians in order to get their view on international policy. Unfortunately, there will be no foreign policy review. It is highly likely that the interested parties will never be consulted.

We also learned last week that the Prime Minister was not satisfied with the work of his officials and that he asked for the international policy review to be drafted by an Oxford University professor. Just imagine.

In the meantime, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation has come forward and expressed a strong desire to intervene and make its point known to the government, but to no avail. Any request to the Prime Minister to this effect falls on deaf ears.

Let us talk about the foreign policy review. It would have been a good idea to hold a consultation in which interested parties could have participated. The parties could have explained some basic things to the government. Unfortunately they will slip under the radar should these two bills be passed.

• (1615)

I am talking about human rights. We are living in a world where 11 million children under the age of five die each year from easily preventable diseases; where close to 1 billion people do not have access to safe water; where many girls and women do not enjoy the same rights, and dignity, as boys and men; where environmental degradation is both a cause and a symptom of poverty.

In light of this, in September 2000, at the United Nations, world leaders subscribed to an ideal of global justice for the 21st century, promising to achieve the millennium objectives to reduce poverty by half by the year 2015. All subscribed to the principle that, to achieve better living conditions for the people, their governments had to be stable, predictable and fair, and their values had to be able to guide social, political and economic behaviour. That is when the notion of governance started to emerge as a key to development. This is why, in international instruments, governance is taken seriously.

Statements on poverty reduction, prosperity and peace all deal with enhancing governance. Good governance is interpreted as being both a development tool and a development objective, involving a broad range of elements in the fight against poverty, including public sector workings, democratic institutions, the political leadership, civil society, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

Government Orders

I would like to read an excerpt from an Amnesty International report dated December 2004, which states the following:

Canadian companies span the world. Resource companies drill for oil and dig for minerals in isolated, far-flung corners. Telecommunications firms do business on every continent. Foreign investment flows in and out of Canada like never before. As global trade expands and the reach and impact of corporate Canada grows, it becomes increasingly important to ensure that Canadians do business in ways that safeguard and promote fundamental human rights and do not directly or indirectly lead to human rights violations.

We believe that to establish a completely separate Department of International Trade will not prevent rights from being violated because, who, then, will keep an eye on how Canadian companies take human rights into account?

In this world of free trade, we clearly see the emergence of various economies, indeed, a number of powers in direct competition with our economy. Although it is wonderful to see countries succeed, I am greatly concerned by the realization that some countries are doing so at the expense of the fundamental rights of their citizens. Quebeckers have always strongly defended human rights, and the Bloc Québécois firmly believes that any review of Canadian foreign policy must refer directly to this.

Last week, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation contacted me to say that, during the meeting of donor countries in Colombia, Canada was preparing to take a dramatic backward step on human rights. In the first half of 2005, Canada is chairing the group of 24 donor countries providing aid to Colombia.

• (1620)

So, we would expect Canada to take advantage of its role and strongly insist that Colombia take concrete measures to comply with the recommendations of the UN High Commission for Human Rights for a reform of human rights there. It is common knowledge that Colombia currently has the highest number of human rights violations.

However, the Canadian government allowed—this is important—donor countries providing aid to Colombia to relax their rules on granting international aid. This means that they did not consider human rights, they did not consider the climate in Colombia. Business comes first. Human rights are set aside.

Canada was the chair at that meeting and should have insisted with the Colombian government that the situation in its country be recognized, a situation the world recognizes and the UN recognizes, the existence of an armed conflict and a humanitarian crisis. However, Canada did not assert itself. It caved, no doubt—we may think—for a few dollars. It put the issue of respect for human rights on the back burner. Yet, of all the countries in the Americas, Colombia has the highest number of human rights violations each year. This is an extremely sad example of this government's vision, which puts the economy above fundamental values such as human rights and the fight against poverty in developing countries.

It is obvious to me and my colleagues that the structure prior to the December 12 order in council, allowed the government to move easily and more effectively incorporate its human rights concerns into its trade policy. At least, we could expect good governance would be incorporated in this regard. Unfortunately, now it has created a distinct Department of International Trade, which has the

sole objectives of promoting trade, investment partnerships and trade and economic policy, who, then, is going to ensure that the objectives of promoting human rights will be considered?

I repeat. All these arguments should have been expressed and presented as part of the Canadian foreign policy review. Evidently, the Prime Minister is having trouble delivering the goods he promised, because that review has been a long time coming. Now, looking at what is going on, I wonder how much he really wanted that review.

Moreover, when I was describing the government's inconsistency, earlier, I was also thinking about the current discontent in CIDA concerning Canada Corps or Solidarity Canada. This apparently will likely be the umbrella organization for CIDA, the Canadian International Development Agency, which concerns itself with such things as human rights, and would coordinate Canadian projects abroad. During the election campaign, the Prime Minister travelled around. He met people who were supposedly in international solidarity and promised them a distinct agency. He created Canada Corps or Solidarity Canada, and gave it \$15 million in operating funds. However, he did not make certain that Canada Corps and CIDA would work together.

We recently attended a fine briefing by CIDA officials, who told us, "We don't know what to do with Canada Corps. It was created by the Prime Minister. It is a promise made by the Prime Minister, and we don't know what to do with it." It is a good example of the improvisations that make the NGOs more than a little worried. It causes real discontent in a number of organizations that cannot see how the functions of the various government instruments for international aid will work out in practice.

We are seeing so much improvisation within this government that I think I have got a handle on how its decision-making process works. The PM draws the country's international and trade policies on the corner of a table and then submits them to Cabinet. They adopt without turning a hair and without consultation. Scandalous.

• (1625)

This way of doing things is scandalous. I will go still further. I question the motives of the Prime Minister. We know that his family still owns ships. And we are well aware that he is capable of changing legislation to benefit businesses owned by himself, those close to him, or his little millionaire or billionaire friends, so is he not capable of trying to relieve the business he owns of any foreign policy that would limit trade with a certain category of country where there is no respect of human rights?

Government Orders

Or yet again, is he trying to weaken Canadian foreign policy in order to ensure that polluting businesses, with which he has close connections, can get around the rules on environment? These are all reasons for which the Bloc Québécois is going to oppose the bill we have before us.

I will just state in closing that when I see the way the federal Liberals make use of power, particularly as far as international relations are concerned, it makes me dream of a future sovereign Quebec and what it could accomplish.

That Quebec will be an alterglobalist Quebec, one that respects human rights and will take steps to promote human rights worldwide.

That Quebec will be in solidarity with the workers of the third world, who have such difficulty making a living.

I allow myself to dream and to think that Quebec will soon become a country, very soon I hope.

• (1630)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam, Citizenship and Immigration; the hon. member for Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, Drug Strategy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak on this bill today. I would first like to congratulate my colleague from Terrebonne—Blainville on her speech on this matter. She has been waiting for several days for the opportunity to voice her opposition to a bill that is aimed at separating and dividing responsibilities between the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of International Trade.

For some time, several months in fact, since this bill was introduced on December 7, 2004, the government has been trying to convince us that it is nothing but an administrative and technical bill intended just to regularize an obvious situation.

I understand that on December 12, 2003, the government enacted an order via the governor in council, which divided responsibilities between two departments, and that this bill is to make that order official. But it is not true that this debate must focus only on an administrative reorganization.

Anyone trying to approach the debate and discussion on that basis fail to see the interrelationships between the mandate and vision of a foreign affairs department and the role an international trade department ought to play in this regard.

By clarifying and dividing these two departmental entities, by splitting responsibilities between two departments, by taking away from International Trade the mandate for foreign affairs, and the related powers and responsibilities the government is ignoring debate that is of great concern to the people of Quebec and Canada.

It concerns our view of the role our governments must play in the context of increased globalization, opening markets and economic

interrelations. This is what we want, of course, but having our rights protected as well. Rights are fundamental for those of us on this side of the House. I am talking of workers' rights, which must be protected fully, of environmental rights, so often challenged in one court or another in the name of free markets. I am also talking of human rights, which must be protected and which are very frequently the victims of a system focussed solely on free markets.

By dividing up the roles of the Department of Foreign Affairs and of International Trade, the government is endorsing this vision. It enshrined it with its order in council of December 12, 2003, and is enshrining it with this bill. We need to keep in mind what the role of the Canada Department of International Trade was: promoting international trade, investment partnerships and trade and economic policy.

We need to realize that there are new concerns and new paradigms emerging, not only in Quebec society, but in this changing world. They are intended to develop new trade and a new type of investment.

First, fair trade has taken off in the past few years thanks to people who want to have goods, products and merchandise on the market that respect workers rights.

• (1635)

It seems essential in processing products that we be able to establish basic ethical rules. When we look only at trade, we forget these important aspects. When we talk about International Trade Canada and investment partnerships, we forget that a new type of investment is emerging, what is called responsible investment. These are aspects that could have been integrated into a foreign affairs policy. Unfortunately, the Canadian government has decided to divide the department in two.

The Department of Foreign Affairs has been reorganized many times, beginning with changes made by the Trudeau government in 1971. Then, in 1981 and 1982, there was a reorganization that integrated a range of activities from those of CIDA, to industry, to trade and commercial policy. The Department of Foreign Affairs became the Department of External Affairs and International Trade.

My colleagues indicated clearly that this bill to divide the entities presents two fundamental drawbacks. First, there is the problem of consistency. How, by dividing two activities that should be integrated, will this situation improve consistency in terms of the management of human affairs and, especially, efficiency?

As for the second drawback, I want my colleagues to explain the attempts we so often see in this Parliament. In fact, the government has introduced the bill we are considering here before it has even undertaken this essential review of Canadian foreign policy.

Government Orders

The federal government is behaving the same way about international trade as it about the missile defence shield project. In both cases, no consideration is given to the issues related to national defence and international trade in an integrated foreign affairs policy in Canada. It prefers to make decisions the wrong way round, when we should, as the government committed to doing several years ago, already have reviewed Canadian foreign policy, which is essential.

On this side of the House, we believe that this bill is premature and hasty. We could have had a debate on this. It would have been healthy and would have allowed us to examine the role the Department of Foreign Affairs will have to play in the future. Why are we not considering its role in the context of emerging markets and globalization? That would have been an interesting public debate, on Canadian foreign policy. Instead, this decision was made in December 2003, resulting in the bill before us.

The same is true with regard to the missile defence shield project. Decisions are made about national defence, although we have yet to review foreign policy.

• (1640)

The government's public decision-making technique, which consists in making decisions in silos instead of using an integrated approach, will result in shameful inconsistency. This inconsistency will not only hurt Canada internationally, but also as regards the various issues that come under federal jurisdiction.

So, we condemn this inconsistency in human resource management, and the fact that this decision was made precipitously. We also condemn this decision because it violates an internationally recognized principle, which is to increase human rights protection in the world.

We know that, in the coming years, the opening of markets will increase trade including, among others, with countries such as China, which is experiencing strong economic growth. This means that countries like Canada—as we found out in recent weeks with the textile issue—may have to expand their markets. This will lead to increased trade. However, this trade must not focus only on the exchange of goods, it must also include the protection of human rights.

Currently, exports account for 40% of our gross domestic product. This was not the case in the 1980s, when they only accounted for 24%. So, we need a policy that will integrate the protection of human rights.

As I said before, trade should also include emerging new types of trade. A new type of trade that is emerging is fair trade, which integrates a foreign affairs policy. There are new investments of course, and these are called—in case the government party opposite does not yet know it—responsible investments. These investments are not only motivated by economic and commercial imperatives; they also take into consideration the protection of the rights of workers. This is an added value that cannot be calculated in dollars alone, because it also includes human value and the respect of those who are involved in the processing of these products.

It is wrong to say that WTO rules are the only ones that should apply to trade. There is an added human value and it is important to take it into consideration.

So, for all these reasons, we are opposed to this bill, which is unacceptable to us. Again, it is unacceptable because it reflects one of the countless decisions on international relations that have been made by the government since the new Prime Minister has been in office, without a true review of Canada's foreign policy.

That is why we will not be supporting this bill. We wish that, under different circumstances, decisions would not be made in silos. Instead, we should be looking at the direction Canada wants to take in terms of human rights and how it plans to make its contribution to international assistance. It is incorrect, however, to say that we will support a bill designed to dissociate international trade from foreign affairs.

• (1645)

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my two hon. colleagues on their excellent speeches, which were both very clear and very informative. I would like to ask the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie if he believes that splitting the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade into two distinct departments would make his job easier, as the Bloc Québécois critic for the environment, when it comes to the follow up concerning Export Development Canada, formerly the Export Development Corporation, as hon. members know.

There is one aspect in terms of the environmental auditing of projects supported by Export Development Canada which is in fact the only hold we have to ensure that the operations of this crown corporation are consistent with Canada's international obligations.

Will this splitting of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade make his job easier with respect to the environmental monitoring of decisions made by Export Development Canada?

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, in order to make a good investment decision, one needs to have entry points in foreign lands and good connections with respect to the actual welcome awaiting various projects.

I did not say much about it in my presentation, but in my opinion, there is a problem with ease and consistency in human resources management. There was very good interaction with the consular offices, with the various services abroad, that enabled us, among investors and among consular services, to have a good interaction. What the government is trying to do is to divide these sections, no more, no less.

When one needs to obtain a certain number of visas, one must deal with the consular offices. Economic development and foreign investment should go hand in hand with international relations. Thus we must aim to have significant integration among the various departments. The same example holds for immigration.

Government Orders

If it were decided to completely sever this kind of relationship between the immigration department and the foreign affairs department, it would cause some problems, because the consulates abroad have the lion's share of responsibility for issuing visas.

Thus, when there is interaction, either in international trade or in immigration, we must ensure that the services provided by the foreign affairs department abroad can be provided to the various services.

It is clear that, in the case of exports, this separation between the Department of International Trade and the Department of Foreign Affairs is a long way from facilitating investments while respecting human rights.

It is clear that it does not facilitate things environmentally either. We need to have all the information. Many crown corporations often try to avoid their environmental responsibilities. We will probably see changes in the future to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, but it is clear than when so-called housekeeping changes are made, as we see today, it has a direct impact on the environmental assessment of various projects to be carried out abroad.

• (1650)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: The vote has been deferred until after the time allotted for government orders on Monday, February 14.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all the parties, and I think if you were to seek it you would find unanimous consent that the vote be further deferred until the end of government orders on Tuesday, February 15.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS ACT

Hon. Stéphane Dion (for the Minister of Foreign Affairs) moved that Bill C-32, an act to amend the Department of Foreign

Affairs and International Trade Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to disappoint my hon. colleagues in the House of Commons in what will be a very interesting debate, I am sure. We will be able to demonstrate quantifiably why Bill C-31, along with Bill C-32, both acts that require and codify the order in council which took place in 2003 to split the Department of Foreign Affairs from international trade, indeed has attributes worthy of the consideration and support of the House of Commons.

Today I have the pleasure of speaking to the legislation amending the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Act. This means that the government is now codifying in law the December 12, 2003, order in council with respect to this department. The Minister of International Trade has also introduced legislation in the creation of this department.

By formalizing the separation into two departments of the former Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, the legislation reaffirms that the Department of Foreign Affairs is under the authority of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is responsible for the management and direction of the department, both in Canada and abroad, and the conduct of the external affairs of Canada.

It does remove from the powers, duties and functions of the Minister of Foreign Affairs those responsibilities related to international trade, which are now covered in the new International Trade Act.

Finally, it amends several federal acts to reflect the fact that International Trade Canada and Foreign Affairs Canada are indeed two separate departments.

[Translation]

I would like to draw a picture of the overall context of this bill and what it will help us achieve.

Nowadays, events that happen around the world can affect Canadians, and their impact is growing. This is so because Canadians who are active around the world can be affected and may then need consular services or other forms of assistance in an emergency. In other instances, it is our interests, such as our security interests, which might be compromised by global terrorism or other threats. Or, our values come under attack, as in the case of the humanitarian crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan. The huge outpouring of support from Canadians for the victims of the tsunami in Asia has revealed the full extent of their deep concern for the well-being of those who share this planet with us.

Government Orders

I must emphasize that the deep interest of Canadians in world affairs is well known by the government. That is why we have allocated more than \$400 million to help the victims of the tsunami. It is also why the Minister of Foreign Affairs is not here in person today. As the hon. members know, he is currently in the Middle East, analyzing how Canada could help ensure that the recent peace overtures made in that troubled region are built on.

In an increasingly complex world, we must do more than just react. We must be in a position to prevent problems from arising, to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves and, where appropriate, to respond to crises more efficiently and in a more timely fashion than in the past.

This new legislation will bring us closer to these objectives. It is an integral part of this government's commitment to renew Canada's international role. A key factor in this renewal process will be the strengthening of Canada's international departments. These are essential tools, if we want to play an effective role on the world stage. For our tools to remain effective, however, we have to fine-tune and adapt them to the challenges facing us on the international scene.

• (1655)

[*English*]

The legislation would help us accomplish, in my view, this task. The new international trade department would allow Canada to focus on growing trade and investment opportunities around the world, increasing our ability to remain competitive, as well as other measures. Foreign affairs will continue to work closely with the new trade department in advancing Canadian interests.

For foreign affairs, the legislation would reaffirm the way forward for the department. Foreign affairs, I know doubt need to tell the House, has a very proud history: from Lester B. Pearson's Nobel Prize winning invention of peacekeeping to the Ottawa convention banning anti-personnel landmines and the International Criminal Court, foreign affairs has helped Canada lead internationally.

The department recognizes that there are many more players involved in international affairs today and that many new issues are of course now only coming to the fore. The department will continue to have a central role in Canada's international effort and it stands ready to meet the new challenges brought forward by a changing world environment.

I should point out that these challenges are many. They include North America. Our friendship with the United States has never been more crucial, from defence and security, to environment, to management of our joint economic space. It is a relationship not only of vital importance in this continent, but to our role globally as well.

As the Prime Minister has stressed, we need more sophisticated management of this partnership. The department will take steps to place new emphasis on this goal, as well as accelerating expansion of our growing partnership with Mexico.

We know, with the presence here of President Vicente Fox, that much of the relationship that we have with that country is now far

more pronounced and more involved in ways that were probably not conceivable 10 or 15 years ago.

Another area is international security. Security threats, from terrorism to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to failing states, all of these have become much more complex and interwoven. The department will lead in developing integrated policy to address them together with more effective and, indeed, faster means to respond to crises and to build lasting security.

Global issues as well constitute another area of change. The issues that matter to Canadians and the world are increasingly and ever-increasingly interconnected. We can think of climate change, the depletion of ocean resources, SARS and poverty in the developing world. It is clear that no one country can deal with these issues. Only through international cooperation can we progress.

However, the UN, which remains the cornerstone of our multilateral policy and other multilateral bodies, needs our help to meet the challenges. As such, foreign affairs will target as a primary goal more effective, flexible multilateral action to tackle these important global issues.

Another area is the strengthening of our bilateral relationships. Although Canada must be anchored in North America, our interests, values and diverse ethnic make-up, and the growing impact of global issues on us, demand we be a global player too. However we cannot of course be everywhere. We have to make choices. While retaining our global reach, the department must refocus, emphasizing regions and countries growing in importance through and through. Integral to this will be the development of country and regional strategies involving all interested departments.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

To achieve important foreign policy objectives, the Department of Foreign Affairs will play the role of integrator and defender of Canada's international effort. We will apply a unique and coherent Canadian position. This objective is especially important when we consider that 15 federal departments, 6 federal agencies and 3 provincial governments host our missions.

The department will continue to manage an efficient global network of 174 foreign missions and thereby ensure that Canada is represented in every region of the world. The department will try to renew the linguistic capability of its foreign service, in particular for difficult languages such as Mandarin or Arabic.

The department will continue to improve its consular services—I am sure of it, since I know this area well—and its passport services for Canadians, who are increasingly active internationally thereby increasing the need to help them ensure their safety. As we saw during the tsunami, Foreign Affairs has a vital role to play in helping Canadians in distress, wherever they may be.

The department will continue to apply a well-defined public diplomacy strategy, so that Canada's voice, ideas and innovations are heard, seen and understood by all, and so that we can form coalitions with people from other countries, which we need to achieve our objectives.

In all these fields, the Department of Foreign Affairs will work in close collaboration with its partner departments, in particular National Defence, the Canadian International Development Agency and International Trade, as well as with other departments including Health and Public Safety, the provincial governments, of course, Parliament, and a wide variety of Canadians. Foreign Affairs will be the lead department that will provide consistency in Canada's relations with the world.

The base for this renewed activity is the bill before us today. By reaffirming the department's mandate, it establishes new foundations so that Canada can proudly retain its place and continue to exercise its influence in the world.

• (1705)

[English]

I have had the opportunity to hear a number of interventions and I look forward to a very fervent debate with all members of the House of Commons on the significance of these two bills, but in particular this bill which would create a new foreign affairs department.

I can readily say, given the work that I as a member have done in the area of consular affairs, along with a very dedicated and devoted first class group of people who work for us overseas and who work to help Canadians day in and day out, that the world has changed.

As much as we stress issues like humanitarianism and talk about new ways in which we begin to trade with each other, we also recognize that Canada's policy in terms of foreign affairs is extremely important.

To put things in their proper context, two year's ago the government undertook the most comprehensive study on the opinions of Canadians. It engaged in town hall meetings on a macro scale to get ideas and opinions from Canadians that took into account and took stock and inventory of the changes that were taking place in Canada's perspective of our work in the rest of the world.

I can say with some certainty that Canadians do believe we have to get it right but, more important, that we need be able to say that the Department of National Defence, where it is needed, is different from the Department of Foreign Affairs, and that the international trade component, which is growing by leaps and bounds with our trade relationships with so many countries around the world, the very successful missions by the Prime Minister and, very recently, with Asia, although they are important and are integrated, they are nevertheless distinct and separate.

In our time in this Parliament, perhaps the most significant international event is the one we witnessed about a month and a half ago with the disaster in Asia with the tsunami. That crisis was a foreign affairs response and the response had to be working to coordinate our best resources to ensure that Canada could react and react swiftly. I believe all of us in the House believe that a job was done that puts our efforts first on the map and puts us in a situation where we can fairly say that we have extremely competent people working for us in the department.

However we cannot, in the case of the tsunami, say that foreign affairs and international trade are linked. I heard the hon. member from Rosemont a little earlier say that human rights would be

forgotten if international trade and foreign affairs were split. Human rights are human rights.

[Translation]

The hon. member from the Bloc Québécois took a position in favour of human rights and humanitarian issues. Still, he thinks there is an issue here, with respect to which trade is important in order to continue to maintain our position on humanitarian issues. That does not make sense.

[English]

I would argue in the reverse. What the hon. member should be stressing is that there are issues that devolve from foreign affairs which have been around for some time. I was very surprised to hear one member from the Bloc Québécois say in the committee a few month's ago that he did not know the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade was about to be separated.

Although this was done as a result of an order in council going back to December 2003, we did not hear a word from members of Parliament in the House of Commons. The sky did not fall. However we were able to create a more pragmatic division that works to help, on the one hand, international commerce by allowing them to focus on the ever-changing world and, to be sure, pressures of globalization, but at the same time allowing foreign affairs to concentrate on its efforts.

The Prime Minister created a role for consular affairs that allows us to immediately to respond to the concerns of Canadians. Many countries around the world are reflecting on the reality that commerce and foreign affairs are not always going to agree. They are not always part of the same agenda. They may have very different and mutually different ambitions, all of them to be sure to help Canadians abroad, but from different perspectives.

From time to time it is important for us to understand that we have to get this right. We have to modernize our thinking that is consistent with a changing world. The cold war is over. The legislation to bring these departments together was first promoted in 1981. I was in my first year as a budding politician working for a cabinet minister back then. It was a very different world. Terrorism was not the concern that it is today, and certainly not in North America. The notion of potential and emerging markets and trade opportunities were not the kinds of concerns that were readily expressed back then but are very important, indeed vital, to maintaining the jobs that the New Democratic Party thinks are disappearing overnight.

I do not see how it would be possible for us to continue having two departments under one when in fact both departments can do their work very effectively. International trade, in terms of our opportunities, in terms of exporting our technologies and our environmental technologies, are certainly there. Canadians understand that there is wisdom in us proceeding as we are today with a commitment made by the Prime Minister. We went through a federal election on this.

Government Orders

This is a question of understanding that the machinery of government is quite separate from the discharge of doing an effective job abroad. It does not confuse our missions. I dare say it does not confuse those who have worked in our embassies and do very good work on the consular front, and, at the same time, understand that even within our consulates and various missions around the world, will be a number of other priorities. Of course, those who will discharge the responsibility of Canadian priorities on the international level will remain the Minister of Foreign Affairs and of course the Department of Foreign Affairs.

I say to those who are somehow suggesting that this is without a basis should remind themselves of the rather exhaustive and extensive consultation which took place. The question has been raised on the subject of international policy review. We have done a very comprehensive and exhaustive study, requiring the input of many departments that will be working and that want input to ensure that the document we put together, like the one we had in 1995 as a government statement then, is also one that will meet the test of the options we have as a government, as a country and as a people. It is clear to me that we have to be united in our approach as to how we see Canada's priorities evolving.

I look forward to some of the things that will be discussed. It is important for us to remind ourselves of the core mandates of each of these departments and that, while we are proceeding with legislation at this time, the two departments have been operating in a way that is mutually interdependent but also with their own priorities and establishing their own routines. Commerce is not like foreign policy at all turns and we certainly do not want to give the impression that some of the work that we have done in the area of consular and in the area of human rights should somehow only be likened to whether there are opportunities for us on the trade side.

• (1710)

We can work together cooperatively, as we saw with the tsunami and as we have seen with our involvement in Ukraine. There is no trade dimension. This is really an outpouring of the pure thought of interaction and treaties between countries meant to build a better world, to ensure the global village continues to survive, and that Canada takes a pragmatic approach to its policies that are prepared to change with the changing times.

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the central question still needs to be answered, why and for whom? The parliamentary secretary talked about SARS, the tsunami, the Ukraine election, the defence of Canada and promoting Canadian objectives.

Division reduces speed of response, yet he has argued the opposite. We saw the difficulty in responding to the tsunami disaster. We had an administrative disaster in Canada before we figured out what we would do.

We have all talked about the good things that we are going to do, but not once have we really answered the central question of how this reorganization will help and address those objectives. Why are we doing this? Whom will it benefit?

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, those are core questions and they go right to the point of what I was explaining.

It seems to me that international trade has evolved to a point where it is very clear that one department should handle policy not of a commercial nature, but of the values and interests of Canadians. It is quite separate and distinct from commercial ends, whether they be the promotion of Canadian opportunities abroad or instruments that help improve opportunities, through the World Bank, through IMF or other policies, for countries to bring themselves to a much higher standard of living.

Canada plays an important role from the perspective of influence in terms of our values like our Charter of Rights, our independent judiciary and our consular services which ensure that Geneva conventions on torture or on access, as an example, are respected. How that has anything to do with international trade is beyond me.

I can assure the hon. member that this speaks very clearly to the two very separate and distinct responsibilities now clearly reflected in the wisdom of what the Prime Minister proposed in the order in council on December 12, 2003, and what we are proposing today.

On the question of the tsunami, it is very clear. I do not know where the hon. member was, but I know where I was. I know where the hon. Minister of National Defence was. I was out on a tarmac freezing with our good Canadian soldiers from Canadian Forces Base Trenton. They were out there helping with 25 tonnes of supplies. The United Nations and our NGOs on the ground in Sri Lanka told us what they needed, things like potable water for drinking and tablets to put into the whatever water people were getting so it would not be contaminated. We also provided tarpaulin tents.

Within 48 hours an action plan had begun. We were not going to second guess what people on the ground knew. Foreign affairs not only had it right, but we were ahead of expectations. No one in the chamber wanted to make this a political issue because we saw a human tragedy unfolding which we had not seen in a long time. We have to separate in our minds as we did with our hearts and our compassion. Our response did not have a commercial interest.

The hon. member gave the example of the tsunami. I used the tsunami as a classic example of why there is a distinction between trade and foreign affairs, human rights and the ability for us to assist those in need.

• (1715)

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's speech. I think I understand what he is trying to get across as to why this needs to happen.

He made an interesting comment about the need to enhance our friendship with our U.S. friends. Could he enlighten me as to what has happened recently on that side of the House to enhance that friendship after a year of terrible abuse? I think he knows what I am talking about, and I do not need to relay any of the details.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Wild Rose for raising that, and I want to ensure that he understood. I said that our friendship with the United States had never been more crucial, from defence and security to environment to management to joint economic space. It is a relationship not only of vital importance on this continent, but globally as well.

Government Orders

As the Prime Minister has stressed, we need a more sophisticated management of this partnership. The department will take steps to place emphasis on this goal as well as accelerate expansion of our growing partnership with Mexico. I pointed out that President Fox was here.

There is no doubt in my mind that the most enviable trade and the most enviable relationship that two countries could have is the one that Canada enjoys with the United States. It is definitely not one that I or my government take for granted. It is not one that any member of Parliament in the House can afford or should take for granted. We share so much in common, not just a common geography, a common history.

It is a two-way street. We have to understand the needs of Americans and they have to appreciate ours. The Prime Minister was right in establishing a parliamentary secretary under him, the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, who is devoted to the issue of working with the bilateral relationship with the United States, ensuring that members of Parliament are speaking to American congressmen. Yesterday, one of the most important decisions made in our time in this Parliament was to open our beef exports. We have work to do on softwood.

We understand trade is important. However, from a foreign affairs perspective, we also understand that we share so much in common with the United States and that the world is truly at a disadvantage if Canada and the United States cannot get together. It serves no interest of any type or any shape for our two countries to find reasons to disagree. If we are to disagree, let it be for only those reasons. Let us understand and respect each other so we can look each other very firmly in the eye the next day. Let us ensure the common interests that our two nations have will never be affected.

I know the hon. member is passionate about this issue, as am I, and I am not afraid to say that. The United States is our friend and I continue to value that relationship. I wish I could get more of its help in other cases, like the one of Omar Khadr, where we can get consular access.

I have been given assurances by that government, and I take it at its word. I take that member at his word. I know his sincerity in terms of what he is trying to suggest. We cannot afford to lose that relationship for the sake of both of our countries and for the sake of the stability of the international global community.

• (1720)

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-32 is an act respecting the Department of Foreign Affairs. The bill amends the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Act and other acts as a consequence of the establishment of the Department of International Trade.

The bill takes account of changes of responsibilities held by the Minister of Foreign Affairs following the establishment of the now separate Department of International Trade. It also makes brief reference to the relationship of the Minister of International Cooperation to the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Most changes appear merely to make adjustments in language as a result of the severance of the responsibilities of the Minister of International Trade from the package of responsibilities formerly

conducted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

However, the present text needs clarification or expansion at several points. As it stands, it leaves the impression that the combined Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade remains, when it will not upon the passing of Bill C-31. The devolution of certain responsibilities upon another minister is apparent rather than concrete, these being the responsibilities of the Minister of International Cooperation.

The bill codifies the December 12, 2003, order in council, as has been said, separating the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade into two departments.

By introducing the legislation, the government is formalizing the changes made last December. Since then, Foreign Affairs Canada, FAC, has continued to coordinate and conduct Canada's foreign policy, providing the services to Canadians travelling, working and living abroad. The creation of separate Departments of Foreign Affairs and International Trade will, it is hoped, enable both departments to better focus on their core mandates, with separate budget building capabilities and distinct lines of authority, or so the theory goes.

The act to amend the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Act codifies the changes made in the order. Specifically, it is supposed to reaffirm that FAC is under the authority of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is responsible for the management and direction of the department both in Canada and abroad. The bill sets out the powers, duties and functions of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, which largely mirror those set out in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Act, minus those responsibilities related to international trade. It also adjusts several federal acts to reflect the appearance that FAC and International Trade Canada, which is now known as ITCan, are two separate departments. They are separate, but maybe they are not.

We need to ask for clarifications of certain ambiguities. The language produced for a revised section 1, subsection 2(1) provides that the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade is continued under the name of the Department of Foreign Affairs, over which the Minister of Foreign Affairs, appointed by the Commission under the Great Seal, presides. If the combined department, DFAIT, still lives as one body, how can its minister not be master of the whole body? Thus, it appears that the separation of the Department of International Trade from DFAIT is apparent, not real.

The Minister of International Cooperation likewise appears to have only subordinate authority. That minister is described as carrying out his or her responsibilities with the concurrence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, while using the "services and facilities of the Department of Foreign Affairs".

A further ambiguity surrounds the description of associate deputy ministers. While the foreign affairs act provides for three associate deputy ministers, the proposed legislation provides for only two. Was the missing third responsible for international cooperation? Were that officer's responsibilities those now performed by the Minister of International Trade?

Government Orders

Exact responsibilities for the associate deputy ministers are not provided, but it is stated that the governor in council may designate one of the associate deputy ministers appointed under subsection (1) to be deputy minister for political affairs. What is the force of this word "may"? Is it intended to create this office or not? What are the contemplated responsibilities of the other associate deputy minister?

The official opposition must just not swallow everything that comes from the government side. We in the past have criticized governments for the practice of multiplying ministers of the Crown. The opposition has regularly maintained that lines of responsibility for governmental policy and action must be rigorously defined for the purpose of ministerial accountability. Multiplication of persons answering for shared government policies complicates the business of securing authoritative answers in the House on behalf of the people of Canada.

There has also been no statement as to the estimated costs. Government suggests that this exercise will be cost neutral, but that is really unrealistic. Talk to any public middle manager going through this exercise and he or she will tell us there are a lot of costs.

Implementing this so-called separation will inevitably entail costs in reassignment of personnel, changes in facilities, titles, names of offices and officers, attendant requirements for communication and budget building. The whole thing will be quite expensive.

• (1725)

Questions about such details should be asked at both committees. Comprehensive estimates are required to justify the main case.

The government is proposing this move, but has it really made its core case to do so? What is accomplished by having ministers without ministries? Is this a pattern: magnifying the titles of deputy ministers; creating ministers of second rank without ministries; complicating chains of responsibility; causing opposition critics to chase down responsible ministers for questioning in the House? The same obstacles are presented to journalists and commentators and the rank and file of citizens who seek information about public programs and decisions of government.

The government must offer in committee answers to remaining questions, particularly the matter of the continuing existence of DFAIT. The minister should explain to us in detail what authority he will have or will continue to have over the Minister of International Cooperation, and why this ministerial position exists without its own full separate department.

Some questions come to mind about the bill. There were good reasons to combine in the past. Were all those reasons in the past wrong?

What were the real problems which preceded this decision to separate? Did the initiative come from within external affairs? If so, what problems were they trying to solve by making this proposal? What is the substantive background justification for the move?

Has any research been done into the reasons that were used at the time of the combination of the two departments?

Certainly the chain of command which is envisaged following the creation of the new ministers and the deputy ministers needs to be

clarified. Will the new ministers and deputy ministers continually answer to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, or will they become separate entities?

Who is being served by this move? What are the improved end product results identified that will make a difference to Canadians? How will the voters be better served? How will our Canadian national interest be enhanced? Will it make the government any faster off the mark in dealing with the legal challenge, for instance, on the Byrd amendment regarding softwood lumber? Those are the kinds of issues we should be dealing with, not reorganizing our own offices.

Parliament is not the government. Parliament is where the government comes to get permission to tax and spend the people's money, and to get legislation passed by the people's representatives. The government proposes, but Parliament is a separate entity that must vote and pass the legislation and vote the money. Government must make its case to Parliament. The question remains open if it has made that case with this bill.

The government has danced all around the central question of why and for whom. When all is said and done, maybe it is nothing more than a payoff to a political buddy, so that Liberals can hook their thumbs in their lapels, smile and turn to the world and say, "I am a full minister. I am a somebody". Sadly, this seems to be the Liberal way.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to assure the hon. member that everything here has already been done for the past year and a half; the two departments have been functioning as one.

Under the Public Service Rearrangement and Transfer of Duties Act the governor in council has the ability to transfer portions of the public service and ministerial powers, duties and functions from one part of the service to the other.

CIDA is not affected by this. CIDA will continue to work in concert with the minister.

On the question of costs, very quickly, it is part of the fiscal arrangements. Members should be able to see that in the next few weeks. If I had more time, I could elaborate.

• (1730)

Mr. Paul Forseth: Mr. Speaker, I certainly hope we will get much deeper justification at committee and not just the same political answers, but real good data.

It sets a pattern here. When a department is being restructured, the case has to be made not just with all the nice bromides, but with real hard numbers and outside studies. I stress that the government makes the proposal, but in the end Parliament must approve the move.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

[English]

CITIZENSHIP ACT

The House resumed from November 30, 2004 consideration of the motion that Bill S-2, an act to amend the Citizenship Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this private member's bill should not be here because it is such a ridiculous set of circumstances that has brought the bill before the House. The issue should have been taken care of by the government quite a long time ago. I will set the scene. I have no doubt that the bill will pass because we are in a minority government situation and all of the opposition parties are in support of the bill. It is going to pass at some stage in the process.

The issue that is addressed in the bill has existed since 1977 and has been identified repeatedly since that time. The amendment is very brief. It is an amendment to one section of the Citizenship Act. It will provide for citizenship for people who should have citizenship in this country. Because of amendments to the law over the years, there are gaps in the law, which have been identified for quite some time. This has had the effect of denying citizenship to individuals who have every right to claim that citizenship in this country.

When the problem was identified, it was corrected going forward. That occurred back in February 1977, but the problem pre-existed and a number of people whom I believe are Canadians, who should be Canadians and who should be recognized by this country as Canadians, from 1947 to 1977 were excluded. The effect of the bill will be to make the provisions that are in the law now retroactive for anyone who falls into one of these categories from 1977 onward.

We ended up with the anomaly that individuals who were born in Canada were denied their citizenship. The almost unbelievable nature of our law surfaces. Children who were born of Canadians who were outside the country, that is the children were born outside the country, those children were entitled to Canadian citizenship and rightfully so because of their birth to Canadian parents and equally and obviously rightfully so it seems to me should children born in Canada but who were moved by their parents to another country. Those children lost their citizenship if the parents took out citizenship in the other country. It was a unilateral act of their parents which resulted in the children losing their citizenship.

There is a real tragedy in a number of cases. The Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration heard some of those stories as it took evidence from a number of witnesses.

In my own constituency in Windsor, which is right on the border, a number of people fall into this category unbeknownst to them in a large number of cases. In Windsor over the years a large number of families have moved to the U.S. side of the border, oftentimes within a stone's throw of the border but they are living on the American side for employment purposes.

A woman who came to see me was almost in shock when she found out that she was not a Canadian citizen. She had been born in Canada but had been moved by her parents to the United States, to the state of Michigan, for a relatively short period of time. It was less

than seven years. She was back in Canada by the time she was seven years old. Her parents' marriage had broken down and her mother had moved her and her siblings back to Canada.

● (1735)

One of her siblings was born in the United States. She lived in Canada for the rest of her life. I do not want to identify her but she became a very strong contributor to our society and when she applied for her old age pension, she was advised by the authorities that she was not a Canadian citizen. Her sibling, who was about two years younger than she but was born in the United States, was a Canadian citizen. When she turned 65 she qualified for her pension.

It makes no sense at all that we have that situation under our existing law.

I am sure that anybody listening to this address and the others we will have this evening will ask why we would do this. When we consider some of the comments from the civil servants who were called to testify in previous hearings before the standing committee, and listen to the parliamentary secretary who tried to give some explanation in this last round, there really is no explanation.

We are told that there may be a large number of people and we should be concerned that they would all drift back across the border at one time and swamp our services, health services, pensions and whatever else to which they may be entitled. The first answer to that is that if they are Canadian citizens, they are entitled to those benefits. They are not going to be denied those benefits by the arbitrary nature of the existing legislation.

Again, it is gross discrimination just because a person was born after 1977. It is not an issue. People are Canadian citizens if they are born here, but if they were born in that 30 year period and then moved with their parents to another country, they are denied citizenship. It is extremely arbitrary. It is outright discrimination. It makes no sense at all.

One case that was used was a woman whose family has been in Canada for almost 300 years. Her father actually was a judge in Canada. She was told, again fairly late in life that she was not a Canadian citizen.

The evidence we heard at the committee was that a civil servant went to her, told her she would be given her Canadian citizenship but she would have to sign a non-disclosure agreement. As much as she wanted to be a Canadian citizen, she refused. She said that is not what Canada is about. She knew more about what Canada was about than the person who was making the offer to her, and she left the country. She was a woman who had contributed greatly to this country but was forced to leave because she was not a Canadian citizen.

People are running into problems at the border when people who think they are Canadians travel outside the country and when they come back are told they are not Canadian citizens. This has become more of a problem since September 11, 2001. People who come into the country are being more closely scrutinized. Often they find out to their severe dismay that they are not Canadian citizens.

Private Members' Business

The amendment would correct this. It is an amendment that should go through. All the opposition parties are in favour of it so it will go through eventually. One final point I would make, unlike some of the other private members' bills that might get stalled in the other house, this one has already passed the other house. This is going to become law. It is one of those occasions when we can point to a minority government and say that a number of majority governments have not dealt with the issue, but democracy will reign on this case and this injustice will be ended once and for all.

• (1740)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak to Bill S-2, a private member's public bill before the House.

Bill S-2 seeks to amend Canada's Citizenship Act by completely eliminating the residence requirement for a certain group of people who lost their Canadian citizenship as minors and now wish to resume it. These people ceased to be citizens at the time they were minors because their responsible parent or parents in some cases acquired citizenship of another country. The contention is that this was not fair, that the minor had no choice in the matter at the time, and that therefore no residence requirement should now exist for people in this situation.

The truth is that parents make decisions on behalf of their children on many different occasions, including in situations which have important consequences. The bill before us today is therefore less about rectifying a perceived wrong than it is about simply changing the consequences of a choice made under the legislation that was in effect, which reflected the time when the decision was made.

Allow me to clarify an important issue. Canada's current Citizenship Act has a provision for people who wish to resume Canadian citizenship. To qualify to resume citizenship a person must demonstrate a commitment to Canada through residence. It is quite simply a commitment demonstrated by actually living in this country under Canada's current act. A person in this situation must become a permanent resident under immigration law and must reside in Canada for one year immediately before making a citizenship application. That is Canada's current law.

All former Canadians, whether they lost citizenship as minors or as adults, can resume citizenship in the same manner. We ask that all who lost citizenship, whether as minors or adults, are treated equally and that we keep our current citizens and residents safe.

What is being proposed in Bill S-2 is that there is no residence requirement at all, at least for a small number of individuals whose parents opted for citizenship in another country. We can all appreciate the desire to obtain Canadian citizenship, particularly if one has obviously lost it. Citizenship in this country has value and worth. Obtaining it has requirements. These requirements cannot be waived simply because a decision made by a responsible parent or parents in the past is perceived today as having been a bad decision.

I do not believe that it is appropriate to give further consideration to certain former Canadians, particularly when the circumstances of their loss involve actions of their parents. These minors lost their citizenship because their responsible parent or parents chose to immigrate and acquire another citizenship, not because of a

distinction based on gender, family status or other such equality issues.

Nor do I believe it is responsible to vote in favour of a bill that would negatively impact the government's ability to manage access to Canada and protect the safety and security of Canadians. Bill S-2 does this by essentially bypassing, for certain individuals, Canada's processes that would normally check for serious criminal convictions overseas. The citizenship process presupposes that this step has been followed. It works in tandem with the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to ensure that persons seeking to return to Canada are in fact admissible.

Let me be clear. This bill could allow serious criminals to reacquire Canadian citizenship and return to Canada once released. All Canadian citizens have the right to enter and return, and remain in Canada. We are opening the door to persons who stopped being Canadians many years ago, who have lived in another country, and who have committed serious crimes. This bill would allow them to resume citizenship.

A reasonable provision already exists to resume Canadian citizenship for people who wish to do so, in a way that allows the government to maintain the integrity of the program and to keep Canadians safe. I am therefore opposed to Bill S-2 or any special provision that will eliminate the residence requirement altogether for one particular group of people, and potentially place the safety and security of Canadians at risk.

• (1745)

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk to my hon. colleague who read the government position. I would say to him that in the next few days before the bill gets to committee we look at the present law. It does exactly what he says is so wrong for people prior to 1977. Anybody since 1977 has dual citizenship. If individuals are born in Canada, they are Canadian for the rest of their lives, even if their parents take them to the United States and make them American for a while. They will have dual citizenship. That has been done on both sides of the border by Americans and Canadians.

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However, to say we will be allowing serious criminals back into this country is scaremongering. I could give the hon. member a list of Canadians who came before the committee, people like Don Chapman, who has been denied his citizenship. They are said to be former Canadians. Don Chapman is not a former Canadian. He was born in this country and he is a Canadian. His parents took him at a very young age to the United States. His father became an American. Because of the war and what he was doing for the government, he had to be an American. It should not prevent Don Chapman from being a Canadian.

This man's family has donated millions of dollars to Canadian universities and thousands of dollars to community events inside Canada. He has a home in Canada. Yet, the hon. member is telling him he has to become a landed immigrant to get his Canadian citizenship back. I think that is shameful and so do the majority of the members of the House, including many Liberals in the House.

The government bureaucracy, through the parliamentary secretary and the minister, hoodwinked the people across the way into believing what Canadians should be. We are proud of this country. What amazes me is that the parliamentary secretary who became a Canadian citizen is denying people who were born here their Canadian citizenship. That is shameful. We pride ourselves in being Canadians and anybody who was born here should never, ever lose that birthright.

I am proud that the Senate, all parties including independents, voted for the bill. I will be very proud when we get it to committee and it comes back here for a vote one night when the majority of members of the House will vote to pass the bill to ensure that all those Canadians who were born here can be proud Canadians for the rest of their lives.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 16, 2005 immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

● (1750)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 6:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, December 6, 2004 I posed the following question and the new Minister of Citizenship and Immigration answered. I asked:

Mr. Speaker, about the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, we have heard the minister's excuse about compassion. We have seen her ruse of the Ethics Commissioner. What seems clear is that a specialty loophole was used for exotic clubs because of inside political access. Nearly all of the dancers came from just one country, revealing that there was a special deal.

She has been the minister for a full year and yet it took the human resources minister to shut it down. Why did the minister defend the program for so long when thousands of desperate cases of people in real need have been waiting for years?

The present immigration minister replied:

Mr. Speaker, the member has already heard the answer on many occasions. The minister made her decision and has referred the decision to an independent officer of the House, the Ethics Commissioner. The opposition has also referred the matter to the Ethics Commissioner.

Perhaps opposition members would like to get an answer from the Ethics Commissioner before they jump to a conclusion.

We are still waiting to hear from the Ethics Commissioner and we have a new minister. Some 70% to 80% of my community casework is about this dysfunctional immigration department. My deep concern is that the government is not capable of solving the serious problem of the department. The cover-ups do not change the reality on the ground. The minister is supposed to be accountable.

In view of such poor results, one can understand why I asked my particular questions. We were talking about it yesterday and the parliamentary secretary accused me of just using rhetoric, yet I gave her and the department all of my comments in advance so that I could get a substantive answer and I did not get it.

Immigration is in a crisis and the Liberals are responsible for the mess. Change begins with the admission that a problem exists. I do not think the government gets it. If it does, it is still in public denial. We can only hope that with the new minister there will be a meaningful change process and a huge commitment to clean up the department.

Adjournment Proceedings

Change was a long standing promise of the Prime Minister and Canadians expect no less. There is talk about a six point plan. It should be explained to Canadians. What are the financial commitments? How many extra people are going to be hired to deal with customer needs? What are the published wait time reductions? When will the wait times come into the 21st century of normal business standards?

It looks like it will never be a reality on this party's watch. How are the rules and regulations going to be streamlined? How is the flawed basic law going to be reviewed and fixed? When will the department communicate comprehensively in a timely manner with its clients? When will the department stop losing files? When will the department treat people in its purview with respect and basic human dignity? This department and its minister must be more accountable as the operational results are not up to standard. The Federal Court of Canada says so on many occasions.

We heard today of another instance where the minister really does not know what is going on. The advertised family reunification program is being administered harshly and unfairly. Then on another issue, people are being deported to Iran regardless of the risk. Canadians want action, not denials. They want results, not more excuses.

• (1755)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to have to repeat a lot of what I said yesterday when I responded to the hon. member's questions because really none of it has changed.

What I did was give the facts. The hon. member accuses me of not answering the questions and only accusing him of rhetoric. That is not true. The hon. member should go back and look at and read the answer I gave him. I gave him many substantive points.

What I did say, and what we did admit, is that there are problems in the system. Anybody who is an MP knows there are problems with the system. That does not mean the system is falling down around our ears.

Of the 245,000 people who come into this country every year under immigration and refugee status, 80% of them have no problems. They come in, they come in easily and they begin to build their lives. They have settlement services, et cetera. Twenty per cent do have problems. Those problems, as I told the hon. member yesterday, are not necessarily and only of the department's doing.

The hon. member and his party across the way have always accused us of letting anybody into the country. They always accuse us of not taking the time to look up criminal records and find out who these people really are. During 9/11 they accused us of letting in all sorts of terrorists and so on.

We do have to follow through with due diligence in finding out more about the people who come into this country. It is not easy to get information in some countries and that is one of the causes of the time lag. Also, the department has many cases, and with family class reunification being expanded to grandparents and dependent children under 21, it is now inundated with more.

Each one of those cases needs to have verification of data, of fact, of birth, of simple things. In Canada and certain other countries someone presses a button on a computer and can get all of that data. In some countries, that data is stored in a village in such a way that we have to get somebody to find it. It takes time. Twenty per cent of the people who seek to come to this country need to get that kind of information followed through on and that often takes time.

We are aware that we could do things better and obviously everyone is trying to do that. I said to the hon. member yesterday that we would love to have his party's input into what are the very positive and creative ways in which we can make the system work better.

This is an evolving system. It does not stand still as more people come in from different countries where there are challenges with getting data from some of those countries and where there are a lot of difficulties. That puts a greater burden on the system.

How do we deal with those increasing burdens? That is a valid question. Instead of the hon. member being negative and constantly casting innuendo, I would like to hear him suggest some important and creative things that he and his party think we should be doing to deal with an extremely complex situation that involves very complex processes and finding very complex solutions.

Mr. Paul Forseth: Mr. Speaker, I raised my concerns because immigration is important to Canada. I know the member opposite wants the same thing. But change begins with the recognition that a problem exists. I am sincere when I plead for the serious re-evaluation and major overhaul of immigration.

From our side of the House, I think what we would say is that the government's legislative agenda is pretty thin right now. Why does it not dig in and do something meaningful and fix the problem staring us in the face before we have another need for a big judicial inquiry that will look back to see who is to blame for some big disaster?

We understand that the immigration department, with all its responsibilities, including its separate refugee determination process and the various means by which a person can come to Canada, is very complex. There are always many decision points and at those decision points where there is discretion there can be errors.

We really have an issue here that the department is in somewhat of an organizational mess and we really need to fix it. We want government committed to re-evaluate the process.

• (1800)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I have absolutely no doubt that the hon. member's intentions are good and that he is sincere in his questions, but I will repeat the answers because I probably have not been saying them clearly enough.

We know there are problems. We hear about them. We are endeavouring to set up a way of dealing with them. The current Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has said very clearly that it is our government's priority and that he has a six point plan of action to speed up the process, to change some of the processes, and to ensure that the department and the processes are more efficient and more effective. Having said he has a six point plan, the minister cannot wave a magic wand and suddenly make it so. That only happens in *Star Wars*, as far as I know.

Adjournment Proceedings

What we are really talking about are complex processes. It takes time to put machinery into gear. It takes time to do this. In the meantime, we would be delighted to get some very positive and creative solutions out of the member and his party opposite.

DRUG STRATEGY

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for the opportunity to once again raise an issue which is a primary concern in my riding of Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission. It is the problem of the growing use of methamphetamine, or crystal meth, primarily by our youth and young adults.

Experts say that crystal meth is one of the most addictive street drugs and one of the hardest to treat. Addiction counsellors say the relapse rate of 92% is worse than that for cocaine. Crystal meth users do not recover. The drug is unforgiving. It is a drug that destroys families, destroys communities and destroys lives.

In November, I asked the Minister of Justice if he had any programs or plans in place to combat the growing use of this insidious narcotic. He indicated that he did not and said that this was a matter for Health Canada. Frankly, I was shocked that the Minister of Justice did not think he had a significant role to play in combating this drug, which is destroying lives right across this country.

The communities in my riding are not waiting for the federal government to get its act together. In Maple Ridge a task force has developed a comprehensive action plan to combat crystal meth in that community. I have been a member of that task force and I am proud of the work that we are doing to make our community a better place. In Mission, a similar task force has begun work to combat the problem there.

Members of the RCMP in my riding have expressed frustration with the light sentences handed out to producers and distributors of crystal meth. Clearly the federal government has a role to play in beefing up our laws so that drug pushers who prey on our children receive serious deterrents, including serious jail time. Instead, if they are prosecuted at all, many receive nothing more than conditional sentences. More and more Canadians are calling for mandatory minimum sentences for these criminals. I agree with those sentiments.

Provincial governments are taking action. In August 2004, my province of British Columbia released a five point strategy to combat crystal meth. The report states:

Methamphetamine use is a serious and growing problem in the province. Problematic substance use of methamphetamine and other illicit drugs affects a large proportion of the population both directly and indirectly. These harmful impacts may include loss of productivity and wages, disability and death due to overdose, as well as enforcement, social and health costs. These detrimental effects to the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities can be prevented and reduced.

The B.C. government can be commended for its comprehensive, integrated approach to combating crystal meth.

In Alberta, a cross-ministry working group has called on the federal government to review existing laws with a view to recommending ways to strengthen and enhance legislation related to methamphetamine drug enforcement.

Just yesterday the government of Saskatchewan released its strategic plan for dealing with crystal meth. The report states:

Many communities are grappling with the side effects of crystal meth use. Along with the human cost on addicts and their families, police in those communities report crystal meth use has spawned increases in both poverty and violent crimes and has contributed to increased suicide rates.

Let me repeat that: crystal meth causes increases in poverty, violent crimes and suicide rates. That statement alone should compel all members in the House to demand a response from our federal government.

Once again I have a question for the minister. What is the federal government doing to address this problem? What is its integrated plan of action? Where are its programs to assist communities that have been shocked by the speed with which crystal meth has invaded their towns? Where are the federal laws and regulations which will deter production and distribution of crystal meth? What is the government doing specifically to address the growing problem of crystal meth? Continuing to ignore the problem is no longer an option.

• (1805)

Hon. Paul Harold Macklin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not believe everyone in this House is familiar with the expression crystal meth or about the meth problem. I would like to take a couple of minutes to inform hon. members about this problem.

Meth, which is short for methamphetamine, is a synthetic drug in the family of amphetamines. It is similar in chemical structure to its parent drug of amphetamines but causes more damage to the central nervous system. The ingredients are household chemicals and solvents combined with ephedrine from cold medicine, and supplies are readily available in our retail stores. Local clandestine drug labs manufacture the drug in makeshift labs. The fact that it can be manufactured locally separates it from other drugs, such as cocaine which has to be imported from another country.

Meth is known by various street names such as “crank” and “speed”, but crystal meth is also known as “ice” which refers to the smokeable form of methamphetamine.

Meth comes in the form of crystals resembling pieces of ice, shaved glass slivers or clear rock salt. It also comes in a powdered form. The drug is sometimes sold in tablets or capsules that can be swallowed or emptied for smoking.

Meth is taken through smoking, injecting, snorting or swallowing, with smoking being the most common method. Members should know that any substance that is smoked goes directly to the brain in about eight to ten seconds. It is the most addictive way of using the drug. The smokeable form was developed in the 1980s but is more potent now than it was in the past.

Adjournment Proceedings

Many young people are, of course, reluctant to use needles. This may well be their first hard core drug, and to many young Canadians smoking is familiar. It is generally smoked in glassware that can be heated.

Crystal stimulates the central nervous system by pumping up the levels of neurotransmitters such as dopamine. At low doses, it boosts alertness and blocks hunger and fatigue. At higher doses, the drug can cause agitation and bizarre behaviour. Physical effects include increased heart rate, blood pressure and body temperature. The serious psychological effects attached to the chronic use of meth include anxiety, emotional swings and paranoia. Symptoms increase with long term use and can involve paranoid delusions and hallucinations. Violence and self-destructive behaviour are common. Overdose is also a risk with the use of crystal meth. Symptoms include fever, convulsions and coma. Death can result from burst blood vessels in the brain, triggered by spikes in the blood pressure, or heart failure.

Meth use takes a toll on both individual health and well-being, as well as community safety because of its effect on behaviour. The agitation and paranoia can lead to aggressive and violent behaviours, and those behaviours have an impact on family members and the community.

An additional safety concern is the meth labs themselves. Making meth produces odourless toxic fumes which can explode, posing a danger to those who are living in or visiting the abode, socially or professionally, and those within close proximity. Many of the chemicals are flammable and highly reactive. Spending time in an environment where there is this phosphene gas, a by-product of meth production and a poisonous gas, can make people ill. The toxic waste produced by these labs, which winds up in ditches, sewers and dumpsters, poses another public safety issue.

Clearly, crystal meth is a concern.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, while the parliamentary secretary's response was informative, it did not give me much hope that the government was doing anything to solve the problem of the proliferation of crystal meth in my riding and elsewhere in Canada.

In the United States a bipartisan group of U.S. senators introduced the combat meth act, which would make it harder to get materials

used to produce the drug that the hon. member has described. Governments across North America are taking this seriously.

Would the parliamentary secretary not agree that the Government of Canada has been slow to respond and that it must do much more in order to win this war against crystal meth?

• (1810)

Hon. Paul Harold Macklin: Mr. Speaker, methamphetamine is currently classified under schedule 3 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. As a result, the maximum penalty for possession is three years and the maximum penalty for trafficking is ten years.

In contrast, the maximum penalties for drugs in schedule 1, such as cocaine or heroin, are seven years for possession and life imprisonment for trafficking.

The responsibility, as has been previously mentioned, for the administration of the CDSA and specifically the listing of these substances is with the Department of Health. Health Canada is aware of the views expressed by the courts, prosecutors and the police that higher penalties should be available for trafficking in these methamphetamines.

Starting in March of last year, officials of the Department of Justice have met with officials of the office of controlled substances at Health Canada to discuss the issue. Justice officials will continue to work with their counterparts at Health Canada in this process.

As the minister mentioned today, at a recent federal, provincial and territorial justice ministers meeting in January of this year, a working group was set up that will forward with this and bring forward recommendations as to how we may better combat this problem that the hon. member raises.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:12 p.m.)

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